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911 in Washington is dangerously broken. It has been for a long time. People suffer every hour of every day because of delay, confusion and dysfunction at the Office of Unified Communications (OUC).

Sadly, no one in charge will publicly acknowledge there's a DC 911 crisis--even after people die. That was the case when I testified five-years-ago after the deadly L'Enfant Plaza Metro fire, when OUC delayed sending firefighters for six-minutes. That's the case now, after the four-minute dispatch delay to the tragic fire at 708 Kennedy Street, Northwest.

Two-months-ago, OUC's director sat in front of you, under oath and made inane excuses about the lost four-minutes. To your credit, Mr. Chairman, you, Chairman Mendelson and Council member Silverman saw through that charade and expressed well-justified skepticism.

Unlike every other agency connected to Kennedy Street there was no independent investigation of OUC. Why is that? Why was OUC exempt from the Kennedy Street probe?

My view is Mayor Bowser and Deputy Mayor Donahue are scared to pull back the curtain. They know it will expose something even more disturbing than an inexcusable four-minute delay as police officers desperately tried to save two

lives. They fear an investigation would show Kennedy Street is not an aberration. That it's a regular occurrence at OUC.

I know this because, in just three months, I've uncovered more than a dozen incidents of significant OUC delays in dispatching DC Fire and EMS. The delays range from six to 17-minutes. Three of the delays involved sending firefighters to the wrong quadrant of the city for reported fires. These mishandled calls show OUC workers don't have a clear understanding of dispatch protocols, basic fire department procedures or the city's geography.

My work doesn't scratch the surface. It comes from a very small sample of emergencies that I can monitor via time-stamped radio traffic. I can't listen to the 911 calls. How many of those are mishandled by the same staff?

You likely can't get the answer to that last question and the underlying reason for OUC's dysfunction without an outside, independent investigation. I urge the Council of the District of Columbia to demand one.

It should be noted that no one at OUC or anyone else in the DC government has disputed the delays and mistakes I've documented. The facts are there. The question now is what will the leadership of the DC government do about it?

Will someone finally act and fix DC 911? Or are we going to keep hearing non-sensical excuses after people die due to OUC's incompetence?

And please keep in mind that it isn't just the public that's in jeopardy. At least one of the incidents I documented, along with the Kennedy Street fire, clearly show that even firefighters and police can't promptly get help when they call OUC. I also fear for their safety, too. And you should, too.

Confirmed delayed dispatches from the Office of Unified Communications since October 2019

October 7: It took about 17-minutes before DC Fire & EMS received accurate notification about the collision of two trains at the Farragut West Metro Station. Approximately 10-minutes of the delay was due to OUC.

October 14: It took about 15-minutes before DC Fire & EMS was correctly dispatched after a man fell onto the tracks at the Waterfront Metro Station. Upon learning this was a man on the tracks, OUC failed to send the correct assignment. The correct assignment was only dispatched after a fire company on an unrelated call told OUC they weren't sending the right units.

October 20: Seven-minutes were lost after DC Fire & EMS Engine 1 asked for more units to be sent to a large gas leak at New Hampshire Avenue & M Street, NW.

November 2: It took about 11-minutes before DC Fire & EMS was dispatched to a small fire on the platform at the Gallery Place Metro Station. The majority of this delay was on Metro.

November 15: About 10-minutes were lost after DC Fire & EMS was dispatched to a reported building fire at 5706 5th Street, NE. The correct address was 5706 5th Street, NW.

December 10: It took about seven-minutes before DC Fire & EMS was dispatched to a fire on the tracks at the Tenleytown Metro Station.

December 10: It took about 14-minutes before DC Fire & EMS was dispatched to a reported fire on the tracks between the Woodley Park Metro and Dupont Circle Metro Station. About 10 minutes of this delay was due to OUC.

December 10: It took about nine-minutes before DC Fire & EMS was dispatched to a reported fire on the tracks at the Van Ness Metro Station.

December 15: OUC has refused to answer questions about what its call-takers knew during a fire on Banneker Drive, NE that injured five people. Dispatched originally as an automatic alarm, sending an engine and truck, the call was not upgraded to a box alarm for about 11-minutes. OUC will not say when call-takers

learned there was smoke in the building (which, if occurred, should have triggered the upgrade earlier). Strangely, OUC did say that “fire” was reported about 10-minutes in, but just won’t say if there were any reports from residents about smoke and when they occurred.

December 16: It took about 11-minutes before DC Fire & EMS was dispatched to a report of an arcing transformer at the Friendship Heights Metro Station. WMATA says it had to make multiple calls to contact OUC.

December 21: About six-minutes were lost after DC Fire & EMS was dispatched for a report of a building fire at 1432 Girard Street, NE. The correct address 1432 Girard Street, NW.

December 24: About nine-minutes were lost getting help to a traumatic cardiac arrest patient injured in a construction site accident in the 3900 block of Wisconsin Avenue, NW. The call was dispatched as a pedestrian struck with the patient under the vehicle. No information was given to the responding firefighters that this was a construction accident on a work site. OUC provided dispatch times for this call but refused to provide answers about what the caller told 911 and what was relayed to firefighters.

January 3: It took about eight-minutes before DC Fire & EMS was dispatched to a report of arcing transformers between the Friendship Heights Metro Station and the Bethesda Metro Station.

January 13: OUC mistakenly dispatched DC Fire & EMS to 810 1st Street, NW when the correct address for the reported fire was 810 1st Street, NE. Upon figuring out the mistake, OUC didn’t dispatch the DC Fire & EMS units that were just two blocks from the correct address. Instead they told those units to go in service and dispatched 11 other units from much further away. Luckily, the original battalion chief ignored OUC and all the units just moved two blocks east.