Testimony of Christopher Schuyler, Senior Staff Attorney
New York Lawyers for the Public Interest, Disability Justice Program
To the New York City Council, Jointly with the Committee on Fire and Emergency Management and the Committee on Technology
Regarding the Implementation of New York City’s Text-to-911 System (Nov. 12, 2019)

For people for who stutter and those with other speech disabilities, the option to text 911 is more than a matter of convenience – it’s absolutely essential.

Good afternoon. My name is Christopher Schuyler and I am a Senior Staff Attorney with New York Lawyers for the Public Interest, Disability Justice Program. I am also a person who stutters and an active member of the National Stuttering Association.

Stuttering affects 1% of the general population; there are approximately 85,000 New York City residents who stutter, not to mention scores of others who work in or visit the city every day. While the root cause of stuttering is believed to be neurological and physiological – rather than psychological – it can be triggered by emotional or situational factors.¹ For instance, some people who stutter experience increased difficulty speaking in situations when time is of the essence.² It’s also not uncommon for people who stutter to experience heightened difficulties when referring to proper nouns, such as names and places.³ These communication challenges, while inconvenient in everyday life, can be life-threatening in a true emergency.

Text-to-911 is imperative for people who stutter because it would remove very real risks of miscommunication. When reporting an emergency, specific details are important – such as location, specific individuals involved, and what is happening. If a person who stutters is unable to verbalize these details, they may not receive the assistance they need in a timely manner.

Additionally, operators that are relatively unexposed to stuttering are liable to misunderstand a person who stutters. Accuracy and clarity in communications is of

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² Id.
³ Id.
paramount importance during an emergency. Text-to-911 would alleviate these major and unnecessary barriers to effective communication.

Notably, the benefits of Text-to-911, including increased accuracy and clarity in crucial moments, are benefits shared by groups outside of those with speech disabilities. The increased accuracy and clarity provided by Text-to-911 would also benefit the Deaf and Hard of Hearing communities, visitors with Limited English Proficiency, as well as individuals who need to text subtly, such as people experiencing domestic violence or active shooter situations – as my colleague, Maureen Belluscio testified to in greater detail.

Text-to-911 has been implemented by hundreds of call centers around the country. By failing to implement Text-to-911, New York City is placing countless people at risk every day. New York City must implement Tex-to-911 without further delay.

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