

A RESOLUTION

25-378

IN THE COUNCIL OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

December 5, 2023

To declare the existence of an emergency with respect to the need to amend the Retired Police Officer Redeployment Amendment Act of 1992 to allow retired Metropolitan Police Department officers and retired firefighters from the Fire and Emergency Services Department to be eligible for rehire at the discretion of the Director of the Office of Unified Communication as temporary full-time or temporary part-time 911 call takers or 911 dispatchers without jeopardy to the retirement benefits of the employee.

RESOLVED, BY THE COUNCIL OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA, That this resolution may be cited as the “Retired Firefighter and Police Officer Redeployment Emergency Declaration Resolution of 2023”.

Sec. 2. (a) Under current law, retired District government employees who collect pension benefits and are rehired by another District agency are subject to an annuity offset. This offset deters retired government employees from pursuing employment at another District agency. However, the law allows for some exceptions to this rule. There are currently pension offset exemptions for retired Metropolitan Police Department (“MPD”) officers who are rehired as fully sworn temporary full-time or temporary part-time police officers, rehired as temporary full-time or temporary part-time employees at the Department of Forensic Sciences or hired by the Superintendent of the District of Columbia Public Schools as security personnel. These exemptions allow former District government employees to apply their specific skills in new roles for which they are uniquely suited.

(b) The emergency legislation would allow firefighters retired from the Fire and Emergency Medical Services Department (“FEMS”) and retired MPD officers to be rehired at the discretion of the Director of the Office of Unified Communications (“OUC”) as temporary full-time or temporary part-time 911 call takers or 911 dispatchers without decreasing their retirement benefits. This exemption would give OUC access to a new pool of candidates who, while not explicitly excluded from being rehired as 911 call takers and dispatchers, may be uninterested in starting a new job without any additional compensation.

(c) Retired firefighters and police officers would be valuable additions to OUC’s 911 operations, as they are familiar with dispatch operations from the FEMS and MPD perspectives.

They would bring the expertise and knowledge that they acquired over decades on the front lines of emergency response into the heart of OUC operations, including their knowledge of the District's geography, their medical expertise, and knowledge of the information that firefighters and police officers need from dispatchers when responding to a scene.

(d) OUC must maintain a minimum number of 911 call takers and dispatchers to timely and safely carry out core 911 response operations. However, OUC has struggled in recent years to maintain minimum staffing levels. Recently, in October 2023, 30 out of 67 911 call-taker and dispatcher shifts did not meet staffing targets. This was also the case for 26 out of 64 shifts in September 2023, and for 26 out of 66 shifts in August 2023. Call wait times also continue to exceed targets. In 4 days in November 2023, fewer than half of 911 calls were answered in 15 seconds or less.

(e) Since OUC's 911 Performance Dashboard was launched, several residents submitted feedback regarding 911 call wait times, which received the response, "OUC is working to hire more 911 call takers to minimize the call wait times." OUC has had chronically high vacancy rates over the past few years and instituted obligatory overtime policies to maintain minimum staffing levels. These staffing challenges complicate OUC's efforts to deliver timely and high-quality frontline emergency response services to District residents.

(f) The emergency legislation can help OUC reduce the number of understaffed 911 call taker and dispatcher shifts, reduce call time waits, more frequently limit shifts for 911 call takers and dispatchers to a maximum of 8 hours, and reduce OUC's use of mandatory overtime to fill staffing gaps for critical roles. It will likely increase interagency collaboration and understanding, as retired firefighters, police officers, and OUC call takers and dispatchers work together to address District residents' urgent medical and safety needs.

(g) Emergency legislation is needed to allow OUC to hire retired firefighters and police officers who apply for 911 call taker and 911 dispatcher positions as soon as openings are next posted.

Sec. 3. The Council determines that the circumstances enumerated in section 2 constitute emergency circumstances making it necessary that the Retired Firefighter and Police Officer Redeployment Emergency Amendment Act of 2023 be adopted after a single reading.

Sec. 4. This resolution shall take effect immediately.