

**Testimony of Alma Roper
Executive Vice-President, Local 1549, District Council 37,
AFSCME, AFL-CIO
Before the Committees on Fire and Criminal Justice and
Technology in Government
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Good afternoon Chairperson Vacca, Chairperson Brewer, Chairperson Vallone, and members of the Fire and Criminal Justice, Technology in Government and Public Safety Committees. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today regarding the Unified Call Taking (UCT) System.

My name is Alma Roper and I am the Executive Vice-President of Local 1549 of District Council 37 (DC 37). Local 1549 represents more than 18,000 clerical-administrative employees in almost all city agencies and more than 1,200 Police Communication Technicians and Supervising Police Communication Technicians assigned to the city's 911 system.

Today, I am speaking on behalf of the 1,200 members, colleagues and friends who staff the 911 call center. Police

Communication Technicians are the first responders for thousands and thousands of our city's residents and visitors.

Seven days a week, 365 days a year, my members are there – receiving approximately 13 million calls for assistance annually. Prior to holding office at the union, I devoted twenty years of service to the citizens of New York as a 911 calltaker, dispatcher and supervisor.

When hired, a 911 operator goes through an extensive eight (8) weeks of training. This training consists of six (6) weeks of classroom training where operators learn policies, procedures and approximately 477 emergency codes and 20 to 30 fire codes. The other part of the training is two (2) weeks of “hands-on” training where new operators take calls while experienced operators listen in. Upon the completion of training, the operator goes “solo” and handles all emergency calls on his or her own.

911 personnel prove themselves time and time again. This was certainly displayed during the tragic events of September 11, 2001. They also rise to the occasion during blackouts, snowstorms and all major events in the City of New York.

Prior to the Unified Call Taking system implementation on May 4, 2009, a 911 operator would receive a fire call and immediately transfer the call to a fire dispatcher. The 911 operator would stay on the line as the fire dispatcher questioned the caller and would input into the system all pertinent information supplied by the caller.

On May 4, 2009, the city changed over to the Unified Call Taking system, which meant that the 911 operators would handle all fire calls in addition to all other emergency calls.

In recent weeks, a rash of incidents involving delayed response time have resulted in a misleading focus on human error when,

in fact, the focus should be on a Unified Call Taking system that is unified in name only. FDNY and NYPD recently made modifications to that system yet, the problems today are the same ones that became apparent in the wake of the events of September 11, 2001, that sparked efforts to facilitate communication between New York's premier emergency response agencies. Unfortunately, the City still has work to do in that department.

With the design and implementation of any system of this magnitude, there are issues that need to be resolved and problems that need to be corrected. The Unified Call Taking system is no different. There is no doubt that the police and fire departments want to optimize emergency services in this city. A major stumbling block to accomplishing that goal is due to the fact that the Police Department's SPRINT system and the Fire Department's STARFIRE system are incompatible. Another major stumbling block could be the

failure to tap the first hand experience, knowledge and expertise of the men and women who use the system rather than allowing them to become the targets of misleading attacks.

Local 1549 members who work as 911 call takers, dispatchers and supervisors have years of experience under their collective belt. Yet, many are afraid to speak out about the system even though they are being blamed for its flaws. 911 calltakers, dispatchers and supervisors are dedicated Civil Servants who take their jobs as New Yorkers' safety net and life line very seriously. These attacks have added an additional level of stress to a job that is already highly stressful and demanding.

It is time to stop placing blame and to get down to the business of reviewing the efficiency and effectiveness of the Unified Call Taking System with input and assistance from those who operate the system. In the interest of the public's safety,

improving the public's awareness and improving the system are critical. When it comes to emergencies, especially fire calls, every second counts. Lives are at risk.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify today. I will gladly take any questions you may have.