

**NEW YORK CITY 311 TESTIMONY BEFORE THE NEW YORK CITY COUNCIL
COMMITTEE ON TECHNOLOGY**

April 25, 2024

Good morning, Chair Gutiérrez and members of the City Council Committee on Technology. My name is Joe Morrisroe, and I am Deputy Commissioner of New York City 311 (NYC311), under the Office of Technology and Innovation (OTI). Thank you for the opportunity to testify today on NYC311 operations. With me today is Melissa Guillaume, OTI General Counsel.

As NYC311's Deputy Commissioner since 2008, I oversee all aspects of 311, from the operation of the most familiar component – the call center – to the creation and implementation of multiple customer-facing channels, performance results and quality control measures; interaction with city agencies; and data collection. When Mayor Adams' Executive Order 3 consolidated the city's technology agencies under OTI in January 2022, the NYC311 team was also united within this single office. This new organizational structure strengthens and supports continual evolution and enhancements to service delivery and customer experience.

As you all know, NYC311 delivers fast and easy access to government services and information to all New Yorkers. NYC311 is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year through multiple channels, including the call center, online portal, text, mobile application, and social media. Originally launched as a call center, NYC311 has evolved into the most comprehensive municipal government customer service platforms in the nation. NYC311 received 37 million customer contacts in 2023, and on an annual basis receives more calls than all other U.S. city 311 call centers combined.

I am also pleased to share with the Council a recent report by an independent third party on the public's satisfaction with NYC311. Call center representatives received a customer satisfaction rating of 94 percent, positioning NYC311 in the top 10 percent, outperforming even private sector companies. This level of public satisfaction is a testament to the dedication and commitment of the NYC311 team that serves their fellow New Yorkers every day.

It is important to note that NYC311 serves as the *platform* to provide information and services to the public. With few exceptions, public interactions with NYC311 services result in one of the following outcomes:

- Information Request (e.g. when is my trash pick-up day?)
- Referral to an external entity (e.g. NY State Department of Labor, FCC)

- Service Request (e.g. submitting a ticket)

We rely on our collaborative relationships with each city agency to build out the service request forms and information pages (also known as “knowledge articles”) that properly reflect the mission and services for each agency or office.

With respect to service requests specifically, NYC311 does not create them in a vacuum – there must be an agency that will accept the request, investigate, and if applicable, enforce. When an agency decides that adding a new service request is necessary, it contacts NYC311 to create, test and deploy a complaint form. There are various bills we will discuss today that propose the creation of a new or modified service request, some of which are in production today. I would like to invite any council member to reach out to OTI with gaps in service requests so NYC311 can loop in the potential responding agencies to see if the service request can be implemented without the need for legislation.

I will now turn to the pieces of legislation associated with this hearing.

Intro. 131 relates to creating a NYC311 service request category for noise from sirens.

As the committee is aware, noise complaints are among the top service request types NYC311 intakes year after year. The NYC311 service request has a “closed loop” process where NYC311 is responsible for the triage and intake of the service request information, and the agency is responsible for investigating, responding, and updating the status of the service request once the agencies have investigated. This is the “closed loop” process customers expect when filing a service request with NYC311. Intro. 131 asks that a service request to be taken for siren noise, but we are unaware of any city agency that would accept such a service request making the “closed loop” process that customers come to expect from NYC311 impossible. At this time, implementation of this legislation would not be possible.

Intro. 422 relates to creating a separate NYC311 category for rooftop activity service requests and to produce an annual report.

NYC311 agrees with the intent of the legislation however cannot meet the requirements as written because they do not align with the city’s service request structure and process. The bill requires that “Rooftop Activity” be the complaint “Problem” name, and the type of issue, like “Noise” or “Exceeding Authorized Rooftop Occupancy” be the subcategory and route to appropriate agency for response. The 311 service request model cannot support this data hierarchy structure. There is also a requirement to create a subcategory for “Public Safety” complaints. This subcategory is too vague, and any public safety issue call has to be triaged for potential emergency response.

However, NYC311 is already in conversations with agencies that would receive these complaints to figure out how we can create or code rooftop activity complaints within the existing service request framework. This approach will also allow the data to be available in NYC Open Data.

Intro. 461 relates to creating human translations of the NYC311 app.

Local Law 30 requires covered agencies to appoint language access coordinators, translate commonly distributed documents into 10 designated languages, provide telephonic interpretation in at least 100 languages, and develop a language access implementation plan, among other requirements. NYC311 is in compliance with this law.

NYC311 provides telephonic interpretation and translation services for up to 175 languages through a third-party vendor, Language Line. Language Line is available for free to customers 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

NYC311 provides additional options for customers who speak a language other than English or may be limited English proficient. For the phone channel, a customer can access announcements and messages in the language Integrated Voice Response (IVR) system in the 10 designated citywide languages. Spanish-language customers can be assisted by a NYC311 customer service representative who speaks Spanish.

Annually, NYC311 services approximately one million calls in languages other than English and has provided service in 133 non-English languages over the years.

The NYC311 mobile app allows customers to connect with an agent and vendor partner Language Line for human translation.

NYC311 has over 2,000 discrete content items called “knowledge articles,” and it performs thousands of edits annually as well as revising content for readability on a constant basis.

Certain content changes require in-the-moment creation and modification, such as during emergency situations.

Inro. 461 would require a human translated version of the NYC311 mobile application. To do so would require significant additional support resources so that OTI’s ability to create and maintain the up-to-date content meet NYC311’s standards for customer satisfaction and service delivery.

Intro. 485 relates to the NYC311 customer service center providing assistance relating to affordable internet programs.

NYC311 is aware that the FCC announced the winding down of the federally funded Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP). NYC311 is monitoring the program and will update the content as appropriate should Congress act to restore funding. As the ACP winds down, OTI continues to provide opportunities for all New Yorkers, particularly those who are historically vulnerable to being on the wrong side of the digital divide, to access the internet and digital and education resources.

The Mayor’s Big Apple Connect program is now deployed at all eligible NYCHA developments, and provides NYCHA residents with free, reliable, and safe broadband internet and basic cable TV. Since the initiative launched in September 2022, 121,702 households have enrolled in the program, an 80% enrollment rate across the city. We also provide information on additional access points in the city. If the Council is aware of programs not part of the current NYC311 content we would be happy to discuss further and update where appropriate.

Intro. 582 relates to creating a mobile application to support the efficient handling of NYC311 service requests by city employees.

As we understand Intro. 582, we do not believe there is a need for an application for agencies to receive service request data. NYC311 coordinates with service request agencies to ensure they receive the service request information in real time and in a way that best suits the business workflow. Many agencies have their own applications they use for handling service requests. The NYC311 application already allows service requests to be viewed via a mobile device if an agency opts in for that specific functionality.

Intro. 583 relates to requiring the NYC311 customer service center to provide live chat functionality.

NYC311 already offers real-time text capability, through the 311-692 SMS code and through the “Text 311” option on the mobile app, in addition to call center representatives, available 24/7.

Text agents engage in synchronous, written communication with customers to respond to questions and submit service requests using the existing enterprise service request format to submit to agencies.

The content on the NYC311 website and available through the mobile app already provides customers with access to information comparable to what they would receive through a live chat interaction. It incorporates user-friendly features such as prompts like “Need Something Else” and “What You Need”, in addition to curated sections and links.

Intro. 583 requires an increase in resources beyond current levels to provide services that NYC311 already offers to the public through its phone, text, mobile, and social media channels. At this time, NYC311 opposes adding incremental resources, and will continue to monitor customer feedback and industry enhancements in this area.

Intro. 584 relates to providing an estimated wait time to NYC311 call center customers.

NYC311 will review queueing system options that provide estimated wait time to customers as a potential enhancement to the high call volume protocol.

Intro. 588 relates to NYC311 transmitting image and video data for service requests.

All NYC311 service requests already accept image or video except for Housing Preservation & Development and the Department of Homeless Services per their request due to privacy concerns.

Intro. 598 relates to creating a NYC311 service request category for snow or ice on pedestrian bridges.

It is possible to file a service request today for snow on a pedestrian bridge but is limited to the call center. NYC311 is in discussions with the Department of Transportation to streamline the process and make filing a service request for snow or ice on a pedestrian bridge available across all channels for the next snow season.

Intro. 602 relates to creating a NYC311 service request for illegal towing by a tow truck company.

NYC311 already accepts these service requests, which are routed to the Department of Consumer and Worker Protection.

Intro. 626 relates to the use of global positioning system coordinates for NYC311 service requests.

NYC311 service requests collect GPS coordinates (latitude/longitude) based on the customer enabling location services in the mobile app or on the website, and by the customer confirming the address identified. If location services functionality is disabled, NYC311 collects latitude and longitude based on the address entered by the customer. NYC311 is exploring a new geolocator (ESRI) service that will take it a step further and collect latitude and longitude based on a pin drop, then identify the address in the format required by the agency based on the service request (address, intersection, or block face). Funding for the enhanced mapping is being pursued.

Intro. 634 relates to NYC311 transmitting of images or video data for housing service requests.

As mentioned in my comments for Intro. 588, all 311 service requests already accept image or video except for Housing Preservation & Development and the Department of Homeless Services per their request due to privacy concerns.

Intro. 640 relates to the NYC311 customer service center to accept requests for service and complaints using video call functionality.

NYC311 supports enhancements in service delivery and leveraging technology to improve customer experience when feasible. NYC311 is opposed to elements of this bill that impose additional requirements for functionality that currently exist - specifically, the minimum call taker requirement, and providing recordings or transcripts to relevant agencies. The additional element of the proposed legislation enabling video call functionality requires commercial grade technology beyond the capabilities of our current platform. This includes enhancement in security measures, user authentication, network access and carrier considerations, bandwidth, and integration elements. In addition, an agnostic video calling platform is necessary to ensure equal access for all potential users. At present, we believe it is premature to impose this requirement through legislation but will keep this under review and add this to the NYC311 service delivery road map when implementation is possible.

Intro. 673 relates to creating a NYC311 service request category for dog runs in public parks.

It is already possible to file a service request for a New York City Department of Parks facility. NYC311 is in conversations with the department to see if we can make the process of filling a service request for a “dog run” more streamlined.

Intro. 820 relates to the number of steps to submit a service request.

We understand the desire to streamline the process for submitting complaints, and where possible, NYC311 encourages agencies to collect information in an efficient way to reduce the burden on the customer. Whenever the service request form is driven by NYC311, it always takes four steps or less to submit that request. For many complaints via the website, NYC311 presents the four-step process as “what,” “where,” “who,” and “review.” This allows for a consistent customer experience across most service requests. On mobile, there may be even fewer steps. There are circumstances under which an agency’s form is used for intake that may not follow the same four-step pattern. If there are specific complaints that require more than four steps, we can take them under review with the agency.

Intro. 822 relates to requiring the NYC311 customer service center to indicate that an agency is unable to respond to a service request and provide proof of any action taken.

The NYC311 service request has a “closed loop” process where NYC311 is responsible for the triage and intake of the service request information, and the agency is responsible for responding and updating the status of the service request to communicate the outcome directly to the customer. There are thousands of different service requests with different service level agreements, some measured in hours and some measured in days. NYC311 is not an oversight agency and does not have the ability to know each status for the millions of service requests filed each year until the agency closes them with a description of the outcome as presented to the customer. NYC311 can work with any agency that wishes to update and improve their messaging of service request outcomes for a better customer experience.

Finally, on behalf of my colleagues, I thank Chair Gutiérrez and committee members for your time and the opportunity to testify. I am happy to take any questions.

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JUMAANE D. WILLIAMS

**STATEMENT OF PUBLIC ADVOCATE JUMAANE D. WILLIAMS
TO THE NEW YORK CITY COUNCIL
COMMITTEE ON TECHNOLOGY**

April 25, 2024

Good morning,

My name is Jumaane D. Williams and I am the Public Advocate for the City of New York. Thank you to Chair Gutiérrez and members of the Committee on Technology for holding this hearing. When first released by the Bloomberg administration over twenty years ago, 311 was a revolutionary development that improved government responsiveness. As time has progressed, 311 is periodically updated to better capture responses and be more responsive.

There are still outstanding issues that must be addressed by 311 to best serve New Yorkers. The most common complaint that my office receives from constituents, non-profits, and other stakeholders such as community boards is that many 311 complaints are closed quickly, without resolution and without an explanation. Furthermore, when 311 agents misdirects and assign complaints to the wrong agency, the agency closes out the complaint instead of redirecting it back to the 311 agent or to the appropriate agency. Intro 634 and Intro 640 looks to bring the City of New York into the current century, respectively, by utilizing modern technology to make complaints by sending photos and videos for housing or building complaints and allowing New Yorkers to make video calls to the 311 system.

Specifically, Intro 634 mandates that the information can be transferred to and available for inspectors. This information will make it easier for inspectors to classify complaints, which will cut down on cancellations. While the Administration has raised privacy concerns, ultimately these concerns can be addressed without overly restricting citizen reporting. Moreover, it may assist with clarifying the nature of the complaints and directing it to the appropriate agency.

Intro 640 allows for video calls to be made to 311. Video calls make it easier to show 311 operators what the specific concern is, so 311 operators can transfer the complaint to the correct agency or more accurately capture the complaint. Intro 640 specifies that video calls will have captions offered in the 10 designated citywide languages. This can be helpful for many New Yorkers who find it difficult to communicate in English, but still need to show video context for their complaint.

I look forward to working with my colleagues so that Intro 634 and Intro 640 are implemented in an effective and efficient manner. Thank you.

Written Testimony about Siren Noise

Submitted on 4/25/2024

Submitted by: Brenda Kuciemba

I live on the 14th floor in a building on the northeast corner of 57th Street and 10th Ave. We have double pane windows. There is regular loud noise from ambulances, fire trucks, police vehicles, trucks and autos.

I have lived in this building over two years and have noticed that police and fire trucks have decreased the amount of noise by tapping their horn versus using a constant siren noise. And, I've noticed that the police use a lower pitched siren which helps.

Most ambulances use a constant loud high-pitched siren. And in response I've witnessed trucks and autos laying on their horns. When I lived near Union Square, most ambulances used a lower-pitched siren. Can the sirens in our area ambulances be retrofitted with lower-pitched sirens?

Some cargo trucks have extremely loud horns. Can the volume on these devices be regulated?

I believe it would be helpful to have a traffic officer at this intersection as it is also heavily used by truck and auto traffic coming and going onto the westside highway.

I have resorted to wearing noise-reducing air pods while walking on the street as the noise from all vehicles is too loud for me. However, many mornings I wake up startled by loud sirens and horns. I am very concerned about hearing loss. Also, It's almost impossible to have a phone conversation or Zoom meeting as I constantly have to mute and unmute versus being able to stay unmuted.

Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Testimony by Dr. C. M. Pyle re. New York City and other Cities' Emergency Sirens.

Thank you for accepting and reading my written testimony on Sirens and noise generated by emergency vehicles in New York City.

European cities, such as Rome and Paris, have sirens that are unmistakable in traffic, but are melodious and not piercing. These melodies cut through traffic noise by their varied tones, not by loudness or shrillness. Please watch just a few seconds of the following video on YouTube:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=--AaxdV8c4s>

Paris, too, has relatively melodious, but easily recognizable, emergency sirens:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qBHrwqqpPVw>

These rhythmic sounds can be heard, due precisely to their rhythms and musical intervals, above the roar of traffic and other city noises in both Rome and Paris, two significant metropolises.

Please consider changing the New York City emergency siren patterns to one of these systems, or something equally unique and unmistakable. It is not at all necessary for sirens to be deafening.

Thank you.

Dr. C. M. Pyle

West End Avenue

New York, NY 10024

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I live on the Upper West on 86th Street. As a major east-west transverse, 86th Street is very popular with ambulances. I certainly understand the need for ambulances to have clear travel through the city, but I don't understand ambulance drivers' love affair with their high-frequency, screeching, ear-splitting sirens at all hours of the day and night, regardless of how much traffic there actually is on the road. Indeed, the lower-frequency sirens employed by the FDNY's own fire engines are almost pleasant compared to those of the FDNY ambulances (but presumably just as effective). The deleterious health effect of such sirens (and the sleep loss caused by them, especially for the elderly) has been well-documented. Ironically, these hospitals are supposed to be promoting public health.

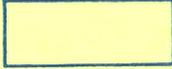
I've traveled throughout Europe and have experienced the much more tolerable European ambulance sirens. Why can't our ambulances employ those sirens?

Thank you for your consideration.

Roberto Goizueta

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card



I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____
 in favor in opposition

Date: April 25, 2024

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Melissa Guillaume

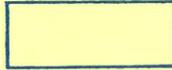
Address: [Redacted], Brooklyn

I represent: NYC Office of Technology + Innovation

Address: 2 Metro Tech Center, Brooklyn, NY

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card



I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____
 in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: JOE MORRISROE

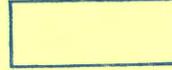
Address: 59 MAIDEN LANE, 14th FLOOR NY, NY 10038

I represent: OTI / 311

Address: SAME

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card



I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____
 in favor in opposition

Date: 4/25/24

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Christopher & Lea Johnson

Address: [Redacted]

I represent: SELF

Address: _____