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Contact: Kevin H. Bell (202) 946-3642,
kevin@freeinformationgroup.com

MOTHER DEMANDS ANSWERS ABOUT 911 DELAY AND SON'S DEATH

DC911 conceals emergency calls and a delay of lifesaving care

Washington, D.C. — Will Ostertag was only 28 when he experienced sudden cardiac arrest and collapsed in the gym of his Columbia Heights apartment building. Paramedic Engine 11, which could have provided lifesaving aid, was right next door to Will's apartment building. But DC's 911 center took nearly 8 minutes to notify the medic and firefighters just 250 feet away. By the time firefighters and EMS arrived, it was too late. While medics restored his pulse, Will's brain was deprived of oxygen for too long. He slipped into a coma and died eleven days later.

When Will's mother, Stephanie Clemans, filed requests with D.C.'s 911 center, the Office of Unified Communications (OUC), for details about her son's death, OUC refused to provide them. She is suing to get the facts.

A mother deserves these answers. Ms. Clemans needs to know what happened when her son suffered and died despite lifesaving aid so close. Yet OUC and the Mayor's Office of Legal Counsel obstinately refuse to provide information to this grieving mother. Their reason is that Ms. Clemans "did not make this (911) call." The Mayor's Office also wrongfully claims there is no "cognizable public interest" in its release.

Will was beloved by his friends and family and had a promising future. He was interviewing for MBA programs at Harvard, Columbia, Berkeley, and Stanford. He was integral at his office in the Department of Energy Loan Programs Office. Will was in love, and planning to marry, and have children.

This lawsuit isn't just about OUC's inexcusable and potentially deadly delay in response to Will's medical crisis. It's about accountability for OUC's systemic — and often deadly — failures.

In June 2020, 59-year-old Sheila Shepperd suffered cardiac arrest at her home, 414 Oglethorpe Street NE. Her 13-year-old daughter called 911 and was assured help was on the way. But that emergency help was dispatched to Oglethorpe Street *Northwest*,

instead of Northeast. By the time first responders realized the error and arrived at the correct location, 20 minutes passed and it was too late to revive Ms. Shepperd. At first, OUC implied that it was the caller who made the mistake¹ but the 911 recording, released five months later by FOIA, clearly proved that Shepperd's teen daughter twice gave the correct address. A 911 call-taker wrongly entered it as Northwest instead of Northeast. This deadly mistake is only one of many documented examples Ms. Clemans has included in her legal filing.

Councilmembers Janeese Lewis George, Robert White, Brianne Nadeau, and Zachary Parker have drawn attention to OUC's repeated failures and lack of transparency. The D.C. Auditor released reports in 2021 and 2022 that OUC fell short of national standards and that it failed to implement corrective recommendations. The Auditor also criticized the agency's lack of transparency. Ms. Clemans will testify tomorrow before the D.C. Council Committee on the Judiciary & Public Safety's Performance Oversight Hearing for the Office of Unified Communications. She looks forward to telling her and her son's story to Chair Brooke Pinto and Members Charles Allen, Anita Bonds, Doni Crawford, and Wendell Felder along with other council members interested in DC government transparency and OUC reform.

¹ <https://wtop.com/dc/2020/09/dc-911-head-responds-to-claim-of-spike-in-dispatches-to-wrong-nonexistent-addresses/>.