

**Testimony of Lillian Roberts
Executive Director of District Council 37,
AFSCME, AFL-CIO
Before the Committees on Fire and Criminal Justice and
Technology in Government
December 10, 2009**

Good Afternoon. I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Chairs of all three committees and committee members for holding this important hearing concerning the 911 Emergency Response System.

My name is Lillian Roberts and I am the Executive Director of District Council 37 representing 125,000 active employees and 50,000 retirees.

Our members are the employees working at the 911 call centers for both the Police and the Ambulance emergency response systems and providing supervision to 911 call center employees. We also have members who work in support functions such as maintaining the computer systems and providing technical development for new aspects of this vitally important public safety function. In total, we have at least five DC 37 locals with members involved in trying to provide the fastest and most accurate dispatching of emergency services to the city.

It hurts DC 37 members, and it hurts me personally, when I see reports in the papers and on TV reports that the city is blaming DC 37 members for recent problems with the 911 system. I will state for the record that the problems reported in the media about delays in dispatching and mistakes in dispatch reports have nothing to do with DC 37 members. All of

the shortcomings that have led to this very dangerous situation have to do with changes put in place by City Hall. These changes were done with little or no consultation with our union, or the DC 37 members who know and operate the system. This culture of mistrust of the rank-and-file employees must stop. In the past, these practices have led to waste of our taxpayers' dollars, but now this mistrust is putting the public safety at risk.

The Emergency Transformation Communication System was announced over six years as a means to reduce redundancies and reduce response time. Based on our experiences, I am here to tell you that the transformation has failed. More and more reports are coming out from the Fire Department and from the general public on the failures by contractors to fix the problems with the 911 system.

Our union tried to address some of the problems before they occur by demanding proper training before the system was put into use. However, there are other problems we cannot address because the City, in its culture of mistrust, keeps many aspects of system development secret.

Most recently we saw a delay in the response to a fatal fire in Woodside, Queens. Immediately City Hall put out a press release stating that the delay was due to human error. This was an incomplete assessment, which avoided looking at the flawed computer system. When we investigated the incident we found that our 911 operator attempted to correct the address within 35 seconds of the first input report, but the system did not allow the correction. The initial dispatch was further delayed by the flawed system, which generated a whole new report when a correction was made.

Valuable minutes were lost while a second fire company was dispatched to the proper address. This is just one of many delays that occur due to the failure of the new system which cost the City over \$380 million. In a two week period in November 2009 the 911 system went down three times requiring operators to improvise to get dispatches out. I am proud to say, these operators met the challenge.

Our members take great pride in their work. They are dedicated professionals. They know people's lives are on the line when these dispatches come in. Our members live in these communities and they have a stake in getting the information out correctly and quickly. They take this work seriously because it could very well be their family or friends whose lives are at risk.

Billions of dollars in funding from different sources went into this new system. The city should always spend wisely in order to get the most for the taxpayer's dollars. I am requesting that the City Council demand an audit of the spending for this program. I further recommend that an investigative committee be created to look into the whole 911 process and see where the Mayor and his highly paid contractors screwed up on this new system. I have also requested a federal investigation, since Homeland Security funds were used to create this new system. I will now turn this over to Henry Garrido to give the City Council more details on the terrible waste of funds and what a dangerous a situation the current flawed emergency response system has created despite the billions of dollars being spent.