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PRESS RELEASE



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WHEN SECONDS MATTER, OAKLANDERS WAIT

Audit Confirms the Oakland Police Department's Response to Emergencies is Slow and Inequitable.

OAKLAND, California (October 8, 2025): Today, Oakland's Office of the City Auditor released a report titled [*Inadequate 9-1-1 Staffing and Outdated Beat Boundaries Lead to Slow and Inequitable Police Emergency Response Times*](#). The report details the results of the Office's performance audit of the Oakland Police Department's Emergency Communications Center, where call takers answer emergency calls and dispatch sworn officers and civilian staff to respond. Emergency calls – which come in via "9-1-1" and the Police Department's 10-digit emergency phone number – include Priority 1 calls which involve immediate threats to life, and Priority 2 calls which include in-progress situations with the potential for violence or damage to property, as well as incidents that have just occurred. The audit assessed the timeliness of the Police Department's response to emergency calls through extensive analysis of call data from the City of Oakland and seven peer agencies in California.

The audit found that vacancies and outdated minimum staffing standards at the Police Emergency Communications Center have led to the Police Department missing state targets for emergency call answering speeds. The State of California requires local 9-1-1 centers to answer 90 percent of 9-1-1 calls within 15 seconds. In 2024, the Police Department answered 54 percent of 9-1-1 calls within 15 seconds. The Police Department was slower to answer emergency calls than the seven California peer agencies selected for comparison, with about a third of calls answered after one minute. The audit also found that average call answering speeds varied substantially depending on time of day and determined that Communications staff could be better allocated to match incoming call volume.

Moreover, callers who do not speak English face additional hurdles to requesting emergency response. About 4 out of 10 Oakland households speak languages other than English, with the most widely spoken languages being Spanish, Cantonese, and Mandarin. The Police Department relies on third-party interpreters because there are not enough bilingual call takers in the Police Emergency Communications Center. In particular, there is a shortage of dispatchers who speak Cantonese and Mandarin. Calls using interpreters are, on average, five minutes longer than emergency calls as a whole—a significant disparity when every second of delay could increase the risk of life-threatening outcomes.

The audit also observed that the Police Department lacks targets for its response times to the most urgent (Priority 1 and Priority 2) calls. Establishing such targets would bring greater accountability by allowing the Police Department to define its response time goals, measure and report on its performance, make informed staffing decisions, and identify bottlenecks and inequities in response times.

Lastly, outdated Police beat boundaries reinforced disparities in overall response times. The Police Department took longer to respond to Priority 1 calls in parts of the Oakland hills, and the audit uncovered significant disparities in Police response times between the City's West Bureau of Field Operations and East Bureau of Field Operations. Compared to the West Bureau, the East Bureau has fewer officers handling a higher number of calls involving weapons or violence. This disparity led to the East Bureau having median Priority 2 response times that were two hours longer than those of the West Bureau. Oakland City Auditor Michael C. Houston stated, "In Oakland, emergency response times must not be based on your zip code. Equity means timely service for every resident, and our audit underscores the need to deliver that for residents in East Oakland and the hills who experience slower Police response."

The audit made 10 recommendations to improve the allocation of existing staff, promote more equitable and timely service to limited English speakers, develop and report on progress toward response time targets, redraw beat boundaries to improve officer availability, and activate GPS in patrol cars to enable the dispatch of the nearest available officers.

Auditor Houston commented on the audit: "Few City roles are more critical than answering 9-1-1. When Oaklanders dial 9-1-1, often it's because lives are at risk and every second counts. This audit demands accountability and action on one of the community's most vital services."

Houston expressed optimism about the impact of the audit, stating: "The audit found that chronic vacancies in the Police Emergency Communications Center are still slowing emergency response. While filling positions has recently improved call times, real change requires more: hiring bilingual dispatchers, aligning shifts with demand, and using data to deploy staff. Oaklanders deserve a 9-1-1 system that responds quickly and reliably every time—and our audit lays out how the City can make that happen." Auditor Houston added: "I am glad we were able to make such meaningful and feasible recommendations – they aren't just ideas; they are essential actions and achievable. My team will follow-up on the statuses of the recommendations until they are implemented, and we look forward to reporting real progress on these critical recommendations."

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You can read the full report [here](#).

The City Auditor is available for in-person, virtual, or phone interviews.

Please direct questions to Assistant to the City Auditor Dena Shupe at DShupe@oaklandca.gov.

ABOUT OAKLAND'S CITY AUDITOR MICHAEL C. HOUSTON

A career public servant, Michael C. Houston has been a government auditor and investigator for 18 years. He first worked as a performance auditor for the City of San Jose's independent City Auditor's Office from 2008 to 2017 and then as the Director of Compliance and Internal Control at California State University East Bay, where he directed the audit and investigation functions between 2017 and 2019. Michael has worked in the Oakland City Auditor's Office since 2019, initially serving as the Whistleblower Program Manager and then as the Assistant City Auditor. In a March 2024 Special Election, Michael was elected to complete the term of the previous City Auditor, who resigned on October 13, 2023. Michael has a Master of Public Policy degree from U.C. Berkeley, a Bachelor of Arts degree in History from Sonoma State University, and is a Certified Internal Auditor.

ABOUT THE OAKLAND CITY AUDITOR'S OFFICE

The City Auditor's Office independently and objectively reviews City operations and services, and reports on their performance to the public. The Office's audits include recommendations to management and those charged with governance and oversight, on how to improve services, reduce costs, and increase public accountability. The Office conducts performance audits in accordance with Government Auditing Standards set by the Government Accountability Office under the U.S. Comptroller General. The City Auditor's Office operates a Whistleblower Hotline to receive and investigate allegations of fraud, waste, and abuse affecting or involving City of Oakland resources, employees, officials, or contractors. The Office also prepares financial ballot analyses for proposed legislation in accordance with the City Charter, and conducts analyses and reviews requested from the City Council. Visit www.oaklandauditor.com to learn more about Oakland's Office of the City Auditor or view a complete list of our released audits, investigations, and annual reports.