Legislation Text

File #: 230640, **Version:** 0

Authorizing the Committee on Public Safety to hold a hearing to explore solutions to ongoing challenges facing the 911 Unified Call Center and the Philadelphia Police Department's investigation into the police response to a 911 call about the first victim in the July 2023 mass shooting in Kingsessing.

WHEREAS, On March 11th, 2020, the Committees on Public Safety and Labor and Civil Service held a hearing on the 911 Unified Call Center focused on solutions to challenges in recruiting and retaining 911 dispatchers; and

WHEREAS, Concerns that understaffing, mandated overtime, and poor retention at the 911 call center could lead to a negative impact on the City's response time in emergencies remain three and a half years after this initial hearing; and

WHEREAS, The City now faces a situation where many 911 dispatchers feel overworked, exhausted, and unappreciated, with the understanding their physical and mental well-being could potentially negatively impact the cohesion of the unit and the functioning of the call center; and

WHEREAS, Historic levels of homicide and gun violence incidents increase the 911 Unified Call Center's call volume as residents become even more reliant on emergency services; and

WHEREAS, Fox 29 reported that in 2021, the 911 Unified Call Center received more than 2.4 million calls and that at least 7,000 callers waited at least a minute and a half for someone to answer. While this represents only 0.29% of calls, residents lose faith in the City's emergency services any time a call for help does not receive a swift answer; and

WHEREAS, Residents continue to express frustration about long wait and response times when they call 911; and

WHEREAS, Issues with 911 came to a head on July 2nd, 2023 when 911 dispatch erroneously deployed police officers to an address three miles away from where Mr. Joseph Wamah Jr. had been killed. Almost two days later, Mr. Wamah's suspected killer returned to the scene and allegedly killed four more residents, including a 15-year-old boy, and wounded two more in the City's worst mass shooting in 23 years; and

WHEREAS, The botched 911 response on July 2nd, 2023 further eroded the Kingsessing community's trust in the City's emergency apparatus and cost the Police Department 44 hours in which it could have investigated Mr. Wamah's death before the shooter allegedly returned to the same location and murdered four more residents; and

WHEREAS, In the wake of the Kingsessing mass shooting, Police Commissioner Danielle Outlaw promised to investigate the unsuccessful 911 response on July 2nd; and

WHEREAS, Philadelphians need to know that when they call 911 during an emergency, they will receive help.

To rebuild confidence in Philadelphia's 911 system, the public must be made aware of the results of this investigation and the steps the Police Department has taken to prevent another incident like it from happening again; and

WHEREAS, City Council has a responsibility to continue to investigate the challenges facing the 911 Unified Call Center and support the Police Department as it takes action to remedy them; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, BY THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF PHILADELPHIA, That it hereby authorizes the Committee on Public Safety to hold a hearing to explore solutions to ongoing challenges facing the 911 Unified Call Center and the Philadelphia Police Department's investigation into the police response to a 911 call about the first victim in the July 2023 mass shooting in Kingsessing.