

UNIFORMED
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FIRE OFFICERS
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TESTIMONY BY CAPTAIN ALEXANDER HAGAN, PRESIDENT
UNIFORMED FIRE OFFICERS ASSOCIATION
BEFORE CITY COUNCIL EMERGENCY MEETING ON 911 SYSTEM

JUNE 21, 2013

My name is Eddie Boles. I am a Lieutenant in the New York City Fire Department and I am Treasurer of the Uniformed Fire Officers Association (UFOA), the superior officers of the FDNY. I'm speaking on behalf of UFOA President Al Hagan, the 2500 fire officers we represent, and the taxpaying citizens we are sworn to protect.

I don't want to waste any time getting to the point. The Unified Call Taking system is a horrific failure, dangerous to the citizens of New York City and to its first responders--- firefighters and police officers.

The fire officers of the FDNY have been filing complaints about this system since its inception. The Department acknowledged that there was many issues with the system and developed a UCT form as a method for our officers to report problems encountered.

The UFOA has been collecting complaints from fire units across the City for four years. It was at least two years ago that I testified here with a stack of complaints about two feet high. The stack is now about four feet high, yet very little has been done to improve the system from the end user's perspective which are our field units. It's important to note that every one of those pages was a potential death or injury or loss of property for someone in the city, including our firefighters.

We now have the evidence that the City Administration was so warned more than two years ago by reputable Consultants paid with taxpayer dollars. In a June 3, 2011 report to Deputy Mayor Stephen Goldsmith, the City's own Consultants, Winbourne and Costas Inc. wrote as follows:

“It is our finding that the current UCT process is dangerous to the citizens of New York City and public safety personnel.”

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The Consultants listed 20 critical recommendations to support their findings, and ended with this devastating conclusion:

“It is our recommendation that the UCT initiative be discontinued as soon as possible and that NYPD and FDNY implement new (no cost) 9-1-1 call-taking and dispatching business practices that will improve both NYPD and FDNY Communications Center operations.”

The record shows that the administrator rejected all findings and ordered the Consultants to produce a new assessment. In a later report, the warning that the UCT system was dangerous to the citizens and public safety personnel mysteriously disappeared. Also gone was the recommendation to scrap the system as soon as possible. However, the new version, dated May 1, 2012, did contain repeated admonitions that serious changes were necessary.

The City Administration did recently roll out the new and allegedly improved system, only to see it crash repeatedly. Since the scathing June 3, 2011 report, the City’s administration ignored these stern warnings and recommendations, and provided two more years of chaos, confusion, and unacceptable response times that ultimately culminated in the death of a four-year-old child.

To make matters worse, once again the official response is to blame someone else. In this case, it is the spectacle of an attempt to blame a 23-year-veteran EMS operator with an impeccable record for a severely delayed response.

This city does not need any more two billion dollar wasteful projects that make the jobs of our firefighters and police officers more difficult and more dangerous. The taxpayers of this City deserve an effective system to report a fire or a serious Medical Emergency which they had before UCT. Our units need an efficient dispatch system that provides them with the most accurate information, location and type of emergency. The FDNY responded to 218,000 heart attacks, strokes, asthma attacks and choking incidents last year. As the Consultant report noted, 100% of calls to the Fire Department are life-and-death calls for help. So the proper dispatching of fire units is imperative to saving lives.

We have supplied the City Council with 5,000 pages of a series of reports from the Consultants Winbourne and Costas, Inc. They did the people of New York City a great public service. Too bad the Mayor’s office ignored them.

My last thought for you today is this: Why is this Administration stubbornly insisting on throwing huge amounts of taxpayer money at this failed project? The City Council and the Comptroller should refuse to sanction any further waste of scarce city funds on this debacle.

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