

**DEPARTMENT OF INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY & TELECOMMUNICATIONS
BEFORE THE CITY COUNCIL COMMITTEES ON TECHNOLOGY AND PUBLIC SAFETY
RE: INTRO. 0868-2014 / CREATING AN EMERGENCY MOBILE TEXT SYSTEM
THURSDAY, JANUARY 14, 2016**

Good morning Chairs Vacca and Gibson, and members of the City Council Committees on Technology and Public Safety. My name is David Kirks, and I am the Associate Commissioner leading Next Generation 911 planning efforts at the Department of Information Technology and Telecommunications, or DoITT. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today on Intro. 868, which would require DoITT to develop a plan to allow the public to communicate digitally with emergency responders using the City's 911 system. I would also like to take the opportunity to update the committees on the steps the City is currently taking to do so.

New York City's 911 emergency communication system handles more than 10 million calls each year, delivering emergency, often life-saving services through an expert combination of people, processes, and technology. So I begin by stating that the Administration shares with the Council the goal of this proposed legislation – enhanced access to emergency services for the public – and has in fact begun work to develop a long-term strategy for implementing a Next Generation 911 (NG911) system.

As you are aware, when dealing with lifesaving systems even a single error is an error we must do all we can to prevent. Therefore, we must always carefully conduct due diligence before proposing or making changes to the systems and/or processes that fuel 911 operations. A review conducted by the City has revealed that while some municipalities had made progress with text-to-911, to date no large city in the country – and certainly none comparable in size, scope, or complexity to New York City – has successfully implemented a comprehensive NG911 system.

So before updating the Committees on the progress the City has made with its long-term NG911 planning, it is beneficial to outline, from a technology perspective, what moving to NG911 means.

In order for people to move from older, analog telephone landlines to current cell phone technology (enabling text, video, and data transfers), mobile carriers have had to build-out an entirely new digital infrastructure, separate from their copper-based legacy networks. And in order to offer 911 users the same features, 911 systems across the country must make the same transition to an all-digital network infrastructure.

While texting to 911 will be available as part of any NG911 system, some jurisdictions are implementing a version of texting prior to NG911 rollout. That said, text to analog 911 remains a developing technology with limited market deployment and multiple open technical concerns. However, we are committed to continue working with NYPD and FDNY to find an acceptable solution in the short-term – provided such a solution does not in any way compromise the City's ability to quickly and effectively respond to emergencies.

So, what have we done thus far? DoITT created an NG911 project team in the summer of 2015 to develop a path forward with all stakeholder agencies. We received approval from the 911 Executive Steering Committee – consisting of top executives from the First Deputy Mayor's Office, Mayor's Office of Operations, NYPD, FDNY, and DoITT – to move forward with the proposed path.

Next, we will be releasing a Request for Information (RFI) to assess options for migration to a NG911 system for New York City. This RFI is still an early step in our comprehensive planning process, but will provide us with a better understanding of the benefits, challenges, risks, and issues associated with migrating to a NG911 platform.

This RFI will help drive our decision around NG911 technologies by surveying experts across the industry, and ensuring a holistic look at the City's options for seamlessly integrating the processing of traditional voice calls with various types of modern and emerging forms of communication.

Responses to this RFI will help the City create an NG911 system that ensures highest standards of public safety and emergency response – all within the framework of 911's operational needs and specifications. While the City is best positioned to make determinations about what technologies and practices fit with its functional requirements, throughout this process we are committed to looking at the innovative solutions the private sector has to offer even beyond texting (i.e., video, data transfers, etc.) in rolling out a state-of-the-art system for New Yorkers.

We have described today our efforts to plan for an NG911 system and our commitment to work with NYPD and FDNY to identify potential interim solutions, well aware that any change to a system as vital and complex as 911 must be approached in as cautious and deliberate a manner as possible. We encourage the Council's continued feedback and input as we work together on a safer, more responsive New York City for all.

Thank you.

**STATEMENT OF
INSPECTOR RICHARD NAPOLITANO
COMMANDING OFFICER, COMMUNICATIONS DIVISION
NEW YORK CITY POLICE DEPARTMENT**

**BEFORE THE NEW YORK CITY COUNCIL
COMMITTEES ON PUBLIC SAFETY AND TECHNOLOGY**

JANUARY 14, 2016

Good morning Chair Gibson and Chair Vacca and members of the Council. I am Inspector Richard Napolitano, Commanding Officer of the Communications Division of the New York City Police Department. In that capacity, I oversee all NYPD operations at the 911 Call Center, including call-taking and dispatching. On behalf of Police Commissioner William J. Bratton, I wish to thank the City Council for the opportunity to comment on Intro. 868 as it relates to the Police Department's participation in the current 911 call taking process.

Intro. 868 would require the Department of Information Technology and Telecommunications ("DOITT") to create a plan to upgrade the City's 911 system to "Next Generation 911," which would allow the public to communicate digitally with NYPD call-takers using the City's 911 system. The system would allow the public to send digital communications, including text messages, videos, and photographs to 911.

At the outset of my testimony, I want to state very clearly that the NYPD strongly supports the move to this technology. While Intro. 868 certainly contemplates important technological advancements that will eventually be made to the City's 911 system, the Police Department agrees with DOITT and the Administration that these upgrades to the system must be made thoughtfully, given the significant operational, training, and headcount implications involved in upgrading a complex system.

NYPD personnel at the 911 Call Center received 10 million calls last year. As you probably know, by volume of calls, it is the largest 911 system in the United States. Under this Administration, and with the help of this Council, the Police Department has increased the headcount of police communication technicians (PCTs), commonly known as 911 operators and police dispatchers, which has resulted in handling calls more quickly and efficiently – while also reducing the reliance on overtime.

There are significant operational implications associated with moving to a system that allows text-to-911 communication. When call-takers answer a 911 call, they are trained to ask a series of questions – all of which are designed to elicit pieces of information that are ultimately used to inform an emergency response. As an example, all 911 callers are asked "where is the emergency" and "what is the emergency." Different types of emergencies require different sets of follow-up questions.

The answers to these questions are often essential to ensuring that responding

officers, firefighters or EMTs have the information they need to respond efficiently, effectively, and safely. They are also necessary to be able to prioritize jobs – so that we can provide the best service possible to the public. Text-to-911 has implications for the back-and-forth dialogue that our call-takers use day-in and day-out to ask these questions and get this information. Accordingly, there are certainly operational issues we will have to work through to implement any text-to-911 system.

There are also significant training implications associated with moving to a text-to-911 system. Our dedicated PCTs receive rigorous training – entry-level call-takers receive nine weeks of training; radio dispatchers receive an additional five weeks. In-service training is also conducted in order to ensure that our PCTs have the skills to use the most up-to-date procedures.

As the intake point to the 911 system, PCTs are strictly and rigorously trained on how to handle each and every one of the approximately 27,000 daily emergency calls into the 911 Call Center with efficiency and precision. Next Generation 911 would dramatically change the duties of PCTs and such significant changes would require significant retraining. The 911 system and PCT training are exclusively based on telephone calls and verbal questions and answers. Accepting and analyzing text, video, and photos from the public will require an entirely new training curriculum.

Finally, there will certainly be new headcount requirements associated with this change. We are in the process of working through our proposals on hiring associated with text-to-911, so that we can ensure that this technology will not hinder response times.

We agree that there are benefits to an emergency mobile text system, especially as it relates to domestic violence emergencies or in instances where a person is hiding or unable to speak into a phone, but it benefits all New Yorkers that these important upgrades be dealt with in a meticulous and cautious manner. The NYPD and the Administration are committed to further improving the 911 system through technological advancements as well as through collaborations with city agencies and the Council.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you this morning and I am happy to answer any questions that you may have.



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Center for Independence of the Disabled, NY

January 11, 2016

Committee on Technology, jointly with the Committee on Public Safety

Public Hearing on

Int. No. 868 – a bill to create an emergency mobile text system.

Susan M. Dooha, J.D.
Executive Director

Re:

Thank you for the opportunity to address Int. No. 868, a bill to create an emergency mobile text system. We testify to bring your attention to the benefits of this proposal for people who are Deaf or have difficulty hearing, have speech disabilities, or are dealing with domestic violence in the event of a disaster. We strongly support Int. No. 868. We would encourage you to extend availability of text communications to callers to 311 as well. Both play critical roles in the event of a disaster. Indeed, all City helplines would benefit from having text capacity to ensure effective communication with people with disabilities.

Created in 1978, the Center for Independence of the Disabled, NY's (CIDNY) goal is to ensure full integration, independence and equal opportunity for all people with disabilities by removing barriers to the social, economic, cultural and civic life of the community. In 2015, we helped over 15,000 people take control of their own lives by offering information, education and advice to individuals struggling with poverty, housing, barriers to health care coverage and access, nutrition, education, and work. We help apply for services and supports, navigate complex systems and advocate for consumers when things go wrong. We provide technical assistance to public and private entities to improve their disability literacy. We guide lawmakers on sound public policies that will foster equal opportunity.

We applaud the sponsors of this legislation for addressing this important issue. As you may know, according to the American Community Survey of the U.S. Census Bureau, there are at least 185,378 people who are Deaf or have "difficulty hearing" in New York City.¹ It will also be important for people with speech disabilities.

We believe that an emergency mobile text system would be critical in the kind of emergencies that happen every day, including for people who are Deaf, hard of hearing or have speech disabilities. It would be even more critical in the event of a disaster in New York City. The way that people who are Deaf communicate has evolved over the years. Few of the people CIDNY sees use TTY. They view this technology as outdated. People who are Deaf and communicate with us use either text or videophone.

Other

Thank you for listening to our concerns, we hope that the Council will vote to ensure effective communication for people with disabilities in the event of an emergency or disaster. We hope you will consider expanding this technology to 311 and other City help lines. Thank you for your efforts to improve the lives of all New Yorkers, including people with disabilities.

¹ The ADA at 25: Many Bridges to Cross, Susan M. Dooha, Center for Independence of the Disabled, NY, 2015. [http://www.cidny.org/resources/CIDNY-ADA25-Many%20Bridges to-Cross.pdf](http://www.cidny.org/resources/CIDNY-ADA25-Many%20Bridges%20to-Cross.pdf)



Testimony of Christopher E. Bromson

Crime Victims Treatment Center/Downstate Coalition for Crime Victims

January 14, 2016

Int. No. 868

Good morning and a sincere thank you to Councilmembers Gibson, Vacca and all members of the Public Safety and Technology Committees.

My name is Christopher Bromson. I am the Deputy Director of the Crime Victims Treatment Center (CVTC) at Mount Sinai St. Luke's and Roosevelt Hospitals, and also the co-chair of the Downstate Coalition for Crime Victims Legislative Committee. Between these two roles, I spend each professional day, from beginning to end, working with and for survivors of violent crime.

CVTC has always worked hard to identify and address the needs of underserved populations of crime victims. Non-English speaking survivors, teen and adolescents, sexually exploited individuals, young men of color, all of these populations are identified as underserved, and CVTC has been extremely successful in engaging them. Because of this, three years ago, we received a federal grant from the Office on Violence Against Women, to increase therapeutic and advocacy services to Deaf/deaf and Hard of Hearing survivors of sexual and intimate partner violence. The grant brought together executive leadership from five organizations: CVTC, Barrier Free Living, Harlem Independent Living Center, CONNECT and the Manhattan District Attorney's Office. Our goal was to work together to create culture change within our own organizations that would allow us each to serve Deaf/deaf and Hard of Hearing survivors.

Very early on, during one of our first meetings, we began discussing the concept of Justice (a very exciting and robust discussion between victim advocates and prosecutors). What does justice mean to the victim of a crime? Is it seeing the perpetrator of the crime arrested and convicted? Is it receiving a sincere apology from the guilty party? Is it simply having the opportunity to heal at a place like CVTC?

The conversation went on for several minutes, until Christina Curry, the Executive Director of HILC who is herself Deaf, said something that changed everything. Justice to a Deaf survivor is simply having the ability to communicate effectively. A concept of justice beyond that, like the ability to make a police report or pursue legal remedies, things most of us take for granted, are not available in the absence of effective communication. They are things that a Deaf survivor may never imagine he or she could have.

Imagine being hurt badly by another person, and not being able to call for help. Being trapped in situation of abuse with no means for independent escape. Maybe a neighbor hears something and calls 911. Thank god. Imagine then that police arrive, help is finally there, but you can't tell them what happened. Maybe the person hurting you can tell them, though. Maybe he or she will explain that it was just a simple argument, 'I accidentally raised my voice and our neighbors misinterpreted it. Everything's fine.' Imagine that.

The Deaf/deaf and Hard of Hearing community are among the most vulnerable to victimization, yet have the least access to services. CVTC has begun working with a small number of Deaf/deaf clients, and the experiences they have had with the people and systems designed to help them are beyond shocking.

The right to access 911 should be a given for every individual living in this city. Access to police, fire, or emergency medical services should not be denied to someone because the language they use is not a spoken one. Lack of access in this case can mean the difference between life and death, and it can also mean that those committing violence are able to continue that behavior with no repercussions.

I understand that there is resistance to this bill, and to the concept of allowing individuals to text 911 for help, and I know that some of those concerns are about security and other very serious issues. However, we must not allow those concerns to be a justification for prohibiting the use of 911 by an entire community of New Yorkers.

Let's expand the definition of Justice for Deaf/deaf individuals. Access to effective communication should not be anyone's definition of justice. Access to effective communication should be everyone's right, and this is an excellent place to start.

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

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Date: JAN 14 2016

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Name: CHRISTOPHER BRANSON

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Date: 14 January 2016

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: David Kirks

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I represent: NYC Department of Information & Telecommunications

Address: Same

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in favor in opposition

Date: 1/14/16

Inspector

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Name: Richard Napolitano

Address: NYPD - Communication Division

I represent: _____

Address: _____

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