

GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
METROPOLITAN POLICE DEPARTMENT



Fiscal Year 2023
Performance Oversight Hearing

Testimony of
Pamela A. Smith
Chief of Police

Before the
Committee on the Judiciary & Public Safety
Council of the District of Columbia
The Honorable Brooke Pinto, Chairperson

February 13, 2024
1350 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW, Room 500
Washington, DC 20004

Introduction

Good afternoon, Chairperson Pinto, members of the Committee on the Judiciary and Public Safety, everyone gathered here today in person and those joining us online. My name is Pamela A. Smith, and I am Chief of Police for the Metropolitan Police Department (MPD). I am honored to testify on behalf of Mayor Muriel Bowser in today's performance hearing to discuss the activities and accomplishments of the Metropolitan Police Department in Fiscal Year 2023 (FY23). On July 17, 2023, Mayor Muriel Bowser afforded me the opportunity to lead MPD in service to this great city. In November of 2023, with a unanimous vote, this council supported my vision for MPD and I continue to be thankful to serve in this role. When I was asked to serve in this distinguished position last summer, I knew that the Department and the city were facing some challenges, but I also knew that Washington DC, MPD, and I were well prepared to tackle challenges ahead. Though we know there is much work to do, I know that the committed individuals that serve the Metropolitan Police Department are here 24 hours a day / 7 days a week, committed to the residents of Washington DC. I want to close my introduction by formally thanking members of the Metropolitan Police Department - for their service through the storm - and for their unwavering support for me as Chief.

Legislation and Strategic Planning

Thank you, Councilmember Pinto and your staff for all of your collective work to quickly bring Secure DC to the full Council for a vote. I am confident that once the legislation is enacted, MPD and our partners will have new tools to advance public safety. Though I will not focus on this legislation in depth today, Secure DC will play a core role in the strategic work of MPD.

As we will shift to discuss data, strategies, projects and plans - it is critical that we keep one thing in mind: each crime is not just a number, it is a person, and the impacts of crime reverberate through our city.

Crime	2022	2023	% Ch	2023YTD	2024YTD	%Ch
Homicide	203	274	35%	26	16	-38%
Sex Abuse	184	185	1%	23	26	13%
Assault with a Dangerous Weapon	1,387	1,407	1%	143	111	-22%
Robbery	2,076	3,470	67%	273	305	12%
VIOLENT Crime - Total	3,850	5,336	39%	465	458	-2%
Burglary	1,054	1,092	4%	114	99	-13%
Motor Vehicle Theft	3,756	6,829	82%	815	622	-24%
Theft from Auto	7,827	7,797	0%	1,012	710	-30%
Theft	10,814	13,349	23%	1,358	1,494	10%
Arson	4	11	175%	4	2	-50%
PROPERTY Crime - Total	23,455	29,078	24%	3,303	2,927	-11%
All Crime - Total	27,305	34,414	26%	3,768	3,385	-10%

YTD = Year to date, January 1 – February 12

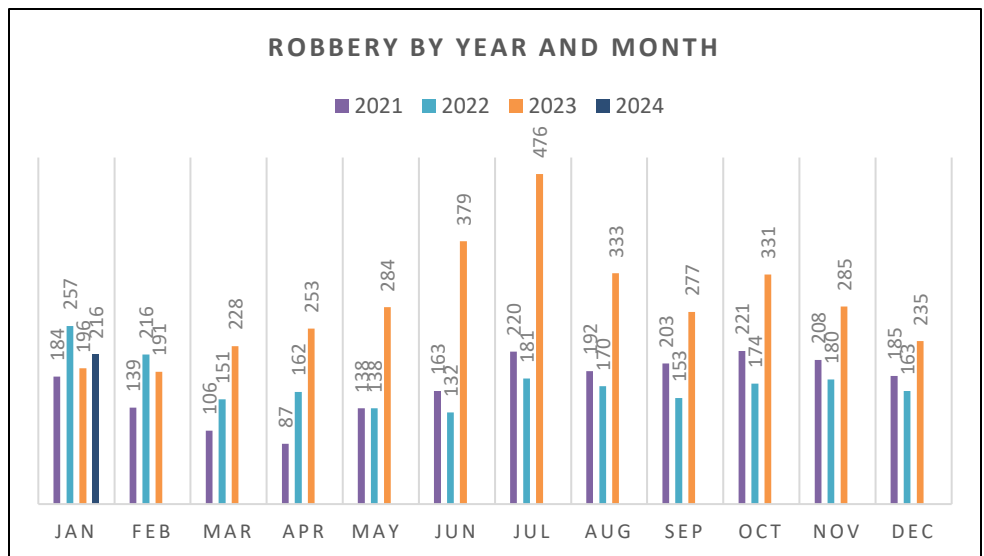
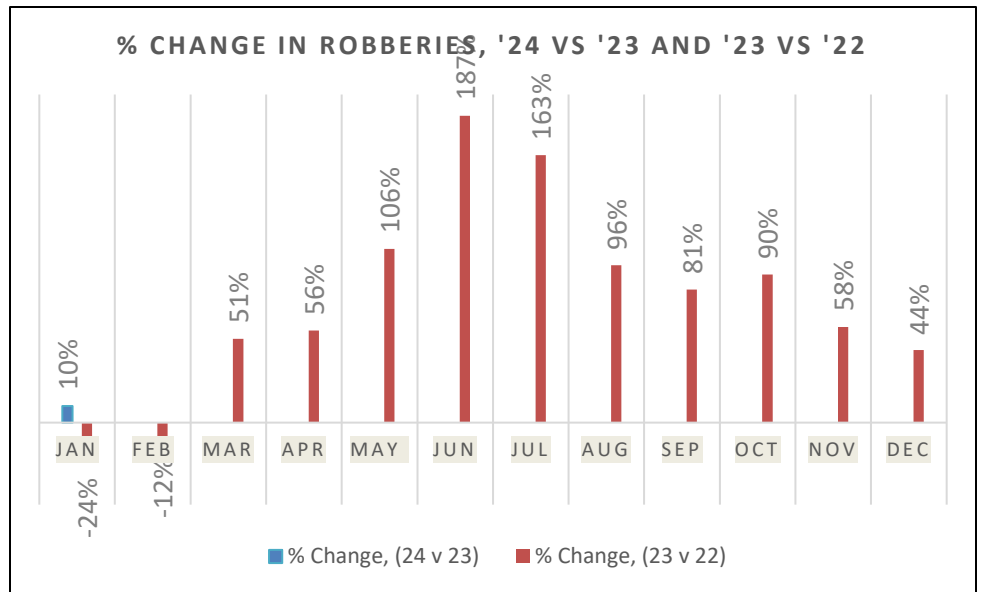
In 2023, DC reached the tragic milestone of 274 homicides, the highest number since 1997. A higher lethality for shootings was a significant contributor to the increase in homicides. While the number of shootings was 9 percent higher than the average for the prior three years, the shooting



fatality rate was 22 percent higher than the three-year average.¹ It was the highest since MPD began tracking the figure in 2017 (15.5%). At a 15.5 percent shooting fatality rate, there would have been 82 fewer homicides in 2023. One factor driving the higher lethality of shootings is the increase in the use of conversion switches, which modify handguns from semi-automatic to fully automatic. The number that MPD recovered tripled in just two years, from 66 in 2021 to 195 in 2023. Overall, more than 3,000 firearms were recovered in 2023, about the same number as in 2022 and 36 percent more than in 2021.

Looking back, it is easy to see the beginnings of the crime increases in early 2023. Homicides were spiking by February, and carjackings and robberies began increasing in March. The increase in carjackings and robbery

peaked in June, with more than twice as many robberies and three times as many carjackings reported than in June 2022. In July, this started to turn around. Comparing the first six months since my appointment to the six months before it,² motor vehicle theft – which have helped to fuel violent crime – is down 15 percent, carjackings are down 7 percent, and assaults with a dangerous weapon are down 10 percent. Robberies have increased slightly – by 46 crimes – but it is going in the right direction. In January we had the fewest robberies since February 2023, before the initial spike.



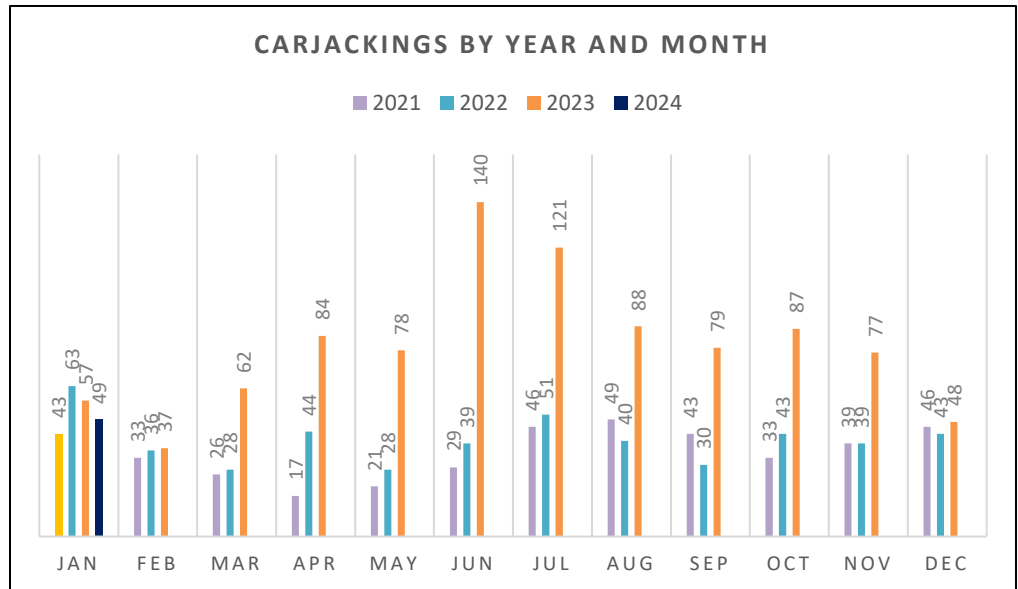
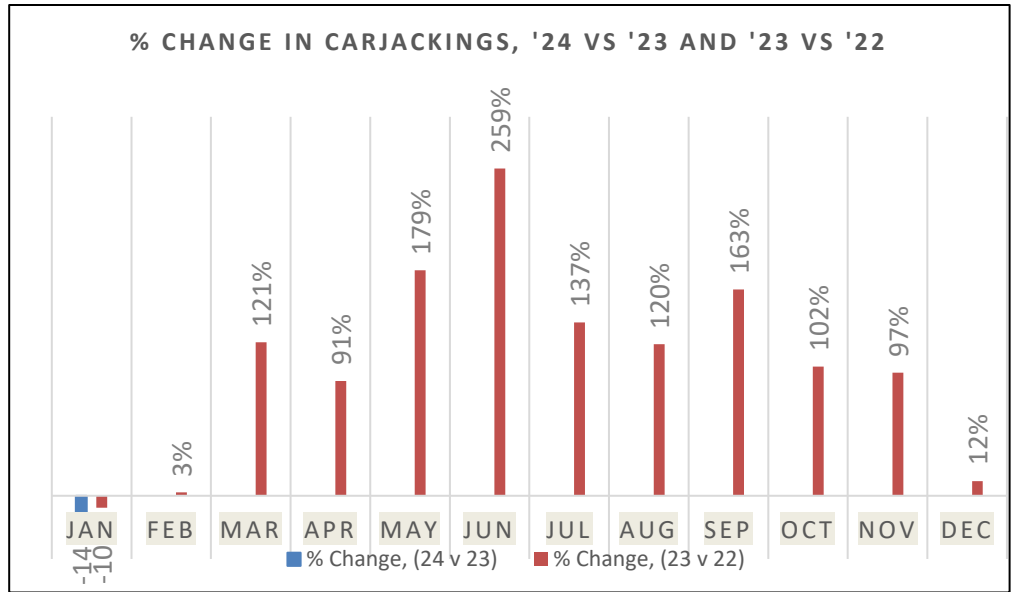
¹ There were 984 shootings in 2023 compared to an average of 904 for 2020 – 2022. The 2023 fatality rate was 23.9 percent compared to an average of 19.6 percent.

² July 17, 2023 through January 13, 2024 compared January 17, 2023 through July 16, 2023.



Youth Involvement

Unfortunately, youth have been heavily involved in vehicle thefts, carjackings, and robberies. Overall, only 11 percent of MPD arrests are of juveniles. But in 2023, 32 percent of vehicle theft arrests, 62 percent of carjacking arrests, and a shocking 73 percent of robbery arrests were juveniles. In fact, juvenile involvement in robberies has grown significantly in the past few years. In 2019 and 2020, juveniles represented 55 percent of the robbery arrests, in 2021 it was 58 percent, 65 percent in 2022, and in 2023, 73 percent. And more youth are committing serious crimes at a younger age. The number of 12-year-olds arrested increased more than tenfold last year. As a city, we must find ways to prevent at-risk behavior by our youth.



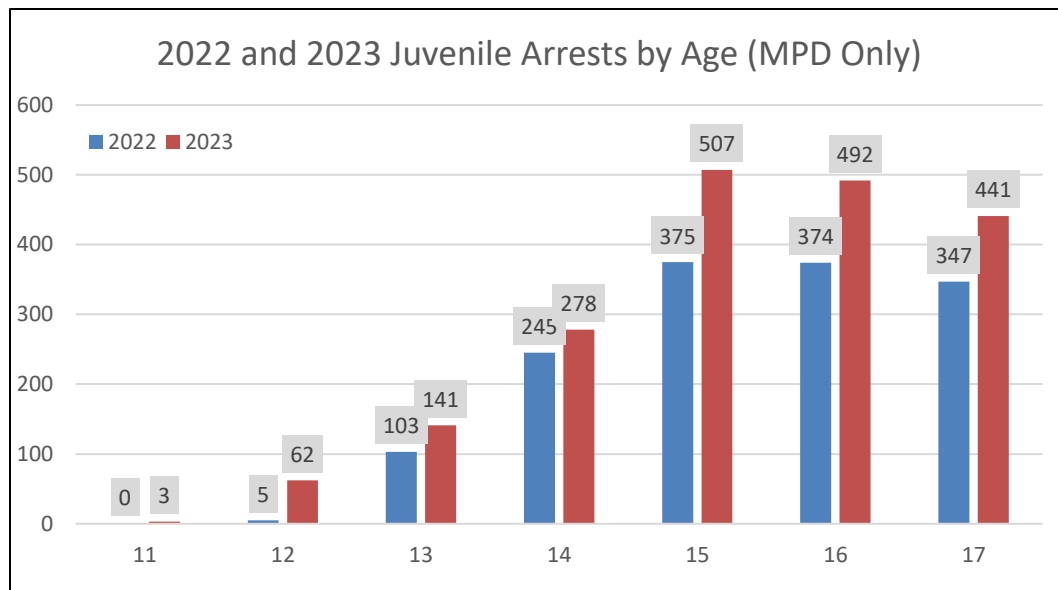
Families, communities, and other partners must all come together to set the boundaries that we know all youth will push against. That is the nature of growing up; we all did it. But too many of our kids are moving from normal youthful rebellion to threatening and dangerous behavior. Not only is it unacceptable to endanger our community members, but kids who are involved in serious crime are more at risk themselves. We must do better together to interrupt this behavior sooner, and make sure our kids stay on a safer and thriving path to adulthood.

MPD Response

In 2023, the Department responded 15 seconds faster to Priority 1 calls for service. This 4 percent decrease happened despite a 9 percent increase in calls for service and 4 percent decrease in sworn staffing. As of February 10th, we have 3,332 sworn members. This is 467 fewer members than at the



end of Fiscal Year (FY) 2020.³ To put that in perspective, at that time there was an average of 342 sworn members in each police district. In a little more than three years, we have lost staffing for one and one-third police districts. This is the lowest number of officers since at least the 1970s.⁴ But there is reason for optimism.



Attrition was lower in

FY23 than originally projected, with decreases in both resignations and retirements, resulting in the fewest separations since FY18. A new in-person recruiting unit is working to attract more prospects by building relationships with professors and student groups, to connect with students interested in law enforcement careers and develop a lasting pipeline of applicants. **The Department also reached 136 cadets at the end of January, the high watermark for the program. Thirty cadets have graduated to become recruits in the past 16 months.**

Strategic Initiatives

The dedicated sworn and civilian members of MPD are working with our partners in communities and government to support public safety through a variety of strategies. We are focusing on our neighborhoods to make our streets safer. In September, I issued a strategic update that is available on our website at mpdc.dc.gov. Efforts such as our Robbery Suppression Initiative and the multiagency Nightlife Task Force continue our work to make our neighborhoods safer. I invite residents to take a look at this for even more information about what MPD is doing in your community.

For instance, this summer our patrol commanders and their teams began hosting community walks. Strong community-police partnerships are critical to successful policing and public safety. When police and community members walk through a neighborhood together, they have an opportunity to identify challenges and possible solutions **together**, strengthening these partnerships. In FY24, MPD is hosting weekly community walks in each district. We are expanding this commitment to interacting with our community members on the streets in our neighborhoods by focusing on foot

³ As of the end of FY2020, September 30, 2020. A decade ago, the Department had almost 700 more officers (4010 at the end of FY2013) and five percent fewer residents.

⁴ While there is a long-running debate about whether MPD should have 3,800, 4,000, or even 4,200 sworn members, the reality is that it will take more than a decade to get back to 3,800 sworn officers.



beats. Many of you have asked that officers get out of their cars more, and I agree that foot patrols expand our opportunities for positive and productive encounters with community members. I have asked each district commander to expand their foot patrols, specifically in the busier commercial neighborhoods where they can check in on business owners and interact with individuals on the street. In some cases, you may see MPD officers partnering with Metro Transit or Housing Authority police to bolster visibility in areas where jurisdictions overlap. I encourage all our community members to join a community walk or talk to officers walking a beat.

Yesterday, Mayor Bowser opened the first of three new Safe Commercial Corridor Hubs in Chinatown. The Chinatown hub will be staffed by multiple operational or outreach teams, including MPD. The agencies will work together to connect residents to services and increase visibility in the corridors. MPD officers from the Chinatown Crime Patrol Unit and Chinatown Bike Unit will use the space to write reports and conduct other administrative tasks without returning to the First District's main station. Other agencies in the space will include the Mayor's Office of Community Relations and Services, and the Departments of Behavioral Health, and Human Services.

The Department has also increased traffic enforcement and education in support of Mayor Bowser's Vision Zero initiative. Traffic fatalities in the District – and around the nation – increased in 2023. In FY24, MPD is conducting at least two high-visibility Traffic Safety Compliance Checkpoints every month. During 33 checkpoints across all seven districts, MPD has issued more than 2,100 tickets, made 69 arrests, and recovered 11 guns. Officers have also installed 34 child safety seats, because we know safety is about much more than just enforcement.

In December, MPD launched Operation ATLAS, or Action Teams Leaving Areas Safer, with non-patrol teams deployed around the city in the evenings based on recent crime trends. The focus is on reducing fear, disrupting crime, arresting violators, increasing traffic safety and enhancing quality of life. The teams bring a highly visible presence to these neighborhoods, with saturation patrols in recent violent crime areas, traffic safety enforcement, and attention to quality-of-life issues and community engagement. So far, the Department has made 216 arrests, taken 48 illegal guns of the street, and recovered 44 stolen cars. Although it is difficult to isolate the impact of a single initiative when we are implementing multiple new strategies and programs simultaneously, there were significant reductions in crime during the first wave of Operation ATLAS in December. When comparing crime in December during the hours of operation (from 6 p.m. to 4 a.m.) to the prior 31-day period, violent crime decreased by 22 percent, assaults with a dangerous weapon dropped by 31 percent, and robbery dropped by 26 percent.

The Department is leading the Targeted Homicide Reduction through Intervention and Violence Elimination, or Operation THRIVE, to reduce homicides in 2024 by coordinating resources in areas most impacted by homicide to protect life and stabilize neighborhoods historically plagued by violence. This is a whole-of-government approach and strategic deployment of MPD personnel and resources in neighborhoods affected most severely by non-domestic homicides and contact shootings. Building on MPD's Homicide Reduction Partnership, this targeted crime-fighting initiative is focusing on three areas: Rosedale, Anacostia, and Washington Highlands.



Just last week, MPD launched an expansion in the Third and Fourth Districts of a hot spots policing effort. This methodology is Evidence-Based Policing by Professors Dr. Lum and Dr. Koper from George Mason University's Department of Criminology, Law and Society Center for Evidence-Based Crime Police. Drs. Lum and Koper worked with the Sixth District in 2022, which saw an 11 percent decrease in violent crime, a 7 percent decrease in calls for service, and a 12 percent decrease in sounds of gunshots in the focus areas. The model focuses attention on small areas – approximately four-square blocks – with a high density of non-domestic violence and sounds of gun shots. The focused and active police presence in the neighborhood helps to both drive down crime and reduce the community fear of crime.

In December, Mayor Bowser and I announced the development of MPD's new Real-Time Crime Center, or RTCC. The RTCC will serve as a new dedicated space that will be staffed 24/7 with local, regional, and federal law enforcement agencies to monitor and respond to criminal activities in real time. The RTCC will serve as the nerve center for law enforcement in DC and throughout the region to collect and analyze data, enhance situational awareness, and facilitate quick decision-making. The RTCC will also improve the overall efficiency of crime prevention and response efforts among law enforcement partners by leveraging their expertise and allowing more information to be shared across jurisdictional boundaries in real time. We know that crime in our region is not limited to jurisdictional boundaries and those committing crimes sometimes use that to their advantage. The RTCC will allow us to leverage our multi-agency partnerships to interrupt crime sprees and identify and arrest suspects, thereby preventing the next crime. We expect the RTCC to open in the coming weeks.⁵

I want to thank Mayor Bowser for her strong commitment to expanding DC's CCTV network. In 2023, we deployed 50 CCTV cameras to new locations, and we are awaiting delivery of an additional 50. This will bring the network up to more than 400 cameras. We know that this network, together with the new RTCC expanding our ability to leveraging the CCTV network, will help solve crime.⁶ I believe that we are taking steps to help solve more violent crimes. To help strengthen all cases, in 2023 we partnered with the U.S. Attorney's Office to develop a comprehensive training on the Fourth Amendment that all members will take in 2024. MPD is also participating in Operation Trident, a joint operation including the US Marshals Service and the Court Services and Offender Supervision Agency. The agencies are working together to identify wanted DC fugitives who are the most likely to re-offend or to be involved in violent crime. The operation then prioritizes

⁵ Partners from nine agencies – Amtrak Police, Arlington County Police, U.S. Capitol Police, Fairfax County Police, Metro Transit Police, Montgomery Police, U.S. Park Police, Prince George's County Police, and the U.S. Secret Service Uniform Division – will work in collaboration with MPD to monitor and analyze data from various sources, including CCTV cameras, emergency calls, and other technology. The DC Homeland Security and Emergency Management Agency and the DC Housing Authority Police Department will also support the RTCC, along with federal investigative partners at the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, and the U.S. Marshals Service.

⁶ An analysis of 2018 homicide cases conducted in 2019 found that detectives obtained video footage (from any source) in 83 percent of the homicides (132 out of 160 cases). When video footage was available, it helped advance the investigation in 71 percent of the cases (94 out of 132 cases) and contributed to closing the investigation in 36 percent of the cases (48 out of 132 cases).



locating and arresting these individuals. So far, the three phases of Operation Trident have resulted in 99 fugitive arrests.

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While these efforts will help to make our communities safer for all, MPD is also working to support some of our most vulnerable populations. For instance, research and experience indicate that concentrations of vacant and blighted buildings can attract crime and may be harmful to public health. To help counter those negative factors, last fall, MPD launched Operation Peaceful Neighborhoods. In partnership with the Department of Aging and Community Living, the Department of Public Works, DC Health, the Humane Rescue Alliance, and others, we are focused on identifying, investigating, and resolving criminal activity taking place in buildings that are sometimes unoccupied or occupied by senior or vulnerable adults. The type of criminal activity most associated with these nuisance properties – drug dealing and the storage of illegal guns – hurts the residents and businesses. This is especially true for certain vulnerable populations such as our senior community members and individuals living independently with special needs, who sometimes are at risk of having their homes taken over in the furtherance of criminal enterprise. I am committed to working with community and government partners to help safeguard our more vulnerable populations.

The Department has also been expanding our work to support individuals with chronic or crisis behavioral health needs and the communities in which they live. This includes completing our two-year training program to ensure all full-duty members have completed either Crisis Intervention training or Mental Health First Aid training provided by the Department of Behavioral Health (DBH). We are building on this in 2024 with an evidence-based approach to use of force training. The goal of the Integrating Communications, Assessment, and Tactics, or ICAT, training is to enhance officer skills in successfully defusing critical incidents with individuals in crisis.

The Department is committed to our Co-Response Team that we launched in the summer of 2023 with DBH. The team includes five officers paired with five behavioral health clinicians, responding to calls for service involving subjects with behavioral health needs in the First, Third, Fifth, and Sixth Patrol Districts.⁷ The COR team can also respond to critical incidents anywhere in the city. MPD was recently awarded a grant to support DBH hiring an additional clinician later in 2024, allowing us to expand the program into the Seventh District. In responding to almost 1,400 calls, the Co-Response Team has connected with more than 600 individuals with behavioral health needs, resulting in only 21 arrests and no uses of force by the team.⁸ The teams have also coordinated more than 200 involuntary commitments and more than 100 voluntary commitments.

Just as MPD works to support healthy and well communities in the District, I am committed to fostering an organizational culture that supports personal wellness and employee satisfaction. In turn, healthy employees are more effective and compassionate. In recognition of the importance of

⁷ The Co-Response Team operates Monday through Friday, 8:00 a.m. to 7:30 p.m, the days and times with higher concentrations of behavior health calls.

⁸ In one incident, a responding officer who was not a COR Team member used OC spray.



this goal, last week I created the Organizational Culture and Wellness Bureau. The new bureau brings together our offices that foster wellbeing, diversity, equity, and inclusion, all of which are critical not only for sound human resource practices, but for a successful police department and a safe city.

Lastly, instead of a new program, I am pleased to highlight the return of a vintage program. As I visited with residents throughout the city, they repeatedly talked about growing up with MPD's Officer Friendly. It is heartening how many District residents fondly remember Officer Friendly as one of their first interactions with MPD. Given that, we have reinvigorated the Officer Friendly program to strengthen connections with youth and families. The program is centered around elementary aged youth and involves a variety of educational programs including anti-bullying initiatives, interactive learning, conflict resolution, and safety education. Officer Friendly has already visited more than 35 public and charter elementary schools. I am hopeful this will lay the groundwork for stronger police-community relations for years to come.

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Closing

In closing, thank you for the opportunity to highlight just some of the good work being done at MPD. I am pleased to report that while we have challenges ahead of us, our members are committed to facing and overcoming them. They are excited to be compassionate and creative, community focused and collaborative in service to our great city. But we can't do this work alone. Under the leadership of Mayor Bowser we have a whole of government approach to the core focus of public safety. We know that working together with this council we can keep our residents safe. We need this council to pass Secure DC. We need this Council to continue to invest in the MPD - our programs, our initiatives and our recruits. We need this council to know and understand that every single day our members respond to the needs of our residents in service of the District of Columbia. Policing with purpose and serving with care is our commitment to the people of the Washington DC. This should be our shared purpose. Our shared commitment. You all know that I am also an ordained minister and here's what I know.... faith without works is dead. Let's get to work. I look forward to answering your questions.

