

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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Deputy City Administrator
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

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John A. Wilson Building
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Good morning Chairperson Allen, members, and staff of the Committee on the Judiciary and Public Safety. I am Kevin Donahue, Deputy City Administrator and Deputy Mayor for Public Safety and Justice. I want to begin with a statement of our overall approach in the public safety and justice cluster and then discuss the performance and accomplishments of the Office of the Deputy Mayor for Fiscal Year 2019.

Let me start by helping those watching or listening to this hearing understand the role of a Deputy Mayor. As one of five Deputy Mayors, I advise Mayor Muriel Bowser on issues of policy, resource allocation, and strategy for my respective cluster. I also supervise and support the agency directors whose organizations implement programs and run city services. In doing so, the value Deputy Mayors add is often to increase coordination, accountability, and coherence in government. For example, when multiple agencies have overlapping programs, we help coordinate their approach to minimize unnecessary duplication of services. When agencies need to rely on each other to remove barriers or succeed in their respective missions, Deputy Mayors will convene and direct that collaboration. When agencies have competing ideas, we can bring clarity and coherence to an overall strategy. And when an agency is lagging in its performance, our role is to help fix it.

As the Deputy Mayor for Public Safety and Justice, I am responsible for overseeing and coordinating the work of public safety agencies in the District. I have a small team based in the Wilson Building that supports these efforts. The agencies in my cluster include: the Office of Neighborhood Safety and Engagement, the Fire and Emergency Medical Services Department, the Metropolitan Police 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, the Department of Corrections, the Department of Youth Rehabilitation Services, and the Office of Human Rights. My office also interacts and coordinates regularly with independent agencies, federal entities, the court system, and our regional partners.

Fiscal Year 2019 in the Public Safety and Justice Cluster

Each of the 11 agencies in my cluster made significant achievements in FY19. The work of my office is reflected in both their successes and their struggles. I want to focus on three particular successes: (1) the expansion of the Office of Neighborhood Safety and Engagement; (2) the capacity to respond to medical emergencies in a fast-growing city; and (3) the work at the Department of Corrections (DOC) and Department of Youth Rehabilitation Services (DYRS) to help individuals in their custody improve their lives.

Expanding the Office of Neighborhood Safety and Engagement (ONSE):

Over the past three years, under the direction of Director Del McFadden, ONSE went from a legislative concept to an established agency that has doubled in size, partnered with community-based organizations to launch violence prevention efforts, and expanded its flagship initiative, the Pathways Program.

Pathways has grown to serving three 25-person cohorts in FY20, resulting in 75 individuals being provided in-depth programming and services. This is a 50 percent increase from last year. The

Pathways Program transforms the lives of its participants by mentoring each individual and providing him¹ with opportunities he may have not previously been exposed to – such as life skills, addressing trauma, GED completion, connections with workforce development and economic opportunities, and gainful, legal employment. All of this is done with the goal of helping Pathways participants assist their families and realize their potential as productive and contributing adults. I want to acknowledge the strong support we have received from Councilmembers who have repeatedly spoken with Pathways participants, attended their graduation ceremonies, and served as role models for these young men.

Preserving the capacity to respond to medical emergencies in a fast-growing city:

The Fire and Emergency Medical Services Department (FEMS) continues to make progress in its efforts to transform the District's emergency medical response system, which is especially important in light of an operating environment made more difficult by the closure of Providence Hospital. FEMS's focus in FY20 is to continue to improve the quality of its patient care. One of FEMS's primary strategies to improve patient care is getting patients the "Right Care, Right Now." This means responding rapidly to critical patients, diverting non-critical patients to our contracted AMR ambulances, and expanding utilization of the Nurse Triage Line (NTL) for patients who do not need to go to an emergency room. In FY19, FEMS was able to divert an increasing number of patients from hospital emergency rooms through the NTL, both through the Office of Unified Communications (OUC) 911 call takers and FEMS field provider referrals. FEMS will continue to leverage the AMR ambulance partnership to save EMS resources for the District's most critical patients.

Additionally, FEMS has made great strides within its apparatus division to expand the number of units in service, preserve its reserve fleet, and allow for more efficient maintenance of its vehicles. To better handle the increased EMS demand, FEMS added four BLS ambulances each shift, resulting in a total of 43 ambulances deployed per shift. FEMS has engaged in an aggressive vehicle procurement plan for ladder trucks and engines, and we appreciate the Council's support for the Mayor's capital budget proposals that made this possible. To ensure the property maintenance of those fleet investments, the City Administrator has approved the move of the Apparatus Division from its current overcrowded home on Half Street SW to a location near the Fire Academy in Ward 8.

Finally, in 2015 FEMS created an aggressive, citywide CPR training program called "Hands on Hearts." You often can find the training team at events and busy locations throughout the year all across the city. To date, these teams have trained more than 70,000 people in hands-only CPR and, as a result, we are seeing improvements in cardiac arrest survival rates. In fact, I am very proud to say that the District is now at or above the national average for cardiac arrest patient survival rates, while four years ago we lagged badly behind. We also have greatly improved how frequently bystanders will perform CPR on a person who has had a heart attack, thus improving the patient's chances of survival. I know at his hearing later this month, Fire Chief Dean is excited to provide a more thorough discussion of these efforts.

¹ To date, all Pathways Program participants have been men.

Making DOC and DYRS national leaders in progressive criminal justice reform:

The approach to serving justice-involved individuals, especially youth and young adults, has shifted tremendously in the past decade. Both DYRS and DOC have restructured their agencies on the belief that restorative justice, intensive peer mentoring, trauma-informed therapy, and improved access to mental health care can make a critical difference in rehabilitation.

DOC has made great strides in enhancing services for residents who are or were incarcerated. Over the past four years, the agency has partnered with four different universities to offer inmates vocational, non-credit, and for-credit college courses. Recently, more than 100 District residents graduated from several educational programs provided at the DC Jail. In addition, DOC created two young adult units, called the Young Men Emerging program, that utilize an innovative mentor/mentee model to promote safety, healing, and accountability. We are very proud that these programs are finally getting the national attention they so very much deserve.

At DYRS, restorative justice interventions happen at New Beginnings, Youth Services Center, and in the community. Immediately after a wrongful act occurs, both parties meet individually with the restorative justice team before establishing an agreement to take part in a restorative justice circle focused on discussing and addressing the harm caused by the wrongful act. This non-court system approach has shown initial positive results.

In FY19, DYRS launched an innovative collaborative effort with the DC Public Library (DCPL) to embed Credible Messengers at the Shaw Public Library. This initiative was intended to help resolve youth-related conflicts and disruptions without relying on law enforcement or the criminal justice system. The Credible Messengers provide youth with programming and mentorship and, according to DCPL, this has significantly changed the atmosphere and learning climate in the library.

Identifying Persistent Challenges to Public Safety and Some Solutions

I will now focus on two challenges – violence and the strain placed on our EMS system – that greatly impact our residents’ ability to feel safe and our responses to those challenges.

Violence fueled by easy access to illegal guns:

While the District is far safer city than just a few years ago, gun crimes and homicides continue to be our highest priority. As a city, we have experienced contrasting trends in FY19 and for several previous years. When comparing my first year in this job, in 2015, to last year, I look at a city that has had 2,000 fewer violent crimes – and 1,300 fewer burglaries – but slightly more homicides and more shootings. As a nation, we see similar trends in several cities and it is something that all of us need to carefully study. In the District, we are using both law enforcement and non-police strategies to deescalate violence and hold people accountable for harms they cause their communities.

Like cities nationwide, the District is greatly affected by the availability of illegal guns in our communities. Our biggest drivers of violence are illegal firearms in the hands of a relatively small

number of repeat violent offenders. Each year, MPD recovers about 2,000 illegal guns, but we know that is only a small fraction of the total number of illegal firearms in the District. Data from the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF) show that guns originating in Virginia are the main source of illegal firearms used in DC, with Maryland, Georgia, and North Carolina following close behind. With the Virginia legislature about to start its 90-day session, Mayor Bowser yesterday sent them her recommendations on legislative solutions they can enact to deal with regional illegal gun trafficking.²

In addition to curtailing the supply of illegal guns, we invest heavily in preventing the use of those guns. When investigating gun-related violence, we often find petty arguments that have escalated dramatically and with disastrous consequences. In far too many instances, a person with an illegal gun may act without concern for the consequences of their actions. That initial act of violence all too often leads to retaliation and, in some communities, a years-long cycle of retaliatory violence in which the sound of gunfire is a regular occurrence.

MPD's Summer Crime Reduction Initiative continues to be a significant component of our law enforcement efforts to reduce homicides. MPD identified six areas in 2019 to provide focused prevention and strategic enforcement on violent offenders through intelligence, tactical, and patrol enforcement. I am proud to say that as a result of those efforts, paired with our other non-law enforcement initiatives, those areas saw a 44 percent reduction in homicides.

One of our highest priorities for reducing violence is to continue to strengthen police-community relations. Each MPD officer is responsible for promoting positive interactions throughout the District. For example, MPD's Community Outreach Coordinators are located at each police district and serve as liaisons with the community. While their tasks vary by police district, MPD coordinators often arrange community events, speaking engagements, and projects to engage officers and members of the community in valuable collaboration.

Because we know that we cannot simply police our way out of intra-community violence, we have focused extensive resources on non-law enforcement initiatives and programs. I have already spoken in detail about the important work being done by ONSE. We will continue to support a public health approach to violence intervention, the expansion of the Pathways Program, and other violence prevention initiatives. One such effort that does not get the amount of attention that it should is the Hospital-based Violence Intervention Program (HVIP), run by OVSJG, which provides services to individuals, and their families, who have experienced life-threatening violence. While the victims are in the hospital recovering, HVIP partners engage with them and their families to create a support system that can lead to long-term change. In FY19, 68 percent of victims of attempted homicide accepted HVIP services, which, though a decrease from FY18, is still a significant increase from the 48 percent who did so in FY17.

There are many other efforts underway in public safety cluster agencies focusing on violence prevention, treating trauma, and helping residents being affected by violence. Agencies such as OCME and OHR have launched initiatives to address family grief and street harassment,

² "D.C. mayor urges Virginia politicians to pass gun reform to help curb city violence," The Washington Post, https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/public-safety/dc-mayor-urges-virginia-politicians-to-pass-gun-reform-to-help-curb-city-violence/2020/01/09/a95416ce-3268-11ea-a053-dc6d944ba776_story.html.

respectively. DFS has cutting-edge forensic scientists helping solve crimes and identify trends. OUC's 311 system continues to expand and evolve to meet the needs of our residents. And HSEMA is regularly updating its preparedness systems to deal with any threat to our city – something that is particularly relevant given current international events.

Persistent strains on our EMS system:

As I described earlier, the District's rapidly increasing population leads to both a higher call volume and more roadway traffic, making the ambulance trip to the already-overcrowded hospital emergency rooms take even longer. This is especially evident in Wards 7 and 8 which have the highest percentage of serious medical emergencies.

FEMS needs to respond rapidly to critical care patients, divert non-critical care patients to AMR, and increase utilization of the Nurse Triage Line for patients who do not need to go to an emergency room. FEMS is analyzing the impact of a recent pilot program that embedded their paramedics at the 911 call center to function as call takers; we expect this analysis to be completed later this year.

To respond to the needs of our east of the river residents, this past summer FEMS added four BLS ambulances to serve Wards 7 and 8. This, in addition to the aggressive procurement plan of new ladder and engine trucks, will help FEMS not only put more units on the street, but also have the flexibility to bring in units for routine service and potentially extend its fleet's life expectancy.

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Chairperson Allen, in the interest of time, I did not detail the work of all 11 agencies within the public safety cluster, but I am proud of the work each of them does to bring critical resources to our residents.

We appreciate the opportunity to share our accomplishments and our plans for continuous improvement. I welcome your questions at this time.