

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



Fiscal Year 2020 Budget Oversight Hearing on
The Office of the Deputy Mayor for Public Safety and Justice

Testimony of
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Before the
Committee on the Judiciary and Public Safety
Charles Allen, Chairperson
Council of the District of Columbia

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1350 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW



Good morning, Chairperson Allen, members, and staff of the Committee on the Judiciary and Public Safety. I am Kevin Donahue, the Deputy City Administrator and Deputy Mayor for Public Safety and Justice.

Last week, Mayor Bowser presented “A Fair Shot,” the Fiscal Year 2020 Budget and Financial Plan, the District’s 24th consecutive balanced budget. This budget does more to make Washington, D.C. a place where people of all backgrounds and in all stages of life are able to live and thrive by making key investments in public safety, infrastructure, education, affordable housing, health and human services, economic opportunity, and seniors. These investments reflect the key priorities identified by District residents at Budget Engagement Forums and telephone town halls held during the budget formulation process. I will begin by briefly discussing my Office’s FY20 budget and then highlighting several mayoral initiatives that will have a significant impact on public safety in the District.

My Office is responsible for overseeing and coordinating the work of the District’s public safety agencies. This work requires extensive coordination to manage the flow of information between my cluster’s agencies, other District agencies, federal and regional partners, and a wide range of outside experts, advocates, and affected community members. This past January, Mayor Bowser added two new agencies to the Public Safety and Justice cluster: the Department of Youth Rehabilitation Services (DYRS) and the Office of Human Rights (OHR). I am excited to work closely with both these agencies, as their work often overlaps with the other public safety agencies.

My Office’s proposed FY20 budget is \$1,570,602, made up entirely of Local funds, and an authorized FTE count of 10. The proposed budget for my office represents a 1.6 percent reduction from FY2019, with no change in staffing level, a minimal increase in staffing costs, and a \$65,000 reduction in Non-Personal Services (NPS).

The vast majority of my Office’s budget goes toward the salaries of the small team that makes up the Office of the Deputy Mayor for Public Safety. Each of my Office’s analysts is responsible for developing and maintaining a detailed understanding of the public safety agencies’ overall missions, as well as their day-to-day operations. This allows analysts to troubleshoot and advise agencies as they navigate the daily challenges with defined budgets and a growing population. Their responsibilities, backgrounds, and skills reflect the diversity of demands placed on my office. They include a chief of staff, an executive assistant, several analysts, a legislative specialist, a community outreach specialist, a lawyer who oversees the Concealed Pistol License Review Board, and a research fellow.

The NPS funds in my Office budget have historically gone toward research and planning studies for cross-agency public safety issues. This fiscal year, we funded the police-community relations survey conducted by the Criminal Justice Coordinating Council and a study of re-establishing a locally-controlled Parole Board. In FY20, I plan to continue this practice of funding independent research with my NPS budget. This may include follow-up work from the study being conducted by Center for Court Excellence on envisioning a new correctional facility, conducting an outside evaluation of the Pathways Program and Community Crime Prevention Teams, and an update to the 2014 study on firefighting and emergency medical response apparatus needs for a growing city.

I will now discuss some of the FY20 budget goals within my cluster, so you can better understand our approach to the FY20 budget formulation.

Continuing to reform the District's EMS system. There are two chronic issues the Fire and Emergency Medical Services Department (FEMS) faces when delivering emergency medical services in the District. First, our ambulances and fire trucks operate nonstop, 24/7, in all kinds of weather, and on all types of road – and water – surfaces. This puts significant wear and tear on those vehicles and requires constant maintenance and repairs. Second, FEMS responds to a large number of patients who are not experiencing any actual medical emergency, but who are using ambulances as their personal transportation to emergency rooms to access primary care physicians. This has a significant impact on the availability of ambulances to respond to critical medical emergencies.

For the past four years, Mayor Bowser and the Council have invested considerable resources to help address these issues and improve our EMS delivery system. In Mayor Bowser's first term, we began using third-party ambulances to transport low acuity patients; we launched the innovative Nurse Triage Line to better meet the health needs of 911 callers seeking medical care; we revised the criteria-based dispatching system between FEMS and the 911 Call Center; and we repositioned FEMS resources to be closer to areas with high numbers of 911 calls for medical emergencies. The FY20 budget continues those critical investments to meet our growing city's needs by funding four new Basic Life Support ambulances and hiring 45 new firefighter/paramedics or firefighters/EMTs.

In the Mayor's proposed capital budget, she allocates \$21.9M in FY20 – and \$65 million over the five-year capital plan – for the purchase of new FEMS vehicles, \$10.5 million for the renovation of two fire stations (Engine Company 23 in Foggy Bottom and Engine Company 26 in Brookland), and \$43.5 million for the relocation of the fleet maintenance facility from Half Street SW to a larger space. Additionally, the Mayor's FY20 budget continues to invest in the innovative Nurse Triage Line and allows it to operate as a 24/7 service.

Rightsizing agency overtime costs. Overtime spending has been a challenge at several public safety cluster agencies, particularly the Department of Corrections (DOC), the Metropolitan Police Department (MPD), and FEMS. Each agency has different overtime cost drivers, but all are exacerbated by the fact that they provide 24/7 services. A key issue is employee leave. In most agencies, an employee out on leave does not have a significant impact on the agency's staffing needs for the day. But for these three agencies, every employee out on leave must be filled with another employee, usually on overtime. For example, if I am out sick for a day, my office cubicle remains empty. But if I worked on a firetruck, in a police district, or as a corrections officer, my absence would require someone else to fulfill my duties for that day – and that person would very likely be earning overtime. While we have focused on internal agency operations improvements that can reduce overtime spending while meeting daily staffing needs, the FY20 budget recognizes OCFO's requirement that we more robustly budget for expected overtime spending. The FY20 budgets for DOC, MPD, and FEMS include increases in their overtime spending. Even with these increases, I consider the funding level to be optimistic and strongly caution Council against any reductions.

Expanding violence intervention and prevention. Over the past four years, the District has experienced substantial reductions in violent crime, with more than 2,200 fewer violent crimes in 2018 than in 2015. In addition to drops in violent crime, between 2014 and 2018, the city also experienced more than a 50 percent reduction in burglaries. These reductions over a four-year period are as large as any the city has experienced in its recent history, dating back to at least the mid-1990s.

Yet, even with these reductions, we have had a tragic increase in homicides. Over the past several years, the number of people shot in the District has remained fairly constant at around 550 per year. But last year, we saw an increase in the lethality of those shootings. As I mentioned in greater length in my performance testimony last month and at the Mayor-Council breakfast in January, our response has been – and must remain – multi-faceted, multi-agency, and evidence-based. That is because the roots of violence are broad, connect deeply to challenges that fall well outside the public safety cluster, and can be traced back to history, poverty, and inequality. We cannot look at just one or two programs to end violence; we need to be effective at many approaches.

Next, I want to highlight three of the many investments in the Mayor’s budget that reflect this multi-faceted approach.

First, Mayor Bowser is investing heavily in the critical work being done by the Office of Neighborhood Safety and Engagement (ONSE). Her budget supports a 61 percent increase in the ONSE budget, which translates into a more than \$3 million increase. The ONSE Pathways Program is an extraordinary initiative focusing on the individuals most at risk of being directly affected by violence. Director Del McFadden and his team are having a demonstrable impact on these young men, and we continue to do all we can to support them. In this budget, we are increasing the stipend paid to Pathways Program participants from \$10 an hour to \$15. This is being done based on feedback from Pathways graduates. We have also included a Budget Support Act provision to clarify ONSE’s ability to purchase food, snacks, and non-alcoholic beverages; this addresses a concern raised by the Office of the Chief Financial Officer.

The Mayor’s FY20 budget continues to invest in ONSE’s violence intervention work with \$2.5 million to fund community-based nonprofit organizations – a \$700,000 increase from FY19. ONSE has hired Collaborative Solutions for Communities, Training Grounds, and Far Southeast Families Strengthening Collaborative to work in about 20 neighborhoods in Wards 1, 4, 5, 6, 7, and 8. In her FY20 budget, Mayor Bowser provides funding to deepen and expand those efforts. The increase in funding will allow these organizations to expand to additional neighborhoods based on data-driven analysis and hire violence interrupters as full-time employees.

The FY20 budget also transfers the entire Roving Leaders program to ONSE from the Department of Parks and Recreation. This transfer involves 27 Roving Leaders and their budget of \$1.966 million. Our goal is to have the ONSE Roving Leaders team take advantage of the synergy being developed at ONSE with violence interruption expertise. In last year’s budget, 10 Roving Leader vacancies were transferred to ONSE. They have hired three of their Pathways Program graduates, and the remaining positions are expected to be filled by June.

A second investment in violent reduction is \$1.5 million to launch three community-based trauma-informed care centers in Wards 7 and 8. District neighborhoods impacted by violence need more resources to heal from trauma both individually and collectively as a community. The FY20 budget provides funding to the Office of Victim Services and Justice Grants to establish community-based Trauma and Community Outreach Services to fund and empower nonprofit organizations with history and credibility in their respective neighborhoods. Each location will provide trauma-informed counseling, culturally competent mentorship, and supportive peer-led workshops by clinicians who dedicate themselves to a single neighborhood, with its unique individuals, strengths, conflicts, and dynamics. These centers will also recruit, train, and support neighborhood community leaders to respond to traumatic events in the community and connect residents to services.

Our third investment is in our police force. As the District continues to increase in population and, as we have seen over the past two years, increase the number of First Amendment events, special events, and national security events that we host, we must ensure MPD has the staffing resources they need. The change in MPD's budget is not large, a mere 0.5 percent increase. However, it includes several investments that allow MPD's new hires to be drawn from DC residents, such as the successful Police Cadet Program. Under this program, District high school graduates ages 17 to 24 work part-time at MPD while attending the University of the District of Columbia. Once cadets earn 60 college credits, they can enter the Police Academy as a recruit. In the past four years, Mayor Bowser and the Council have increased the size of the program from 20 cadets to 100. This has had positive results with hiring, as more than 30 cadets have gained admission to the Police Academy. Additionally, because we very often hear from our residents that they want to see more officers in their neighborhoods and not just in their vehicles, Mayor Bowser is committed to having the new growth in MPD officers be assigned to patrols on foot, bike, and Segways. This will allow officers to better engage with residents, hear their concerns, and work together to address problems within the community.

In closing, Mayor Bowser's FY20 budget will allow my Office to continue to play a critical role in supporting residents' efforts to create a safer, stronger DC. I am proud to work with an incredibly talented group of professionals who lead the public safety cluster agencies. We have a number of challenges ahead of us to ensure the safety and well-being of all our residents across all eight wards. But I firmly believe the work we are doing is making a real difference in improving our residents' lives.

Chairperson Allen, thank you for the opportunity to discuss my Office's FY20 budget. I am available to answer any questions you may have.