

GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
Executive Office of Mayor Muriel Bowser



Public Oversight Hearing on Fiscal Year 2015-2016

The Office of the Deputy Mayor for Public Safety and Justice

Testimony of
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Committee on the Judiciary
Kenyan R. McDuffie, Chairperson
Council of the District of Columbia

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John A. Wilson Building
1350 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 2004

Good morning Chairperson McDuffie, members and staff of the Committee on the Judiciary. I am Kevin Donahue, the Deputy City Administrator and Deputy Mayor for Public Safety and Justice. I am here today to discuss the performance and accomplishments of the Office of the Deputy Mayor for 2015.

The Deputy Mayor's Office is responsible for overseeing and coordinating all public safety agencies in the District. To that end, the Office has daily interaction with the agencies under its purview: the Metropolitan Police Department, the Fire and Emergency Medical Services Department, the Homeland Security and Emergency Management Agency, the Office of Unified Communications, the Office of Victim Services and Justice Grants, the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner, the Department of Forensic Sciences, and the Department of Corrections. The Office also interacts and coordinates regularly with independent agencies, federal entities, the court system, and our partners in the region.

Under Mayor Bowser's direction, my Office has formed a deep and productive working relationship with agencies that are not directly involved with public safety, but nonetheless play an integral role in ensuring our city's health and success. My staff and I have almost daily interaction with the Deputy Mayor for Health and Human Services, the Deputy Mayor for Education, and their respective agencies. I meet directly with the other Deputy Mayors specifically on topics of public safety on a weekly, and often more frequent, basis.

As you well know, public safety is far more than a police officer, a firefighter or paramedic, or a 911 dispatcher. It involves our educational system ensuring our students are receiving quality instruction in a safe environment. It also involves our human services agencies providing a wide range of assistance to families in crisis or experiencing trauma. Our framework takes a holistic approach, recognizing that prevention is key to our city's safety.

Last year, the District experienced a number of events that tested our public safety agencies: the January 12 smoke incident at the L'Enfant Plaza Metro Station; multiple snowstorms; the selection of a new FEMS Chief and reinvigoration of EMS reform; the overhaul of the DNA Lab; the implementation of Initiative 71; and the visit of Pope Francis. I am proud of how our agencies and their dedicated employees rose to the occasion during each of these events. In particular, the September papal visit required an unprecedented level of planning, coordination, and execution between District, regional, and federal agencies.

I'd like to focus now on some of the Office's significant accomplishments in FY 2015 and thus far in FY2016.

One of Mayor Bowser's top priorities in 2015 was ensuring our Fire and Emergency Medical Services Department had the leadership and resources it needed to ensure a strong workforce, functional apparatus, and quality medical services. Entering 2015, the District had not increased the number of ambulances deployed on our streets in about a decade, despite our population having grown by 100,000 residents and a 50 percent increase in 911 calls for medical emergencies. In March of last year, we created a "power shift" to boost the number of ambulances from 39 to 49, which we continue to maintain. We conducted a nationwide search and found an outstanding leader to focus on EMS reform: Chief Gregory Dean who led one of

the nation's leading fire-based EMS departments. We settled a decade-old lawsuit with the FEMS union because simple fairness required that we make sure our workers received the pay they were owed for the hours they worked. And we have instituted a fleet management system to ensure FEMS apparatus are being serviced, repaired, and replaced according to manufacturers' guidelines. As we have seen, our work on EMS reform will not be fast, nor will it be easy. But our residents must have absolute certainty that when they call 911 for a fire or medical emergency, they will receive a fast, quality response.

Our Department of Forensic Sciences plays an essential role in the District's criminal justice system. After our federal partners notified us of their concerns with the quality of work at DFS, particularly the DNA Lab, our Office took immediate action. We brought in an independent auditor to review management and scientific practices. We conducted a nationwide search for a new director and hired Dr. Jenifer Smith, who came to us with an extraordinary background of working for the FBI and CIA, as well as being a leading academic on DNA forensics. Dr. Smith has brought on a new team of professionals and has completely revamped the DNA Lab, its procedures, and staff training. As you know, DFS processes sexual assault kits – an incredibly important function to ensuring our sexual assault survivors receive justice. In the few months that Dr. Smith has been at DFS, the average processing time for sexual assault kits has decreased from more than 120 days to fewer than 70 days. And I am very proud to announce that DFS recently got the green light from its certification board to begin in-house DNA testing again. That is testament to an extraordinary amount of work by the men and women who work at DFS – as well as an \$8 million commitment made by Mayor Bowser and Council in the FY15 Supplemental Budget.

Over the past several months, the District has established itself as a national leader in the use of body-worn cameras by police officers. By working with you, our public safety agencies, and numerous subject matter experts, the District will have one of the most extensive and progressive body-worn camera programs in the nation. By the end of this year, all MPD patrol officers will be outfitted with body cameras and, currently, the public has access to an extraordinary amount of body camera footage.

Our most significant and ongoing challenge has been the same one that many other cities across the country faced: an increase in homicides afflicting neighborhoods most in need of stability and economic opportunities. I want to quote something I said last year during my confirmation hearing:

“There is no law enforcement solution to ending violence.... we're not going to arrest our way out of this problem. Instead, we are working on developing the kind of inter-agency, cross-jurisdictional response to community violence that I believe is essential to ensuring neighborhood safety. All of us - elected officials, government leaders, community members - must work to change the culture of violence in our city. We must dedicate ourselves in particular to providing our youth with alternatives.”

What I said last March remains true today. We have been using – and will continue to use – a multifaceted approach to this issue. To effectively reduce crime and violence, we need to pull on

many different levers, encompassed by three strategies: create opportunities and alternatives to violence for our residents; treat trauma in individuals, families, and communities when violence does occur; and have swift, effective, and fair enforcement.

The programs we initiated in 2015 and that are evolving and expanding this year reflect this approach. My Office has partnered with law enforcement, victim services organizations, and mental and behavioral health agencies in launching the Community Stabilization program. This program has been used 32 times in response to violence, serving some 180 individuals, to assist families who were the victims of violence and to prevent a continuation of the cycle of violence. The program also interacted with another 40 families that were not the victims of violence, but that needed intervention to prevent the possibility of violence occurring.

The essential principle behind this effort is to treat a family – rather than just an individual – traumatized by violence, to lower the barriers for families accessing services, and to time services to when they are needed most. Based on the positive feedback from the families we served and from participating agencies, the Bowser Administration will be expanding the program to larger segments of our city. The key to the program’s success has been the buy-in from all participating agencies, which has allowed for maximum flexibility and responsiveness.

This is just one effort, however. We created and implemented cross-cluster summer safety initiatives involving human services and education agencies. We turned a vacant school building into a community opportunity center in Congress Heights in Ward 8. We expanded the Youth Creating Change initiative to a year-round program. And next month we will launch a hospital-based trauma-informed care program.

Through the D.C. Trust, we funded several mini-grants in five of our most affected neighborhoods in Wards 5, 7 and 8: Woodland Terrace, Benning Terrace, Congress Park, Lincoln Heights, and Carver/Langston. These grants, worth about \$1.2 million, are supporting programs on violence prevention and mediation, mentoring, youth enrichment, and family supports. And we continue to work on changing the physical environment, by adding more lighting and addressing neighborhood litter and blight.

For 2016, my Office’s priorities will be to expand on the efforts we started last year.

Mayor Bowser’s commitment to meaningful and lasting EMS reform will focus on improving healthier outcomes for residents, measurable through on-scene trauma and cardiac survival rates. Our “Hands on Hearts” program, which seeks to train 5,000 District residents on providing CPR, is well on its way to meeting that goal far ahead of schedule. Additionally, we must refocus EMS demand by individuals with non-emergency medical needs through more effective healthcare options via education, access, and prevention. We need to bend the demand curve for non-medical emergency ambulance calls. Our use of a private ambulance service may be a temporary tactic, but the fact remains that far too many people have come to rely on our ambulances as their primary transportation for getting to the doctor. To change this, we will need the help of all our community leaders and partners.

We will continue to work on improving police-community relations. In announcing the recent report on use of force by MPD officers, D.C. Auditor Kathy Patterson correctly noted that our police department is in a class of its own when it comes to national comparisons. But there is room for improvement. The District will be administering several surveys to create a baseline level of police-community satisfaction. Based on these results, we will identify strengths and areas for improvement. Chief Lanier and MPD will be tasked with addressing those areas that need to be strengthened. I am proud of the men and women of our police department and look forward to working productively with the Department's new union leadership.

Our overarching goal is to make the District the safest big city in America. This is essential to ensuring our city continues to thrive and attract new residents, businesses, and tourists. We will accomplish this by focusing on crime rates and emergency preparedness. To reduce crime rates, we will continue to develop prevention programs that provide economic opportunities for at-risk populations, arrest and prosecute those who violate the safety of our communities, and help returning citizens successfully reintegrate into an environment of stable housing and employment. To maximize emergency preparedness, we will continue to improve our overall resiliency through community engagement and training, full scale exercises, and interagency and inter-jurisdictional planning.

Finally, we will continue to dedicate ourselves to reducing domestic and sexual violence and to improving outcomes for survivors. We must do more to stop such violence before it happens through education and early intervention. And we will seek to make sure any person who is victimized by such violence gets immediate help from trained professionals.

I'd like to close my testimony by saying that I am proud of what our public safety agencies accomplished in FY 2015. I believe those agencies' employees should be more regularly recognized for their professionalism, dedication, and service to the District. For FY 2016, Mayor Bowser has set ambitious goals for each public safety agency. Thanks to the outstanding leadership at each of those agencies, I am confident we will achieve those goals.

Chairperson McDuffie, I appreciate the opportunity to present the accomplishments of my Office and of the agencies I oversee. I'd be happy to take any questions you may have.