
Government of the District of Columbia



Metropolitan Police Department

Testimony of
Cathy L. Lanier
Chief of Police

***Public Oversight Hearing on
the Performance of the
Metropolitan Police Department***

Committee on Public Safety & the Judiciary
Phil Mendelson, Chair
Council of the District of Columbia
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Council Chamber
John A. Wilson Building
1350 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20004

Good morning, Chairman Mendelson, members of the Committee, and guests. I am pleased to have this opportunity to discuss with you the performance of the Metropolitan Police Department (MPD) in 2010. The full text of my statement is available on the Department's website at www.mpdc.dc.gov.

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In 2010, both the Metropolitan Police Department and the District of Columbia reached many positive milestones that leave us well positioned to face the challenges ahead. Today, the District is safer for residents and visitors, thanks to the hard work and collaboration of community members and the dedicated members of MPD.

Most importantly for a city that has long been marred by gun violence and its tragic, long-lasting impact on the families and communities of both the victim and the offender, MPD continues to reduce violent gun crime by focusing on violent offenders, taking illegal guns off the street, and implementing innovative strategies to reduce gun violence. Needless to say, I am pleased to report that 2010 ended with the fewest number of homicides in more than 45 years. Robberies committed with guns also decreased 20 percent and assaults committed with guns were down 10 percent. Since 2007, the Department has taken more than 10,000 illegal guns off the streets.

Inside the Department, we sometimes joke that it has taken an "everything but the kitchen sink" strategy to drive down homicides and gun crimes. But I think this highlights what our experience has told us – in order to counter cold-blooded criminals committing wanton violence, the entire law enforcement system must be flexible and committed. Four years ago, when I was appointed Chief, I set a goal of not just reducing homicides, but of changing the approach of the Department and criminal justice system to homicides. Four years later, not only has the number of homicides dropped and the closure rate risen, but there has been a sea change in the city's response to homicides. Key stakeholders – from officers in the Department, to prosecutors, judges, and parole officers – now recognize that working together they can prevent the next homicide. When a shooting happens, I can call our partners together so that we can identify the groups and individuals most likely to be involved in any retaliation, and determine how to stop it.

In addition to being used with immediate impact throughout the city, this strategy was a key component of Operation Sixth Sense, or "OSS", a 2010 summer initiative targeting six areas plagued with the violence associated with drugs, specifically crack and phencyclidine (PCP). From May 1st to August 1st, MPD focused the efforts of Patrol, Narcotics, and Vice officers, as well as outside agency partners on interrupting the drug trade and the resulting cycle of violence. The program was multi-faceted, including the extensive use of technology, intelligence and under-cover operations. The most important component was a "call-in" of the most violent offenders associated with these areas to deliver the message that the entire criminal justice system was committed to delivering swift and certain consequences for any violence. The Operation proved effective, with gun-related homicides in the targeted areas reduced by 36 percent and non-fatal shootings by 44 percent when compared to the same time period in 2009. Calls for service for drug complaints also dropped 21 percent across the areas.

In addition to a geographical focus, the program targeted high risk offenders under supervision by multiple criminal justice agencies. Commitments from partners such as the U.S. Attorney's

Office, the Pretrial Services Agency, the Court Services and Offender Supervision Agency, and the Court Supervision Services Division supported enhanced monitoring and handling of high risk offenders. For example, 135 of the high risk offenders, 29 percent of those identified, were arrested during the program. Of these, only four adult arrests were not submitted to court. Twenty-four of these were detained pending further proceedings. Unlike a zero-tolerance strategy, one goal of OSS was to reduce crime without driving up arrests. One key part of this was providing alternatives for juveniles to engage in structured activities. Therefore the Department recruited children living in the OSS target areas and many more known to hang out in the areas to participate in MPD-led summer camps.

Perhaps even more important than these innovative crime-fighting strategies, community members now believe that when they communicate with police – through a variety of new tools, several of them anonymous – the police will take action, and they will be safer. And much of the information the community provides is valuable. In the past four years, community members providing critical information to MPD have received almost \$1.6 million in rewards for tips leading to an arrest and indictment. This is reflected in our homicide closure rate, which continues to climb and to exceed that of other cities. This year's 79 percent homicide closure rate is almost 20 percent higher than the average of comparably sized cities.

Another commitment that I made to the community upon becoming Chief was that we would not let cold homicide cases linger; I promised to dedicate resources to resolving older homicides both to help heal the wounds of the families and communities, and to ensure that no one gets away with murder in the District. In 2010, we closed 32 cold cases, up from 29 in 2009, 18 in 2008, and 12 in 2007. Cold cases are homicides that are more than three years old. Our hard working detectives arrested individuals for homicides committed as far back as 1990, and charged one offender with murders committed in 1994, 1998, 1999, and 2000. In some old cases, we may never see justice served, because the offender is deceased or already in jail. However these cases are still important to pursue so that the victim's family can know what happened and that the police and city have not forgotten their loved one.

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While these numbers are important, it takes more than just lower crime to build strong police-community relations. For years people in the District complained that they could never see the police. Police visibility was a mystery – how could there be so many police, but people in the neighborhoods never saw them? The most important change for the community has been increasing meaningful contacts with police that have helped citizens to feel connected to the department. This meaningful connection is the key to ensuring that communities feel safe even if a police officer is not standing on every corner. Moreover, building relationships between community members and police officers increases the likelihood that an individual will reach out to the police to prevent an impending incident or crisis, or to share information when something does happen. Many of the elements of this strategy now seem commonplace, but four years ago they represented a sea change in Department operations and community relations.

The Department has adopted an aggressive deployment of officers on footbeats, bicycles and Segways. In four years, MPD has gone from just a handful of officers assigned to regular foot patrol, to more than 300 deployed on foot patrol on all three shifts in neighborhoods across the city. Forty Segways are assigned to the police districts, and an additional 20 Segways are

dedicated to patrol around schools. Almost 100 officers patrol on mountain bikes every day. Even with so many officers deployed on foot, bike, or Segways – generally slower modes of transportation, the Department cut the time it takes to respond to emergency calls for the fourth year in a row. Police response time to priority one calls for service decreased 19 percent in 2010, demonstrating faster police response to crime and emergencies throughout the city.

MPD has reinvigorated community email groups to enhance communication with city residents and provide a 24-hour a day virtual police presence. Police districts post crime stats and prevention tips daily. Community members communicate with police leaders in the districts and each other about important information to keep their neighborhoods safe. Questions or concerns posted to these are usually answered immediately, often by top command members. The police email group community grew 14 percent in Fiscal Year 2010, and 38 percent since FY08.

Given that we cannot have a police officer on every corner, patrol resources need to be strategically deployed in order to combat crime. The Department has been in the forefront of predictive policing to plan for resource deployment in advance of crime trends. Predictive policing uses data and analysis to support forward thinking crime prevention strategies and tactics such as Operation Sixth Sense. For instance, MPD has looked at past crime trends in developing neighborhoods, and uses that data with information about current and future development to anticipate the types of crime that are likely to be committed. This information is presented in depth to patrol personnel so that the patrol teams can prepare and present plans to address anticipated issues. Moreover, strategic deployment is not just about deploying people – it is also about using technology as a “force multiplier” where it can be most useful. Tools include CCTV, gunshot detection systems, automated traffic enforcement, and license plate readers.

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In 2010, the District also recorded its fourth consecutive decline in traffic fatalities, reaching a new low of 25 fatalities. Although this is still 25 fatalities too many, a 54 percent reduction in traffic fatalities is significant progress. Indeed, based on a recent study of 2009 federal crash data, the District was found to have the lowest fatality rate.¹ An important factor in these reductions is the strong partnership between MPD, the District Department of Transportation (DDOT), and the many community and advocacy groups interested in traffic safety to address education and traffic engineering. Of course, these must be coupled with enforcement to change behavior. Overall, officer-initiated tickets for moving violations increased more than 30 percent in 2010, which makes the roads safer for everyone using them. This included increases in tickets written for violations that have a greater impact on pedestrian and bicycle safety, as well as a 22 percent increase in tickets for distracted driving.

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I would also like to highlight that the Department has been a sound steward of District resources, reducing costs paid by District taxpayers. In FY 2010, MPD reduced locally funded overtime by 55,000 hours, a 14 percent decrease. In three years, MPD achieved a reduction of 265,000 locally funded overtime hours, a 44 percent decrease. Over the past four years, I have also reduced the

¹ Copeland, Larry. “Study: Roads are Safer in Urban Areas.” *USA Today*. January, 25, 2011. http://www.usatoday.com/news/nation/2011-01-25-1Ahighwaydeathlottery25_ST_N.htm

size of the fleet, gas usage, and reduced fixed costs by working to consolidate MPD facilities. The bottom line is that accountability and strategic planning have resulted in significant savings.

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Lastly, I would like to focus on the dedicated men and women of the Metropolitan Police Department who serve and protect this city. Although the coverage in the media is sometimes negative, every day I hear stories from community members of exceptional and compassionate service by our police officers. They are also strengthening community trust by using minimal force, and only when necessary. In 2010, we had a record low number of serious use of force incidents, with only seven officer-involved shootings, one injury, and zero fatalities. Our records indicate that this is the lowest level in at least 25 years.

Rest assured, that is not to say that we don't recognize that some members do not meet our expectations, and may be performing outside of policies and laws. The integrity of our individual officers reflects on the integrity of the entire Department, and we take this issue seriously. Ensuring this integrity includes not only training and making sure officers have the right information and tools to do the job, but also conducting regular audits and integrity check operations. The integrity checks may be based on an issue or function that presents opportunities for corruption, or based on specific information regarding a person or unit. We also conduct randomized checks. The recent arrests of members involved in burglaries or buying stolen property did not happen by accident; they happened because we are committed to making sure our members are acting with integrity.

In many ways, police officers are no different than everyone else – when stress occurs in their personnel lives, it can have a critical impact on their professional lives. Through various health, wellness, stress management, and other campaigns, we have tried to assist our officers in achieving balance in their personal lives. In addition to our Biggest Loser Campaigns that support physical fitness, we have sponsored classes on stress and financial management. The Department has paid special attention to issues such as impaired driving and domestic violence. These have likely contributed to a dramatic reduction in arrests of members for domestic violence incidents – from nine in 2009 to four in 2010 – and in impaired driving – from ten in 2009 to just one in 2011.

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In closing, I would like to thank the members of MPD for their continued excellent work and professionalism during the past four years and throughout their careers. I would also like to express gratitude to our many partners in this effort to keep our neighborhoods safe, vibrant, and thriving. It is an honor to work alongside our colleagues in the government and community-based organizations who bring commitment and energy to this effort. Lastly, I am extremely grateful to the remarkable residents of the District who inspire our work every day, and I look forward to another year of progress and working together.