



COUNCIL OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
THE JOHN A. WILSON BUILDING
1350 PENNSYLVANIA AVENUE, NW
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20004

BRIANNE K. NADEAU
Councilmember, Ward 1

Chairperson
Public Works and Operations

Committee Member
Recreation, Libraries, and Youth Affairs
Facilities and Family Services
Health

Transmitted electronically

July 2, 2024

Kevin Donahue, City Administrator
Office of the City Administrator
1350 Pennsylvania Avenue NW,
Washington, DC 20004

Heather McGaffin, Director
Office of Unified Communications
2720 Martin Luther King Jr Ave SE,
Washington, DC 20032

Dear Mr. Donahue and Director McGaffin:

I write to express my deep concern and frustration with the Office of Unified Communications' (OUC) persistent mismanagement of emergencies and lack of transparency. The agency's ongoing failures in dispatching assistance where it is needed is alarming and unacceptable.

This is not hypothetical—I heard more from anxious Ward 1 constituents over 10 days in May about disturbing 911 incidents they experienced than I typically do in a year, and I continue to receive emails and calls. Residents are frightened, and rightly so.

OUC's mission is to provide accurate, professional, and expedited emergent and non-emergent service to the residents of and visitors to the District of Columbia. It has not met that mission for some time now. The agency has a documented history of making critical errors, including dispatching EMS to the wrong address,¹ misdirecting calls,² failing to

¹ Melissa Kim, *DC man says 911 sent help to wrong address for fire*, WUSA9 (May 13, 2024), <https://www.wusa9.com/article/news/local/dc/dc-man-says-911-sent-help-to-wrong-address-for-fire-uoc-emergency-services/65-a0367b83-256f-4ed4-a788-9f639d2f5545>; Paul Duggan, *D.C. firefighter sent to wrong address for infant in cardiac arrest who was later pronounced dead*, The Washington Post (July 28, 2022), <https://www.washingtonpost.com/dc-md-va/2022/07/28/dc-911-mistakebaby-dead/>.

² Emily Venezky, *DC's 911 call center reports 'call handled properly' to find crashed car in Anacostia*

prioritize emergencies,³ and not answering 911 calls.⁴ Tragically, some of these mistakes have resulted in the deaths of people and animals.

On June 1, 2024, numerous 911 calls were made to report a serious disturbance at 1456 Columbia Rd. NW, but no one answered their calls. Then, the caller reported she was placed on hold for 20 minutes before she hung up.

On May 20, 2024, a constituent called 311 for a police non-emergency at 4:00 PM and was on hold for over an hour. No one ever picked up.

On May 11, 2024, another constituent called 911 to report multiple gunshots in her neighborhood. The caller received the automated “please do not hang up” message, was put on hold, but the call was eventually dropped. The caller attempted four more times to call for help but could not get through.

The agency is also derelict in providing transparency and support. On numerous occasions, when my staff reaches out, the agency does not provide information or even a response. This makes it difficult to meet the needs of our constituents.

It was shocking to see that on June 4, 2024, the agency posted the required monthly performance report for April 2024 and mischaracterized the number of mistakes that occurred. The agency reported only one complaint when there were at least seven.⁵ The agency is also breaking the law by refusing to release the agency’s daily staffing statistics, as required by legislation.⁶

Even if the Mayor downplays the agency’s deficiencies and allows for obfuscation, I remain committed to holding OUC accountable until significant improvements are made. Residents must have confidence that when they call 911 someone will answer their call and will dispatch the services they need quickly. Right now, they do not have that confidence. And neither do I.

With this letter I request the daily staffing statistics for the past two years, an updated list reflecting the actual number of agency mistakes for April, May, and June 2024, and an immediate briefing on the changes, anticipated or enacted, that the OUC will take to correct these systemic failures, and the CAD copies of the above incidents by July 15. Additionally,

River, WTOP News (July 29, 2023), <https://wtop.com/dc/2023/07/dcs-911-call-center-reports-call-handled-properly-to-find-crashed-car-in-anacostia-river/>.

³ Mark Segreaves, *DC 911 call center made errors during response to tragic District Dogs flood, director says*, NBC Washington (Aug. 22, 2023), <https://www.nbcwashington.com/news/local/dc-911-call-center-made-errors-dispatching-to-the-tragic-district-dogs-flood-director-says/3408424/>.

⁴ Rafael Sanchez-Cruz, 'It was just continuously ringing'| Neighbors question DC's 911 response following deadly crash, WUSA9 (May 14, 2024), <https://www.wusa9.com/article/news/local/dc/neighbors-question-dcs-911-response-following-deadly-crash/65-31ab3818-dab6-4b86-a3ed-d3ecf7b68f20>; Will Vitka, 'When he needed help, no one responded': DC, 911 call center sued over drowning death, WTOP News (March 21, 2024), <https://wtop.com/dc/2024/03/when-he-needed-help-no-one-responded-dc-911-call-center-sued-over-drowning-death/>.

⁵ Dave Statter, @STATter911, X (June 5, 2024, at 10:27AM), <https://x.com/STATter911/status/1798360944541622425>.

⁶ Secure DC Omnibus Emergency Amendment Act of 2024, D.C. Act 25-410.

I request a private briefing with the City Administrator. Please contact Sabrin Qadi, Senior Legislative Assistant at (202) 834-8093 to schedule both briefings no later than July 19, 2024.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Brianne K. Nadeau". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Brianne K. Nadeau

Cc: Councilmember Brooke Pinto, chairperson of the Committee on Judiciary and Public Safety