



September 27, 2022

The Hon. Charles Allen, Chair
Committee on the Judiciary and Public Safety
Council of the District of Columbia
1350 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington D.C. 20004

Dear Councilmember Allen and Colleagues:

I write to share information for the Committee on the Judiciary and Public Safety September 28, 2022, roundtable on 911 Operations at the Office of Unified Communications (OUC) and ask that this be made a part of the Committee record. As you know, the Office of the D.C. Auditor (ODCA) published a comprehensive audit of OUC 911 operations in October 2021, [District's 911 System: Reforms Needed to Meet Safety Needs](#). And we provided an update on the status of the audit's recommendations on September 9, 2022, [911 Status Report #1: Minimal Progress](#).

The October audit found significant leadership and management failures at the OUC but also reported that the Bowser Administration appeared committed to addressing the major issues, and, in fact, agreed in whole or in part with all of the audit's recommendations. Nevertheless, the update report we issued recently found that reforms appeared to have stalled. We will issue a second status report later this year including a review of recommendations as well as an update on a sampling of 911 historical data, 911 recordings, computer-assisted dispatch history, and voice recorder data for radio dispatches plus an assessment of any corrective action taken following two recent instances of delayed OUC response.

I share for the Committee's consideration an excerpt from the recent report. The attached Recommendation Summary Status chart includes the Executive's commitment to address each recommendation and what our expert contractors found -- with most recommendations showing minimal progress. The chart also includes the actions the OUC has stated they will take according to the OUC Audit Roadmap published in the September report.

You may wish to focus on:

- **Calltaker use of Location Determining Technologies (LDT; see page 17 #3).** A persistent issue documented in the October audit was failure to use mapping technology to confirm incident addresses, something also seen in more recent dispatches. The status report found "minimal progress" and OUC indicated they were "developing a policy" and had the "existing policy under review." Why has staff hesitation to use mapping technology not been effectively addressed through training and supervision nearly a year after the audit was released?

- **The addition of a fourth supervisor in each shift** (page 23) to provide back-up and improve performance. The OUC response indicates the director is “working through the Mayor’s Office to add additional supervisory FTE positions” – something that apparently did not occur during consideration of the FY23 budget even though the approved budget did include an increase in agency funding and full-time equivalent employees. Why did the Bowser Administration – which agreed with the recommendation in the October audit – not take the requisite action to ensure implementation of additional supervisors as part of the FY23 budget?
- **Workplace culture issues.** The audit found that supervision deficiencies contributed to “a culture in which cliques, bullying and uncorrected inappropriate behavior exist” with anecdotal information from operations staff that “supervisory staff may participate in and facilitate these behaviors.” The audit team recommended (page 25 #1) supervisor training in leadership and soft skills and in the recent assessment found “no observed progress on recommendation.” As the October audit was being released there were indications that members of the OUC staff were being held accountable for inappropriate workplace behavior by leadership then in place. What steps have been taken to address such workplace culture issues?
- **Ensuring corrective action is taken when errors occur** (p. 26-27). The October audit reviewed OUC after-action reporting on four 2020 incidents on which the then-Director Holmes stated that corrective actions had been taken. While the audit found the incidents had been reviewed, there was no documentation of corrective action in two of the four incidents and no comprehensive tracking of such follow-up. The recent status report found “minimal progress” in tracking corrective actions and in using quality assurance reviews to develop training to address deficiencies. Why has there been so little progress on what clearly is or should be a priority?

In addition to seeking updates on the October audit recommendations, you might also ask administration witnesses to address the level of priority given to the OUC/911 audit and ongoing issues. On September 8, 2022, Mayor Bowser was asked about the OUC/911 audit and stated that she was not aware of the audit even though copies were provided to her senior leadership and there was substantial press coverage at the time of publication. This begs the question of what the practice is within the Bowser Administration to ensure that District leadership is aware of serious deficiencies when they are documented as was the case with the October audit.

Finally, Deputy Mayor Chris Geldart stated in an August 13, 2022 *Washington Post* article that “the city has been considering asking the fire department to take over dispatch responsibilities from OUC employees,” which Mayor Bowser later denied. This prompts a final question for your consideration though it is outside the scope of the ODCA audit. A pilot project conducted in 2019 was to test the efficacy of medically trained Fire and Emergency Medical Services Department personnel managing fire and EMS calls. Both former Chief Gregory Dean and then-Director Holmes acknowledged in hearing testimony that an analysis of the pilot project would be forthcoming. What were the results? Was that analysis ever made public? Is the administration, in fact, considering such a change given the apparent reluctance to move forward with ODCA recommendations to improve dispatch with the current structure?

Please let me know if ODCA can provide any additional information on the OUC/911 operations audit.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Kathleen Patterson". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first letters of each word being capitalized and prominent.

Kathleen Patterson
District of Columbia Auditor

cc: Councilmembers
Officers of the Council

Attachment