

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



FY22 Budget Oversight Hearing on  
The Office of the Deputy Mayor for Public Safety and Justice

Testimony of  
Chris Geldart  
Acting Deputy Mayor for Public Safety and Justice

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

June 3, 2021  
9:30 AM

Good morning, Chairperson Allen, members, and staff of the Committee on the Judiciary and Public Safety. I am Chris Geldart, Acting Deputy Mayor for Public Safety and Justice, and I am testifying today on Mayor Muriel Bowser's proposed Fiscal Year 2022 budget.

Over the past year, we have been facing two concurrent epidemics in the District of Columbia: COVID-19 and gun violence. While COVID-19 is now trending in the right direction both in the city and across the country, we are seeing a significant and sustained nationwide increase in homicides and gun violence. In 2020, we lost 198 people to homicides, with 86% of them killed with a firearm. We also had 922 gunshot victims. These are numbers that the District has not seen in more than a decade. So far this year, we have lost 79 people to homicides – a 23% increase from YTD 2020. Reducing gun violence is a critical priority and Mayor Bowser's proposed budget provides significant resources for a comprehensive, government-wide approach to public safety.

### ***FY 2022 Budget for the Office of the Deputy Mayor for Public Safety and Justice***

I will begin with my office's proposed FY 2022 budget and then focus the remainder of my testimony on investments within and across the public safety cluster.

My office's proposed FY 2022 budget is \$2,399,136 and 11 FTEs. The proposed budget is a 42% increase and is primarily due to four investments: \$400,000 to support Building Blocks DC's public information campaign; \$225,000 to provide stipends for the members of the Concealed Pistol Licensing Review Board (CPLRB) and fund a paralegal FTE; \$100,000 to fund an outside assessment of staffing needs at the Department of Corrections; and \$100,000 to fund planning needs for the Parole Board.

The Building Blocks DC investment will support a public information campaign around this comprehensive violence reduction initiative, the services it can offer residents, and how to get involved in supporting grassroots community-led efforts. Our increased investment in the CPLRB is reflective of its significant increased caseload and the essential role it plays in ensuring the District complies with constitutional requirements of legal firearms ownership. The CPLRB has seen its caseload jump exponentially from 13 cases in FY 2018, to 145 cases in FY20, to 150 cases as of June 1, 2021. Our funding of a correctional staffing assessment reflects our need to better understand the cost drivers at the DC Jail particularly with a significantly reduced inmate population. Finally, as last month's Committee hearing made clear, there is much work to do in determining the future of parole – but also substantial disagreements on what that looks like. Our investment will help the city plan those next steps for this important function of our criminal justice system.

I will now turn to critical public safety investments both in the public safety cluster and in other clusters.

### ***Historic Investments in Treating Gun Violence as a Public Health Crisis***

The Mayor's FY 2022 budget makes a significant \$45.5 million investment in citywide violence prevention programs, through investments in violence intervention, person- and place-based

services, and employment opportunities for residents in the communities most impacted by gun violence.

### *Violence Intervention*

Under Mayor Bowser’s proposed budget, we will be investing \$8.2 million per year over the next 3 years to add an additional 52 Community Outreach Staff to reduce gun violence, including Violence Interrupters, Community Navigators, and Case Managers at the Office of Neighborhood Safety and Engagement and six Credible Messengers at the Department of Youth Rehabilitation Services. We propose to double the ONSE Pathways Program by adding a new location to serve an additional four cohorts of 25 individuals – a 100% increase in the number of at-risk individuals served. The ONSE team has started looking for potential locations in Wards 4 and 5 that would meet their security and accessibility needs.

### *Returning Citizens*

As part of the Mayor’s proposed budget, we are providing \$10.1 million per year in grants through the Office of Victim Services and Justice Grants, in partnership with the Department of Insurance, Securities, and Banking, for flexible funding for reentry services providers to assist returning citizens based on individual needs assessments. The returning citizens will receive support for housing deposits, transportation needs, connectivity, and other temporary or immediate expenses to assist with reintegration, avoid homelessness, and reduce recidivism. We are also providing \$658,000 to provide one-on-one financial coaching for 1,000 returning citizens over the next three years through existing Financial Empowerment Centers. Additionally, the Office of Returning Citizens will receive \$617,000 to hire five returning citizens as peer navigators to provide advice, support, and mentorship to other returning citizens.

### *Building Blocks: Person-Based Services*

As part of the Building Blocks DC initiative, Mayor Bowser’s proposed budget funds \$4.2 million to supporting victims and survivors of gun violence. This investment will provide:

- Expanded access to trauma-informed mental health services through ONSE and the Office of Victim Services and Justice Grants;
- Enhanced case management, including 20 family support workers and five supervisors to coordinate delivery of services to Building Blocks DC neighborhoods; and
- Developing a more flexible housing assistance program to offer short- or medium-term housing stabilization to assist in violence intervention efforts.

### *Building Blocks: Placed-Based Services*

An additional component of the Building Blocks DC initiative is a \$2 million investment to support communities impacted by violence and trauma. This investment will:

- Provide grants to individuals and non-profit organizations to support violence prevention efforts;

- Provide the Department of Housing and Community Development with \$5 million for the acquisition of vacant or blighted properties within the Building Blocks DC priority areas; and
- Allow the Department of Parks and Recreation to keep a number of their recreation centers open later during the summer months.

### *Expanding Employment Opportunities for DC Residents*

To ensure residents in our focus communities have a fair shot at sustainable, life-changing employment opportunities, Mayor Bowser’s proposed budget invests \$10.5 million in job training and employment opportunities. These investments will provide:

- 150 Project Empowerment seats with wrap-around services in mental health and job placement for participants referred by the Building Blocks DC team. These participants will receive extended subsidized employment, an increase from six to 12 months, and will be provided follow-up counseling for a year after the program ends;
- 150 positions at the Department of Public Works that we will prioritize for referrals from the Building Blocks DC and ONSE teams; and
- Four positions for Pathways Program graduates to engage residents in Building Blocks DC neighborhoods, connect them with services and activities, and assist in developing and achieving neighborhood goals.

The Mayor’s budget also funds the hiring of an additional 100 District residents to serve as police cadets at the Metropolitan Police Department. This program is open only to District high school graduates and expands the pipeline for them becoming police officers. As a graduate of the cadet program, MPD Chief Contee is a great example of the type of opportunity this program provides to our residents.

Additionally, the Mayor’s budget provides \$650,000 for our current and future ONSE street outreach teams to receive specialized violence intervention training and certification at the University of the District of Columbia, as well as restorative justice training for all members of the Building Blocks DC outreach teams. Because we must make these intervention programs long-term and sustainable, these trainings and certifications will help professionalize the field.

### *Getting the Right Care to 911 Callers*

As we work to reimagine public safety in the District, we’ve looked at how we provide services and responses most likely to improve outcomes. In Mayor Bowser’s proposed FY 2022 budget, we are making investments to better provide the right response to non-critical emergency 911 calls.

### *Responses to Mental Health and Traffic Crashes*

On June 1, the Office of Unified Communications and the Department of Behavioral Health launched a pilot program to allow the dispatch of Community Response Teams to address certain mental health emergency calls. The Mayor’s proposed budget provides \$5.8 million to expand the pilot program by adding 26 DBH staff and 10 agency vehicles, along with four OUC call

takers and five Access Helpline call takers to evaluate 911 callers. OUC Director Subido will be able to speak more about this program at her upcoming hearing.

The Mayor is also funding a \$1.1 million pilot for the District Department of Transportation to be dispatched to 911 calls for minor traffic collisions where there are no injuries or criminal issues (such as a drunk driver) and for the Department of Public Works to respond to priority parking complaints. This program will allow Metropolitan Police Department officers to focus on their core responsibilities instead of responding to minor fender benders and parking violations.

### *Sobering Center*

Mayor Bowser's proposed budget funds a sobering center pilot program between OUC, DBH, and the Fire and Emergency Medical Services Department. A sobering center allows first responders to direct patients who are intoxicated, but not in need of emergency care, away from hospital emergency rooms and towards a more appropriate course of care for their medical needs. The sobering center will be staffed by health care experts who can monitor the patients' needs and lessen the demand load at our local hospitals. FEMS Chief Donnelly will speak in greater detail on this program at his upcoming hearing.

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Chairperson Allen, I want to be mindful of the limited time. I look forward to continuing to work with you and other Councilmembers on improving our residents' safety and outcomes. I can take your questions.