

INFORMATION CALENDAR

June 30, 2020

To: Honorable Mayor and Members of the City Council

From: Jenny Wong, City Auditor

Subject: Dispatch Audit Report Wins National Recognition

INTRODUCTION

The 2019 Exemplary Knighton Award for best performance audit report in the Medium shop category has been awarded to the City of Berkeley Auditor's Office by the Association of Local Government Auditors (ALGA). The report, "911 Dispatchers: Understaffing Leads to Excessive Overtime and Low Morale," was judged on several key elements, such as the potential for significant impact, the persuasiveness of conclusions, the focus on improving government efficiency and effectiveness, and its clarity and conciseness.

CURRENT SITUATION AND ITS EFFECTS

Each year, local government audit organizations from around the U.S. and Canada submit their best performance audit reports for judging. The judges from peer organizations determined that our audit of the City of Berkeley's 911 Communications Center was among the best of 2019.

BACKGROUND

We issued our audit report, "911 Dispatchers: Understaffing Leads to Excessive Overtime and Low Morale," on April 25, 2019<sup>1</sup>. The purpose of the audit was to determine:

1. To what extent does the Communications Center, which answers 911 calls, have sufficient staffing to handle workloads and service demands?
2. What contributes to overtime use?
3. How do working conditions affect morale?

We found that it is taking longer than previous years for call takers to answer 911 calls. The Communications Center staffing levels are not sufficient to meet current call demand and, with predicted population growth, the Center will soon need even more resources to maintain its emergency response service levels. We also found that, due to consistent understaffing, the Communications Center relies heavily on overtime to meet minimum staffing requirements, spending nearly \$1 million in 2017 on overtime. Finally, we found

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<sup>1</sup> [https://www.cityofberkeley.info/uploadedFiles/Auditor/Level\\_3\\_-\\_General/Dispatch%20Workload\\_Fiscal%20Year%202018.pdf](https://www.cityofberkeley.info/uploadedFiles/Auditor/Level_3_-_General/Dispatch%20Workload_Fiscal%20Year%202018.pdf)

that morale is low and dispatchers feel unsupported. While there are some resources available for staff to manage stress, the dispatchers often do not have time to access them.

We made 14 recommendations to reduce overtime and vacancies, and further support dispatcher needs. The Police Department has made significant progress towards implementing our recommendations with 9 recommendations implemented, 3 in progress, and 2 not implemented as of their last update to Council on April 14, 2020<sup>2</sup>. The Department has developed a team of five staff dedicated to recruitment and retention of Police staff including a focus on recruiting dispatcher applicants.

#### ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY

This report is not associated with identifiable environmental effects or opportunities.

#### POSSIBLE FUTURE ACTION

We will continue to follow up on the status of audit recommendation implementation to ensure the City mitigates the risks that could prevent the City from providing efficient, effective, and equitable service delivery.

#### FISCAL IMPACTS OF POSSIBLE FUTURE ACTION

Audit work leads to new or enhanced revenue, cost recovery, and increased efficiency, with economic impact well beyond the audit costs. Long-range financial benefits of our audits result in significant improvements to internal controls and service delivery.

Ensuring timely implementation of audit recommendations could result in additional savings and risk reduction, including fraud risk. Reducing fraud risk more than protects money; it builds trust in government. Maintaining a strong audit function and prudent program and fiscal management will reduce future costs and enhance public trust.

#### CONTACT PERSON

Jenny Wong, City Auditor, 510-981-6750

Attachment:

1. 2019 Knighton Award Letter from ALGA

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<sup>2</sup> [https://www.cityofberkeley.info/Clerk/City\\_Council/2020/04\\_Apr/Documents/2020-04-14\\_Item\\_47\\_Audit\\_Recommendation\\_Status.aspx](https://www.cityofberkeley.info/Clerk/City_Council/2020/04_Apr/Documents/2020-04-14_Item_47_Audit_Recommendation_Status.aspx)



# Association of Local Government Auditors

Jenny Wong  
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May 8, 2020

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Dear Jenny Wong:

The Association of Local Government Auditors (ALGA) Awards Program Committee is pleased to announce that the Berkeley City Auditor's report, *911 Dispatchers: Understaffing Leads to Excessive Overtime and Low Morale*, won the 2019 Exemplary Knighton Award in the Medium Shop Category.

ALGA was founded in 1985 to serve auditors who specialize in working with local governments. ALGA members represent approximately 300 local government audit organizations. Unlike the majority of auditors who work within a single industry, local government auditors must work in an environment that encompasses a wide variety of industries. Local government auditors are committed to helping their governments improve service delivery to citizens while doing so more efficiently and effectively with the limited resources available. In making the award, the judges commented:

This audit clearly presented the impact of the audit findings and made a great case for why this audit is important. The audit did a great job of engaging the reader from the onset and effectively used visuals to highlight key points. Key information such as survey results were called out in the audit so the reader could easily digest the information. The conclusions and supporting data were strong and contributed to a convincing report.

To encourage increasing levels of excellence among local government auditors, ALGA created the Knighton Award in 1995 to recognize the best performance audit reports produced by local government audit shops in the previous year. Each year, local government audit organizations submit their best performance audit report to be evaluated against four criteria: (1) an audit scope that has the potential for significant impact, and is responsive to the needs and concerns of decision-makers and/or the public; (2) audit conclusions that are persuasive, logical, and firmly supported by the evidence, which was gathered using appropriate research methods and tools; (3) audit recommendations that are feasible, and will make government programs more effective and efficient; and (4) audit results that are communicated in a clear, concise way. Judges from peer organizations determined that the Berkeley City Auditor was among the best of 2019.

Congratulations receiving this award!

Sincerely,

Pam Weipert, President  
ALGA

Kathie Harrison, Chair  
ALGA Awards Program Committee

