

GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
Office of the Deputy Mayor for Public Safety and Justice



FY24 Budget Oversight Hearing on

The Office of the Deputy Mayor for Public Safety and Justice

Testimony of

Lindsey Appiah

Acting Deputy Mayor for Public Safety and Justice

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

Virtual Hearing

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9:30 AM

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, and I am testifying today on Mayor Muriel Bowser's proposed Fiscal Year 2024 budget.

The investments made in DC's Recovery Plan have translated to more jobs, lower unemployment, more tourism, and the opportunity to experience the very best of what DC has to offer. This FY 2024 Fair Shot Budget acknowledges the economic realities we face by prioritizing the most critical investments needed to make our city a place people want to call home, do business, and visit.

DMPSJ provides direction, guidance, support, and coordination to the District's public safety agencies to develop and leads interagency public safety initiatives to improve the quality of life in the District's neighborhoods.

Mayor Bowser has set clear priorities for public safety: we must reduce crime, gun, and juvenile violence. As I shared with the Committee during the DMPSJ performance hearing in February, 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 and with the Mayor's proposed FY 2024 budget, my office will continue to work to outline a clear strategic vision and implement a framework that supports crime reduction and the enhancement of the safety of our residents and visitors that includes cross-cluster interventions and whole of government strategies.

The Mayor's proposed FY 2024 budget for DMPSJ is approximately \$11,248,000 and includes 14 FTEs. The increase in our budget is from the transfer of Safe Passage from The Office of the Deputy Mayor for Education (DME) to DMPSJ. While DMPSJ has provided operational support for Safe Passage/Safe Blocks since its inception, beginning in FY24, my team will coordinate and manage the program, including the evaluation of its effectiveness and measure outcomes. The budget transfer includes approximately \$3.8 million dollars in reoccurring funds, and a one-time ARPA enhancement of approximately \$5.2 million dollars, totaling a little over \$9 million dollars. We are currently working with DME and The Office of Victim Services and Justice Grants on a transition plan for the program to ensure no service disruptions for the 2024 school year. This

move is demonstrative of the Executive's commitment to ensuring a cohesive, coordinated continuum of prevention services and supports under the umbrella of PSJ.

During the past year and half, PSJ has repeatedly demonstrated its ability to lead successful public safety efforts such as the "Go Teams", Community Resource Pop-Ups, and our two multiagency taskforces. Our taskforces bring a collaborative government approach to address violent crime and other concerns occurring in three key corridors and nightlife areas. During the past fiscal year and this fiscal year to date, our coordinated interagency, cross-cluster initiatives have demonstrated outcomes of reducing crime and increasing presence in our neighborhoods. We look forward to updating the Committee and Council on the Safe Passage transition plan in the upcoming months.

To provide a balanced budget in this current economic climate required agencies to make tough decisions on the realities of hiring vacancies with the current workforce shortage. You will notice in our FY24 budget, my team has a decrease in one FTE. If I was going to ask my agencies to take a critical eye and make tough decisions about their vacancies, I needed to do the same. With a new Chief of Staff and Senior Policy Advisor, DMSPJ plans to hire our remaining vacancies in the coming months; we recognize our office has a big task ahead and are as committed to staffing our office as we are helping our agencies to do the same.

All 12 of the PSJ agencies are part of the public safety and justice ecosystem and have a role in advancing the Mayor's priorities. To do so requires intentional efforts by my agencies to refocus on getting back to their basics. I am asking the PSJ agencies to be *engaged, efficient, and effective* at their core functions because our residents and visitors rightfully expect us to be excellent in these areas.

One of the key priorities for our agencies both now and into Fiscal Year 2024 is ensuring adequate staffing for the vital work they must perform. The work of the PSJ cluster is 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year. PSJ agencies respond when residents are at their most vulnerable and we recognize that it is critical that our response is timely, effective, and high quality. To do this, it takes well-trained, well-equipped, fully staffed agencies. But the pandemic has taken its toll, both on current staff, and on the pool of potential applicants. Given the critical nature of the

work done by our PSJ agencies, the Executive will not lower our standards to fill positions; therefore, we must be creative in the recruitment of new employees in hard to fill positions to our ranks. Additionally, we must preserve investments that help improve the well-being of current staff, to ensure we do not contribute to attrition, until our hiring can catch up. The Executive is supporting agencies with a budget that allows for creative recruiting to ensure agencies have sufficient and qualified staff to deliver their core functions.

While this budget has forced us to evaluate the efficiency and effectiveness of all parts of our government operations, and at times to reallocate funds, doing so has allowed Mayor Bowser to make new investments in the public safety and justice cluster that strengthen services focusing on crime reduction and prosperity for residents through life changing education and workforce opportunities while also refocusing our agencies on getting back to basics by improving core government services and the customer experience.

Mayor Bowser has said it many times, we need a fully staffed police department. The right number to allow for a well-trained, flexible force is 4,000 sworn officers and it's going to take time to rebuild the force. The Metropolitan Police Department (MPD) is understaffed, causing them to be overly reliant on overtime to meet the wide range of tasks and responsibilities they are presented with in our city. We are committed to ensuring that MPD maintains strong hiring practices that result in the best officer candidates. More officers help with faster police response to priority calls; ensure appropriately staffing patrol and investigative functions, as well as specialized units; provide surge capacity to deal with emergencies in the District; and ensure comprehensive annual training is provided to officers without reducing officers on the street.

The FY24 budget directs investments in recruitment and conversion bonuses for new MPD hires of \$5.4 million, and \$1.2 million for expanded educational incentives. Last week Mayor Bowser announced new hire bonuses for MPD are increasing from \$20,000 to \$25,000.

MPD's budget also directs \$2.1 million to support 18 FTEs to support civilianization efforts, reducing the need for sworn officers to cover civilian roles and duties. This creates an opportunity

to return sworn officers into patrol rotation to support crime reduction efforts in our neighborhoods.

The District of Columbia Fire and EMS Department (FEMS) will launch DC's first paramedic school, with Mayor Bowser funding \$1.23 million and two FTEs for the initiative. FEMS will accept its first students in the summer of 2024. This investment will double paramedics onboarding each year, from 35 to 70 and reinforces Mayor Bowser's priority to create pathways to the middle class.

The FY24 budget also commits \$29 million to replace Fire and EMS emergency response vehicles, including ambulances and ladder trucks, as well as \$1.2 million to support the maintenance of these critical apparatus.

The FY24 budget allocates \$7.1 million to the Office of Unified Communications (OUC) to support the replacement of portable radios for MPD and FEMS as well as other communications updates, including the construction of a new 4-D tower and the renovation of the Public Safety Communications Center.

There is also \$2.5 million in OUC's operating budget for the ongoing support of Next Generation 911. This funding will support enhanced call routing and upgrades to thwart attacks on our telephone systems. The proposed budget also includes a \$400,000 enhancement to upgrade OUC's 911 and 311 hardware.

The Mayor's FY24 budget also includes \$277 million for building a new annex to the Correctional Treatment Facility. This annex will be a modernized facility that better supports successful rehabilitation and re-entry. Funds have been advanced in FY24 and FY25 to allow us to continue our planning and design work. There is also a \$4 million enhancement to support high-quality education services for Department of Corrections inmates with special education needs.

Lastly, I'd like to share my support for the following proposed Budget Support Act provisions

which streamline services and ensure we are being efficient and effective. Over the next few weeks, I look forward to working collaboratively on these critical public safety initiatives.

Streamlining the Functioning of the Department of Forensic Sciences: We recognize the critical importance of DFS to the functioning and health of our public safety and justice ecosystem. To that end, we are proposing several measures aimed at allowing DFS to focus on its core functions of forensics. First, we propose moving two units: Crime Scene Services to MPD and the Public Health Laboratory to DC Health. Currently both DFS and MPD perform evidence collection, which is not a forensic activity. Returning the Crime Scene Unit to MPD benefits DFS's ability to focus on re-accreditation and allows MPD to remove sworn officers from evidence collection, re-directing them back into the critical role of policing while DFS will still be responsible for evidence processing, testing, and analysis.

The Executive was supportive of portions of the *Restoring Trust and Credibility to Forensic Sciences Amendment Act of 2022* that were consistent with the recommendations of the SNA International report issued in December 2021. However, the Executive does not support the proposal to make DFS independent of the Executive branch, consistent with concerns raised by the DC Auditor and various other stakeholders. We believe moving the reporting structure from the Executive to Board oversight will cause delays in budget and procurement - potentially delaying services to residents and agencies who utilize the lab's services. Additionally, keeping DFS under the Executive umbrella allows the agency to receive a timely and responsive budget, whose mission and needs can be supported easily by other agencies, like the DC Department of Human Resources, Department of General Services, and The Office of Contracting and Procurement.

Finally, we believe the stakeholder council should remain chaired by DMPSJ as this position is responsible for the coordination of agencies and relationships between all public safety stakeholders - including local and federal partners. This is far beyond the scope of OCME's authority, and we do not believe it appropriate for the agency to assume this difficult role.

Sunsetting the Criminal Code Reform Commission: The Criminal Code Reform Commission submitted its recommendations on a Revised Criminal Code on March 31, 2021 and the Revised Criminal Code Act of 2021 on October 1, 2021. It is now up to the Council and the Executive to craft policy. As such, the work of the Commission is complete, and sunset is appropriate.

Reversing the Drawdown of the MPD School Safety Division: The proposed subtitle would reverse the drawdown of MPD's School Safety Division. The Executive strongly believes school resource officers (SROs) help keep students safe, and without them, school administrators would have no timely recourse if a situation escalated quickly, or a weapon was used in a fight. We have heard from school leaders and students across the city that they feel safest when SROs are present and available to their school communities. We look forward to working with you on this provision and the legislation proposed by you, Councilmember White, Councilmember Gray, and Chairman Mendelson, B25-0153, the Safe Schools and Students Amendment Act of 2023.

Transfer of the Concealed Pistol License Appeal Process to OAH: As part of the Budget Support Act, the Mayor proposed transferring oversight and operation of the Controlled Pistol License Review Board to the Office of Administrative Hearings (OAH), which currently hears appeals of concealed pistol registration denials. We believe such a move is in the interest of efficiency and legal consistency.

In Fiscal Year 2024, DMPSJ 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. My team and the entire workforce of the PSJ cluster agencies will continue to work tirelessly to ensure that residents in all eight Wards, and visitors, are safe and feel safe.

Thank you for the time, and I will answer any questions you may have.