Good morning Chairs Vacca and Gibson, and members of the City Council Committees on Technology and Public Safety. My name is David Kirks, and I am the Associate Commissioner leading Next Generation 911 planning efforts at the Department of Information Technology and Telecommunications, or DoITT. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today on Intro. 868, which would require DoITT to develop a plan to allow the public to communicate digitally with emergency responders using the City's 911 system. I would also like to take the opportunity to update the committees on the steps the City is currently taking to do so.

New York City's 911 emergency communication system handles more than 10 million calls each year, delivering emergency, often life-saving services through an expert combination of people, processes, and technology. So I begin by stating that the Administration shares with the Council the goal of this proposed legislation – enhanced access to emergency services for the public – and has in fact begun work to develop a long-term strategy for implementing a Next Generation 911 (NG911) system.

As you are aware, when dealing with lifesaving systems even a single error is an error we must do all we can to prevent. Therefore, we must always carefully conduct due diligence before proposing or making changes to the systems and/or processes that fuel 911 operations. A review conducted by the City has revealed that while some municipalities had made progress with text-to-911, to date no large city in the country – and certainly none comparable in size, scope, or complexity to New York City – has successfully implemented a comprehensive NG911 system.

So before updating the Committees on the progress the City has made with its long-term NG911 planning, it is beneficial to outline, from a technology perspective, what moving to NG911 means.

In order for people to move from older, analog telephone landlines to current cell phone technology (enabling text, video, and data transfers), mobile carriers have had to build-out an entirely new digital infrastructure, separate from their copper-based legacy networks.
And in order to offer 911 users the same features, 911 systems across the country must make the same transition to an all-digital network infrastructure.

While texting to 911 will be available as part of any NG911 system, some jurisdictions are implementing a version of texting prior to NG911 rollout. That said, text to analog 911 remains a developing technology with limited market deployment and multiple open technical concerns. However, we are committed to continue working with NYPD and FDNY to find an acceptable solution in the short-term – provided such a solution does not in any way compromise the City's ability to quickly and effectively respond to emergencies.

So, what have we done thus far? DoITT created an NG911 project team in the summer of 2015 to develop a path forward with all stakeholder agencies. We received approval from the 911 Executive Steering Committee – consisting of top executives from the First Deputy Mayor's Office, Mayor's Office of Operations, NYPD, FDNY, and DoITT – to move forward with the proposed path.

Next, we will be releasing a Request for Information (RFI) to assess options for migration to a NG911 system for New York City. This RFI is still an early step in our comprehensive planning process, but will provide us with a better understanding of the benefits, challenges, risks, and issues associated with migrating to a NG911 platform.

This RFI will help drive our decision around NG911 technologies by surveying experts across the industry, and ensuring a holistic look at the City's options for seamlessly integrating the processing of traditional voice calls with various types of modern and emerging forms of communication.

Reponses to this RFI will help the City create an NG911 system that ensures the highest standards of public safety and emergency response – all within the framework of 911's operational needs and specifications. While the City is best positioned to make determinations about what technologies and practices fit with its functional requirements, throughout this process we are committed to looking at the innovative solutions the private sector has to offer even beyond texting (i.e., video, data transfers, etc.) in rolling out a state-of-the-art system for New Yorkers.

We have described today our efforts to plan for an NG911 system and our commitment to work with NYPD and FDNY to identify potential interim solutions, well aware that any change to a system as vital and complex as 911 must be approached in as cautious and deliberate a manner as possible. We encourage the Council's continued feedback and input as we work together on a safer, more responsive New York City for all.

Thank you.