

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



Performance Oversight Hearing on

The Office of the Deputy Mayor for Public Safety and Justice

Testimony of
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Acting Deputy Mayor

Before the
Committee on the Judiciary and Public Safety
Brooke Pinto, Chairperson
Council of the District of Columbia

February 22, 2023
9:30 AM Page Break

Good morning, Chairperson Pinto, members, and staff of the Committee on the Judiciary and Public Safety. I am Lindsey Appiah, Acting Deputy Mayor for Public Safety and Justice. Thank you for this opportunity to offer testimony on the performance of the Office of the Deputy Mayor for Public Safety and Justice during Fiscal Year 2022 and Fiscal Year 2023, to date.

I look forward to working with you, Chairperson Pinto, and this Committee to advance us towards a safer, more just city for all our residents, in all eight Wards. While I am new to this acting role, I am no stranger to the District, District government, or the Public Safety and Justice cluster. I first moved to DC in 2001 to attend law school at Georgetown University Law Center and have called the city home for 17 of the last 22 years. I have been deeply privileged to serve my fellow DC residents since 2012, when I joined the Department of Youth Rehabilitation Services (DYRS) serving in several capacities including General Counsel and Interim Director. I joined the Office of the Deputy Mayor for Public Safety and Justice as chief of staff in 2021.

My love for this city makes it a tremendous privilege and honor to be nominated in January by Mayor Bowser, for whom I have the utmost respect, to serve as her Deputy Mayor for Public Safety and Justice.

The DMPSJ office is tasked with providing direction, guidance, support, and coordination to the District's public safety agencies to develop and lead interagency public safety initiatives to improve the quality of life in the District's neighborhoods. Mayor Bowser has set clear priorities: we **must** reduce crime, gun, and juvenile violence and every agency in the PSJ cluster has a role in advancing these priorities.

Enhancing the safety of our residents in all eight wards is one of the most pressing responsibilities we have as a government. Under my leadership, my office will outline a clear vision and implement a framework to reduce overall crime, provide a host of information, interventions and whole of government strategies to inform how we communicate about public safety to various stakeholders, including the public, press, and Council, and clearly communicate the role of the PSJ agencies in the public safety and justice ecosystem.

The twelve agencies of the Public Safety and Justice cluster include: Department of Corrections, Department of Forensic Sciences, Department of Youth Rehabilitation Services, Fire and Emergency Management Services, Homeland Security and Emergency Management Agency, Mayor's Office on Returning Citizens Affairs, Metropolitan Police Department, Office of the Chief Medical Examiner, Office of Human Rights, Office of Unified Communications, Office of Victims Services and Justice Grants, and Safer Stronger DC Office of Neighborhood Safety and Engagement.

The missions of these agencies are dynamic, complex, yet interconnected. Each plays a critical role in the overall health and functioning of our public safety and justice ecosystem. The cluster's interconnectedness is centered around prevention, intervention/enforcement, accountability, and rehabilitation.

Prevention includes those non-law enforcement programs, services and strategies aimed at decreasing the incidence of individuals committing violent crime, and in reducing the community

conditions that lead to high rates of violent crime in communities in our city. It encompasses our work on providing coordinated delivery of wraparound services and connecting our residents and their communities to care. This category includes but is not limited to the work of DYRS Credible Messengers, ONSE Violence Interrupters, FEMS' Hands on Heart CPR Program, and OVSJG managing grants for victims ranging from domestic violence to sexual assault.

Intervention and enforcement are primarily law enforcement strategies led by MPD. MPD currently has the lowest force strength that it has had since before 1999. Mayor Bowser has long maintained that MPD needs 4,000 officers. With increases in crimes involving guns and the types of criminal activity present in our city, we need a force that is strong and agile, with adequate staffing resources.

Prevention programs intend to strengthen, empower, and engage people to keep them safe and healthy BEFORE they engage in risky behavior. These efforts include approaches aimed at reducing factors associated with at-risk, problematic behaviors, and strengthening protective factors. They can be directed toward youth and young adults generally, or more specifically directed towards at-risk populations within the community. Intervention programs, on the other hand, target individuals ALREADY engaged in at-risk behavior, including gang or antisocial group membership.

Accountability includes the criminal justice system. Holding people appropriately accountable for their behavior is critical to future deterrence. Currently, the District's criminal justice system is functioning at a diminished capacity. The DC Superior Court is down eight judges. While case processing is improving, it is still slower than pre-pandemic and the courts must contend with the backlog. Our role in accountability is ensuring the strength of systems that support the timely, fair, and equitable processes and outcomes for victims and perpetrators. An accountability example includes rebuilding the Department of Forensic Sciences and its ability to process evidence.

Rehabilitation includes those strategies aimed at helping restore the individual that has committed harm, and the community that has been harmed, so that they no longer find themselves in the perpetual loop of criminal activity. This category includes providing reentry services to returning citizens. We are committed to supporting returning citizens through programs like MORCA's partnership with Department of For-Hire Vehicles in the Promise Rides initiative which offers clients up to five free cab rides a week to reentry-related appointments.

Our ecosystem has many pain and pressure points. Gun violence has a devastating impact for the victims and their families, but also more broadly by eroding our sense of public safety. Reducing gun violence is one of the Bowser Administration's highest priorities. The District has invested significant resources into a multipronged public safety approach that invests in law enforcement, prevention efforts, youth programming, rehabilitation, and re-entry.

Every day, critical and noble work happens throughout the PSJ agencies resulting in an essential fact: overall crime continued to decrease during Fiscal Year 2022 as it did during previous years of the Bowser Administration. However, what has increased over time is gun-involved crimes and homicides and we know that these increases are fueling anxiety and fear in our residents. There is nothing more foundational to human flourishing than the need to be safe and the need to feel safe.

With that in mind, during the past fiscal year and this fiscal year to date, PSJ coordinated interagency, cross-cluster initiatives which have demonstrated outcomes of reducing crime and increasing presence in our neighborhoods.

The Multiagency Nightlife Task Force brings a whole of government approach to address identified violent crime, quality of life, nuisance activities, and regulatory concerns that were occurring in three identified nightlife areas: U Street NW, H Street NE, and the Connecticut Avenue NW corridors. This team is focused on preventing violent crime, preventing operation of, and seizing illegal ATVs operated on public space, ensuring businesses operate in compliance with regulatory statutes, addressing harmful traffic conditions, and reducing general disorder and criminal activity in these corridors. This taskforce has operated since June 2022 and contributed to a significant decrease in crime in each corridor. Between June and December 2022, there was a 28 percent decrease in total crime in the U Street Corridor; a 20 percent decrease in total crime in the H Street Corridor and a 616 percent decrease in total crime in the Connecticut Avenue corridor.

The Multiagency Public Safety Task Force supports law enforcement efforts in some of our most at-risk communities. In Fiscal Year 22, this Task Force supported the work of the Homicide Reduction Partnership Initiative – known as HRP - focusing on reducing violent crime within four Police Service Areas (PSAs) throughout the entire 2022 calendar year. These areas include PSAs 603, 604, 706 and 708, which accounted for 21 percent of all murders city-wide in 2021. The objective of the HRP is to use a whole of government approach to reduce violent crime, have a positive impact on the community's perception of safety and security, and increase trust among residents in the police and DC government. The work of the Task Force contributed to a reduction in violent crime by 18 percent in 6D and 8 percent in 7D between 2021 and 2022.

This effort was so notable that a DC government employee, a native of Ward 8, shared with me he brought a family member to see the partnership at work because he had not seen that level of in-community coordination between District agencies.

Additionally, PSJ partners with the Deputy Mayor for Education as operational lead for Safe Passage, a program that coordinates government and school resources, to target specific areas of the city to improve student safety as they travel to and from school. Safe Passage workers are trusted adults assigned to priority areas who build relationships with school staff, students, families, and community members.

PSJ is leading the coordinating of public safety Go Teams, which are multi-agency teams consisting of more than 100 credible contacts, including violence interrupters from ONSE and CURE, credible messengers from DYRS, and DPR roving leaders, working together to conduct outreach in community hotspots known for large gatherings and fireworks to promote safety. Safety Go Teams deployed three times in 2022: Fourth of July, Labor Day Weekend, and Halloween. During the time in which the teams were deployed during Fourth of July, there were zero shootings in the 28 communities in which we had teams. Despite multiple shootings in other locations, only one shooting occurred in a Go Team neighborhood, but happened after teams had deactivated (teams deactivated around 2AM, shooting occurred after 3AM).

Additionally, our Resource Pop-Ups meet the needs of vulnerable residents including at-risk youth and seniors. These pop-ups provide communities in the District with the tools necessary to increase safety in their respective communities and build trust among residents, DC government, and community organizations. We are bringing agencies and community organizations from across the District to provide information about programs offered; providing residents with an opportunity to meet and speak with agency and organization representatives; and encouraging residents to interact with and meet their neighbors.

In summer 2022, PSJ launched 202forPeace, a city-wide gun violence campaign. It is designed to raise awareness about services and programs available to DC residents vulnerable to violent activity and seeks to increase community buy in through messaging and activities targeted at engaging youth.

Because of this work and more, we are making progress towards our ambitious but necessary public safety goals. As the Mayor said throughout Fiscal Year 2022, we are throwing everything at crime. We are investing and supporting our District agencies and their employees responsible for the coordinated effort to address crime in our city, and assuring our residents that we will continue to use every tool to increase public safety and to help our residents feel safe.

While there have been meaningful reductions in crime in 2022, there are still areas of great challenge. We have far too many people carrying and using illegal guns. Too many people are being shot. Bottomline, we have too many people acting without accountability for the terror they're inflicting on our communities. We are especially concerned about gun violence involving our juveniles. There were 105 juveniles shot in 2022, compared to 58 juveniles shot in 2021. Tragically, 16 juveniles were killed in 2022.

Given the unique nature of youth crime, PSJ will work across clusters to address the conditions leading to juvenile violence. As stewards of public trust, it is critical that we are always evaluating the efficacy of our efforts and must be willing to scale back, assess, and scale up those programs and initiatives that are achieving the outcomes we wish to see. PSJ will pivot and redirect when necessary. We must be excellent at our primary, foundational agency functions.

We have robust evidence-based, public health and traditional public safety resources, tools, and interventions aimed at reducing crime. When coordinated, we can prevent violence. In Fiscal Year 2023, PSJ will continue to prioritize coordination, collaboration, and transparency. We will be accountable to meeting our residents' reasonable expectations of excellence in meeting and delivery of our agency missions. And we will continue to work tirelessly to ensure that residents in all eight Wards, and visitors, are safe and feel safe.

Thank you for your time and for this opportunity to testify about DMPSJ's performance. I welcome any questions you may have.