

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



Performance Oversight Hearing on Fiscal Year 2018-19

The Office of the Deputy Mayor for Public Safety and Justice

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

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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. I want to begin with a statement of our overall approach in the public safety cluster and then discuss the performance and accomplishments of the Office of the Deputy Mayor for Fiscal Year 2018.

My Office is responsible for overseeing and coordinating the work of public safety agencies in the District. To that end, my Office has daily interaction with the agencies under its purview: 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, and the Department of Corrections. At the start of 2019, Mayor Bowser added two agencies to the public safety cluster: the Department of Youth Rehabilitative 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.

Before I continue, I want to offer a few comments about the new agencies added to my cluster. I am very excited about the additions of DYRS and OHR because the mission of these two agencies often overlaps with the work we do in providing support, guidance, and enforcement of District laws. Although I previously had a great working relationship with both Director Lacey and Director Palacio, and, in fact, as Deputy City Administrator, have been Director Palacio's supervisor for four years, I look forward to working more closely with these agencies in the context of safety and justice.

Each year, Chairman Allen, you ask what DMPSJ's top five priorities for the Office are and how we expect to address them in the year ahead. Each year, my answer has consistently focused on a few meaningful goals that rarely change with the passage of time. Over the past year, we have seen an unacceptable increase in homicides, while other types of violent crimes, such as robberies, assaults with a dangerous weapon (ADWs), and sexual assaults, have continued to drop. That issue – reducing deadly violence – is our top priority. In addition, my office will also be focusing on several other critical priorities:

1. Make the District a model city for police-community relations;
2. Transform Emergency Medical Services in the District into a premier system;
3. Improve outcomes for survivors of violence;
4. Ensure the District is prepared for disasters and emergencies; and
5. Strengthen the justice system to be fair, effective, and rehabilitative.

Each year, I try to focus on a few initiatives, almost always implemented at the agency level, that improve public safety by pushing my office and the cluster agencies forward in each area. I will describe some of the related high-impact initiatives that agencies, both within and outside my cluster, have brought to the District.

Reduce deadly violence in the District: The District experienced 160 homicides in 2018, 44 more than in 2017. Although violent crime (homicides, robberies, ADWs, and sexual assaults) decreased

in 2018 from 2017 (313 fewer) – and greatly dropped from 2015 (2,233 fewer violent crimes) – many DC residents don't feel safer due to the homicide spike. In 2018, 500 people were shot in the city, and this number has remained relatively constant for the past several years. Unfortunately, the fatality rate increased in 2018, from 16 percent in 2017 to 23 percent in 2018. We believe this was due to a few factors: more multiple gunshot wounds, more gunshots to the head, more daytime shootings, and more close-range shootings. While the number of shootings has remained relatively constant, we saw an increase in intentional lethality in many of last year's homicides. Shootings largely stemmed from petty arguments, retaliation from ongoing disputes, robberies turned violent, domestic assault, and access to illegal guns. DMPSJ has worked closely with District agencies to be in the community and work with residents to prevent violence through intervention and mediation. This requires a deepened commitment to street intervention work, providing safe spaces around schools, expanding programs that have been proven to work, such as DYRS's Credible Messengers, and focusing on properties that have been shown to be magnets for nuisance behaviors.

Going forward, we are committed to a comprehensive approach that utilizes tools from both the traditional public safety continuum as well as tools that come from a public health approach to violence reduction. This means expanding the force strength of MPD to 4,000 officers over the next several years. But, it also means expanding jobs and job training for those with a criminal history. It means improving how we deploy police to using independent surveys to measure if those deployments create an unintended adverse impact to community trust. In addition, investments at DFS have allowed for the collection of evidence at higher rates, linking crimes with suspects, which results in higher conviction rates. DMPSJ is currently working with the Comprehensive Homicide Elimination Strategy Task Force, and will work with the Violence Fatality Review Committee, to engage community members with valuable skill sets in devising strategies to reduce homicides and enhance support for victims' families.

Make the District a model city for police community relations: As part of the effort to reduce crime, MPD hires and trains officers to be compassionate members of the community. Officers host and participate in community events to build trust and deepen relationships with residents. MPD has made large investments in the police force over the past year: doubling the cadet class size, increasing housing incentives for recruits and veteran officers, and improving the training officers receive both as recruits and over the course of their careers. In addition, DMPSJ commissioned the Criminal Justice Coordinating Council to do a police-community relations survey, which will be released this spring.

Finally, I want to highlight the innovative diversion program launched last year between MPD, the Department of Behavioral Health, and the Department of Human Services. MPD often interacts with individuals facing chronic mental illness and substance use disorders. While most of these encounters do not result in an arrest, some due because a low-level offense was committed. Too often, people end up back on the street, no closer to services or meaningful engagement with society. Through this diversion program, residents who demonstrate chronic behavioral health or substance use disorder issues can be connected to health care, housing assistance, and substance abuse and mental health treatment. As MPD continues to grow, we want them to build a strong foundation of officers who demonstrate enhanced community engagement, smart policing, and the

ability to utilize all the programs and support networks to assist residents who need help in order to make the streets safer.

Transform EMS into a premier system: FEMS continues to remake its emergency medical services into a premier system. FEMS worked with the Office of Unified Communications to launch the Criteria-Based Dispatch system, shortening the time from the 911 call-taker answering the phone to the EMTs or paramedics being dispatched. FEMS and OUC also worked together to expand the Nurse Triage Line (NTL), which moved to 24 hours a day in January 2019. The NTL helps triage 911 calls so that the right type of unit is sent to each emergency call and non-emergency callers are directed to a clinic in their community. FEMS continues its efforts to identify patients whom they transport very frequently and reducing those numbers through referrals to clinics and information about other options.

FEMS continues its community outreach focus by informing the public about what they can do to help people survive cardiac arrest before the paramedics arrive, such as training more than 50,000 individuals in “hands only” CPR and AED familiarization. This is resulting in survival rates for heart attack victims in the District that are higher than the national average.

Since 2009, FEMS has offered an EMS supervisor career pathway that includes the positions of EMS Captain, EMS Battalion Fire Chief, and Assistant Fire Chief of EMS. The position of Deputy Fire Chief of EMS was created in 2015. The current Medical Director, Dr. Robert Holman, has altered the training schedule for currently-employed members, so that they receive quarterly training, rather than training once every two years, keeping their skills up to date. In 2016, EMS supervisors began conducting regular clinical evaluations of the Department’s advanced life support (ALS) providers. In 2018, the Department launched a new Field Training Officer program for new ALS providers, and the Office of the Medical Director began tracking ALS interventions by ALS providers. While these accomplishments may seem overly bureaucratic, they are essential to building the institutional changes needed to sustain the progress we’re seeing.

Improve outcomes for survivors of violence: During FY18, the District made significant inroads in improving outcomes for violence survivors. We’re very proud that 100 percent of sexual assault victims received on-call advocacy at a police station or hospital; this is keeping the District at the forefront of centering victims and their needs. The Office of Victim Services and Justice Grants launched the Physical Evidence Recovery Kit (PERK) tracking system, so victims who reported their assaults to MPD and had a forensic exam can access the status of the PERK throughout the testing process. In addition, 100 percent of victims who called the DC Crime Victim Hotline received information, support, or a referral. OVSJG also awarded new grants to organizations that provide mental health services and provided support to community-based victim service providers who organized committees to work on enhancing mental health services. In FY19, OVSJG awarded an innovative grant to establish a trauma-specific mental health bank, map existing trauma-informed services in the District, and explore the feasibility of conducting a citywide trauma assessment.

In FY18, about 77 percent of victims of attempted homicide accepted hospital-based intervention services, a significant increase from 48 percent in FY17. This was, in part, accomplished through increasing the capacity of these interventions, specifically for male victims of intentional, life-

threatening violence. In addition, 98 family members of homicide victims were served through crisis intervention at the point of decedent identification, and this year the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner is working to provide that service to everyone, on site, as needed. In addition, DMPSJ worked closely with advocates and experts to introduce legislation to greatly enhance the support and protection of sexual assault survivors. We look forward to working with Council to ensure this critical legislation moves forward quickly.

Ensure the District is prepared for disasters and emergencies: HSEMA ensures the District is prepared for disasters and emergencies. In April 2018, their emergency management program was granted full accreditation by the Emergency Management Accreditation Program (EMAP), recognizing that HSEMA programs bring together personnel, resources, and communications from a variety of agencies and organizations in preparation for and in response to any type of disaster. Due to this accreditation, 100 percent of planning processes for actual emergencies/disasters were completed in accordance with EMAP requirements. The District Preparedness System organizational structure was reorganized to maximize efficiency: two new governance bodies (Emergency Support Function Leads and Emergency Preparedness Council Advisory Committee) were stood up, and the DC Emergency Response System was stood down. HSEMA also worked with federal and regional partners to identify District resource gaps, including personnel, equipment, and space, in order to create pre-scripted mission tasks, resource requests, and identify point of dispensing locations, and formal MOUs are currently in process with federal and regional partners to share resources and equipment.

From April 30 to May 11, 2018, the District participated in the FEMA-hosted National Level Exercise, “Atlantic Fury,” which was an opportunity for all levels of government, private industry, non-governmental organizations, communities, and individuals to work through the scenario of a Category 5 hurricane making landfall in the Mid-Atlantic region. DC conducted 13 related drills and exercises to test our planning and preparation for such an event, and HSEMA and DMPSJ led a comprehensive debriefing after the exercise to understand where the District is well-prepared and where we have gaps. HSEMA also established and implemented two exercise series that each conducted quarterly exercises.

Strengthen the justice system to be fair, effective, and rehabilitative: Each year in the District, several thousand individuals are released from the D.C. Jail or return home from the U.S. Bureau of Prisons. A criminal record can keep people from accessing vital benefits, pulling the safety net out from under them when they need it the most. The District has been at the forefront of progressive criminal justice reform for years by instituting no cash bail, ban the box legislation, and the creation of the Mayor’s Office of Returning Citizens Affairs.

While we have made great strides, we recognize that we have to continue to lead the country in this important work. Some of our recent efforts include: awarding \$225,000 in grants to support critical research on elements of the District’s criminal justice system (a \$150,000 grant to study the design of a new D.C. Jail and a \$75,000 grant to study reestablishing local control over the D.C. Parole Board); OVSJG assistance in standing up the Reentry Action Network (RAN) – a coalition of over 20 local nonprofits that strives to ensure all justice-involved individuals in the District have access to high quality reentry services supporting their successful reintegration; expanding the diversion program for unemployed, non-violent offenders using placements in the

Department of Employment Services' workforce development programs; and proposing legislation to create much-needed reforms to record-sealing protocols, thus offering relief to tens of thousands of individuals living with the burden of a criminal record.

Finally, DMPSJ works closely with the Department of Corrections and the Department of General Services to ensure DOC provides inmates with programming focusing on their rehabilitation, educational needs, and behavioral improvements in suitable facilities. To enhance returning citizens' success in reentering their communities, the District has also established the Resources to Empower and Develop You (READY) Center. The READY Center serves as a portal for returning citizens to access important post-release services such as housing, employment, health care, vital documents, and behavioral health aftercare. Partners at the READY Center, include DHS, DBH, DOES, MORCA, and the Department of Motor Vehicles.

Chairman Allen, I'd like to thank you for your leadership and support. We appreciate the opportunity to share our accomplishments and plans for continuous improvement and look forward to continuing to work with the Committee. This concludes my presentation. My staff and I are welcome your questions at this time.