



## **TESTIMONY OF THE WASHINGTON AREA BICYCLIST ASSOCIATION ON THE 2020 PERFORMANCE OF THE OFFICE OF UNIFIED COMMUNICATIONS**

March 18th, 2021

Hello my name is Ursula Sandstrom and I am the Outreach Manager for the Washington Area Bicyclist Association (WABA). Thank you for the opportunity to testify. In my work at WABA, I run a DC trail maintenance and outreach program, the DC Trail Ranger Program, which relies on 311 reporting and has required more 911 calls than anyone would prefer.

My testimony today focuses on 311 and 911, the OUC services that WABA and the many residents who bike directly interface with most often. I applaud the announced integration of Department of General Services requests, who have jurisdiction for most maintenance at DPR facilities, into the 311 system. Having one place for DC residents to report maintenance and safety requests is more efficient for residents and agencies, and helps keep our city safer. The former work order pipeline for DGS relied on their phone call center, which was not easily accessible for Deaf residents and employees, including staff on the WABA Trail Ranger team who regularly report issues for Marvin Gaye Trail.

However, from a user perspective, the 311 system is incomplete and can be confusing. First off, it is nearly impossible to accurately report issues at not-roadway locations, including most of DC's 62 miles of multi-use trails. The 311 software rejects as "not valid" any location not pre-listed in the database. Additionally, many common or dangerous issues do not have a clear reporting category, such as incorrectly installed and dangerous steel roadway plates. There is also a need for consistency and follow through between and from all DC agencies in the 311 pipeline. Many agencies fail residents by closing and not forwarding service requests deemed outside their scope or jurisdiction, resulting in unfixed issues and user frustration. For 311's part, clear and comprehensive request categories designed from a user, rather than agency use, perspective would help requests go to the correct agency in the first place. And DC government agencies, including OUC, need to establish a better forwarding and follow through protocol for requests. The 311 intake system needs to be clearer, not require fiddly detail user knowledge for best success, and needs to figure out reasonably accurate trail addressing.

While issues reported to 311 can certainly be life-threatening and dangerous, I want to allocate most of my emphasis to 911 call performance. My testimony here today is based both on my

direct experience as a caller and on my professional experience leading dispatch training and managing a trails program. I am concerned about the continuing public reports of slow or inaccurately dispatched calls, especially to locations not neatly identifiable by a house number on the street grid, such as the Potomac Freeway call earlier this month. 911 doesn't have the luxury of time and must be able to do accurate and timely dispatch to all of the District's trails, highways and park locations, just as well as a specific address like 250 M St SE.

I have had the pleasure of leading trail geography training for new 911 dispatchers twice in the last few years as part of work OUC training staff have done to improve trail knowledge during new staff training. Trainings like this helps to orient new staff to DC geography and context that is often less familiar, especially for staff that don't walk or bike our 62 miles of trails regularly. Similarly, I commend OUC for being a part of the multi-agency effort to install mile markers on DC trails to add another layer of support for accurate call location conversations. OUC needs to ensure that dispatchers are set up for success with software, training, and protocol that works for any location, and that residents are confident that if they call, they will receive prompt and accurate help. Let's make sure all DC residents and visitors can quickly get the help they need where they need it with a solid 911 dispatching program.