Testimony for HB138 - SUPPORT
"Public Safety – 3–1–1 Systems – Non-Emergency Information"
Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee
February 8, 2023

A statewide 311 system makes the delivery of government services more accessible to people who live, work, play and run businesses in Maryland. It would provide support for smaller Maryland Counties, relieve some non-emergency call volume from police departments, could save local jurisdictions money for technology and could possibly create a new career path for 911 agents.

I wholeheartedly support the creation of a Maryland 311 operation.

Overview

What is MC311? MC311 provides a single contact number and web site for non-emergency requests for information, service and complaints. A caller will dial 311 within Montgomery County or 240-777-0311 and a call will be answered by a live, trained Customer service representative.

Montgomery County's MC311 is a single point-of-contact for enterprise customer service delivery and Customer satisfaction; Improve functionality of existing systems and data quality across County Government.

MC311 replaced over 13,000 phone numbers and 10,000 e-mail addresses to wade through to find the right person to handle your request. MC311 provides accountability by negotiating Service Level agreements with each department to ensure prompt, effective delivery of services. Efficiency is achieved by consolidating call taking in a single location, supported by a comprehensive enterprise-wide Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system, including telephony, service knowledge database, analytics and reporting equipment and software.

Need for the Program

Montgomery County Government has 40 major Departments and Offices, most of which have sub-organizations, (i.e., divisions, sections, etc.). The result is a large, complex bureaucracy with over 13,000 telephone numbers and over 10,000 email accounts, which serve as the "points-of-contact" for the general public and Customers.

The quality of the response from County government varied based on who you were able to reach; knowledge of many topic areas was shared anecdotally or was based on experience. Often responses were not prompt or a customer would have no idea when a County employee would return their call; the person who could answer the question was away from their desk, and requests were left on a voice mail box. Additionally, departmental systems were not structured to collect the necessary performance data to conduct objective analysis of the accuracy of information given, the precise accounting of service delivery, or of complaints.

When information was available, it was stored in a multitude of different systems with different reporting standards. Many key measures were self-reporting, which led to inconsistencies and inaccuracies. The disparate systems and storage of information made reporting and analysis quite time-consuming and inconsistent.

Description of the Program

Goals and Objectives

MC311 is an integrated Customer Service Center (CSC) and customer service request system which:
- Provides a single point of contact for the general public to Montgomery County Government.
- Provides customer access to the status of their information and/or service request.
- Informs the customer of the status and final disposition of their request.
- Records all previous customer contacts.
- Informs management of the number and nature of requests for information and/or service being received by each governmental organization; and the timeliness of service delivery for each department and each service offered.
- Provides management the information needed to proactively make program resource allocation and reallocation decisions.

There are two types of requests to MC311:
- general information requests (*68% of calls*): includes requests handled directly by MC311 using our extensive knowledgebase of information provided by experts in each County department.
- requests requiring department fulfillment (32%): includes requests for services, referrals to County experts, plus complaints, compliments and comments.

The customer service center is open for calls from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. Monday through Friday. A customer can visit the MC311 Web site 24 hours a day every day at *mc311.com* and get much the same information and request most of the same services that a caller will get by talking to a customer service representative.

Most Common Calls to MC311 BY DEPARTMENT:

DEPARTMENT	MOST POPULAR SERVICES	FY23*	FY22	FY21	FY20
Environmental Protection	trash & recycling	22	25	22	20
Health & Human Services	food/housing/financial/emergencies	15	17	21	14
Transportation	transit/tree maintenance/highway	12	10	8	13
Permitting Services	construction, zoning, compliance	11	12	12	13
Finance	tax bills, delinquency notices	9	9	9	8
Housing & Community Affairs	licensing & registration, landlord/tenant	7	6	5	5

FY23 data Jul – Dec 2022

Call Handling Approach and Staffing. MC311 handles about 43,000 to 45,000 calls per month (much more during the COVID-19 emergency) with 44 budgeted positions – usually 30-32 representatives are on the phone at any given time. High volume call periods are handled primarily by workforce planning models, focused on staffing to peak volume, establishing a calendar in advance for off days for customer service representatives based on workforce optimization. From 2010 – 2015 and again during the COVID-19 emergency we deployed temporary service contractors. In addition, for the first six months of 2021, the County assigned employees from other departments to manage high volume call periods flexibly and cost effectively. During the operational workday, vigilant schedule adherence monitoring of customer service representatives is another call volume

management technique. If necessary, in rare circumstances, supervisors or other trained personnel will take phone calls in unforeseen emergencies.

MC311 Customer Service Center Performance Metrics. In order to provide excellent customer service, all aspects of the operation are measured closely. We want to minimize abandoned calls, answer calls quickly, handle calls within 4 minutes on average, including any after-call work. We also place a strong emphasis on accuracy. Below is a chart that lists our key performance measures.

Metric	Performance Goal
Abandon Rate:	Fewer than 5% of calls abandoned
Speed of Answer:	80% of calls answered in 20 seconds or less
Customer Satisfaction:	Consistently 85% or greater
Average Call Handling Time:	4 minutes
Service Request Accuracy:	95% of Service Requests closed according to established performance standards

Historical and Current Performance:

MC311 KEY PERFORMANCE MEASURES	PRE COVID		COVID			
			Pre-Vax	Post-Vax		
	FY18	FY19	FY20	FY21	FY22	FY23*
Average Calls Per Day	1,927	1,946	2,007	1,901	1,920	1,858
Average Monthly Calls in Spanish (%)	3	3	6	6	6	6
Abandon Rate (%)	5	10	15	6	4	2
Average Handle Time (min:sec)	4:24	4:24	5:10	5:18	4:30	4:09
Average Speed of Answer (min:sec)	1:12	1:34	4:14	1:07	0:36	0:20
Service Request Accuracy (%)	98	98	96	96	97	97
Customer Satisfaction (%)	85	83	86	86	89	87

Improved Access to County Information and Services. MC311 is focused on using channels that allow customers to conduct business transaction with a live customer service representative or interact directly with our CRM system. Customers get the latest, most accurate information and the fastest possible response from Montgomery County. Customers can communicate with MC311 directly through our Web Site from just about any device – to get general information, request a service, make a complaint, give us a compliment or simply make a comment.

Callers and web site visitors as well as employees can use MC311 for directory assistance to find a specific County employee. In addition, County employees and retirees use MC311 to get access to employee benefits information and services as well as employment and recruitment topics.

Emergency Response Support. MC311 supports County Emergency response during public health and public safety events, such as major storms. The goal is not only to increase call-taker capacity and offload non-emergency calls so that 911 can focus on true emergencies, but also provide an efficient way to track responses. All employees are considered essential. Call Center hours are often extended, occasionally to 24/7. During emergencies, County residents can call MC311 reach a live operator to get information related to an emergency, typically in under 20 seconds, even during a power outage using a land line; listen to emergency related information during the welcome announcement and stay on the line to speak to a representative for more information.

Data and Analysis for Continuous Improvement. The data provided by tracking every call and every web site visit to MC311 gives management an understanding of the services most important to residents, how well each department meets its commitments (service level agreements or SLA) service request reports what is important to County Customers on a day-to-day basis. The empirical data collected represents real-time Customer feedback on issues and concerns with County services. Analytics provides focused data and allows the County to tailor Customer satisfaction surveys to address specific issues and concerns with specific services. We use this data to learn how to operate the Customer service center more efficiently and effectively, as we are always looking for ways to improve our service. In many cases, this means re-writing, adding or deleting knowledge base articles, analyzing business processes and helping departments and at re-engineering the business process, providing real-time continuous improvement. The County also uses this data during budget preparation because we know what services priorities with customers are.

Supporting Accountability with CountyStat. One of the goals of the MC311 initiative was to integrate with CountyStat, a component of the County's results-based accountability system that promotes a culture of managing for results, CountyStat is a data-driven process to identify and resolve County departments' Customer service delivery issues in a systematic way. The goal of CountyStat is to ingrain the concepts of data-driven decision making into government culture and focus on each Department's efforts to deliver results. MC311 has specifically designed and developed reports and dashboards for CountyStat reviews of the program as well as all participating Departments. All CountyStat sessions utilize the data from the enterprise MC311 CRM System.

In addition, The MC311 Web site was available, and customers were able to access County information and request services 24 hours a day. In Fiscal Year 22, over 100,000 requests for service were processed via the web, and countless more general information requests were generated.

Results

Success for the MC311 Initiative was defined by the following:
- Created a brand-new County function: a consolidated Customer service call center
- Implemented an enterprise-wide technology solution for service intake and response
- Staffed and trained call center staff
- Customers are greeted with a live person instead of voice mail
- Established and standardized processes, procedures and service level agreements (SLAs) for all services
- Significantly reduced call transfers.
- Eliminated the need for customers to understand or know government structure.
- Increased first call resolution rate.
- Tracked requests from intake through disposition.
- Provided Customer feedback throughout request lifecycle.

All Customer facing business processes, intake and/or "touchpoints" with the public were the focus of the initiative. All front-office processes now reside in MC311 for phone and web. Departments are no longer responsible for handling customer calls for service requests and information. Cost/benefit analysis became very significant very early in the project due to economic conditions.

Each Department and Office had some call intake function, no matter how minimal. Significant savings resulted as part of consolidating the existing call centers and the reduction/elimination of call handling capabilities in Departments into a centralized operation. Because MC311 undertook a thorough business process mapping of all services and channels, we were able to define fractional work years and cost of service.

Before implementing MC311, operational costs for customer service for the County were estimated at $25 million annually (Fiscal Year 09). These costs were identified by rigorous business process analysis. Some Customer service personnel from other county Departments were brought to MC311, meaning no new call taking positions were created to start the new agency.

Overall cost per call to the County was reduced, as 45 centrally located generalists could take the same number of calls as 300+ specialists who also had other duties in addition to Customer service.

Return on Investment. The implementation cost of MC311 was approximately $10.4 million. For the FY11 budget year, the program was credited for a permanent cost savings of almost $10M, broken down as follows:

MC311 Cost Savings Analysis	Before MC311	After MC311
Department Operating Cost	$25,000,000	$15,000,000
MC311 Implementation Cost	$10,400,000	N/A
MC311 Operating Cost	N/A	$5,100,000
ONGOING PERMANENT COST SAVINGS	**N/A**	**$9,900,000**
People	300	50
Processes	6 call centers	1 call center
Technology	20 back office customer-facing systems	1 CRM system

Brian Roberts
MC311 Program Director
Montgomery County Government