

GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
METROPOLITAN POLICE DEPARTMENT



Fiscal Year 2024
Performance Oversight Hearing

Testimony of
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Chief of Police

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

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1350 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW, Room 500
Washington, DC 20004

Good afternoon, Chairperson Pinto, members of the Committee on the Judiciary and Public Safety, everyone gathered here today in person and those watching us remotely. My name is Pamela A. Smith, and I am the Chief of Police for the Metropolitan Police Department (MPD). I am honored and proud to be testifying today about the Department’s activities and accomplishments in 2024.

I would like to begin today by thanking all of MPD’s employees who demonstrate their commitment to the Department and the District of Columbia every day. Over the past year, MPD staff, both sworn and professional, have stepped up time and again to the credit of the city and the Department. They supported events of national and international significance, such as the international summit to commemorate the 75th anniversary of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. MPD supported people peacefully exercising their First Amendment rights at nearly 1,200 assemblies in 2024. MPD also supports the local events that highlight DC as a vibrant and thriving city, including cultural celebrations, parades, and sporting events.

Of course, during all of these events, MPD members are in DC neighborhoods, supporting community members daily. Every day I see how MPD members bring their passion for public service to support DC residents, DC businesses, and everyone who comes into this great city. They truly embody policing with purpose and serving with care, and I want to thank them for it.

I would also like to thank Mayor Muriel Bowser. MPD’s successes in 2024 were possible due to the tremendous support and commitment to public safety by the Mayor, who champions the work of the men and women of MPD every day. I am grateful for her support and confidence in MPD. Last but not least, I appreciate the support from Councilmember Pinto and all of the Council who meet and talk with MPD daily. I am grateful that we all share a common commitment to the District of Columbia and everyone in it. When we work together, we can overcome just about anything.

Overview of 2024

In July 2023, I was honored to accept Mayor Bowser’s nomination for me to lead MPD in service to this great city. At that time, the District was facing some critical public safety challenges. In particular, homicides, robberies, and carjackings spiked sharply in the first half of 2023. I am pleased to report that in 2024, we reversed these trends, driving down overall DC Code index crime – and particularly violent crime – to its lowest levels in decades. MPD drove down crime at a historic pace in 2024 thanks to a focus on data-driven policing, strategic initiatives, and critical investments in technology.

Our initiatives and investments led to a 35 percent drop in violent crime in 2024 when compared to 2023,¹ including a 32 percent drop in homicides, a 39 percent decrease in robberies, and 48 percent decline in carjacking. Property crime declined 11 percent, led by a 25 percent decrease in vehicle theft. We still have work to do because it is never acceptable for even one person to be killed or shot or robbed. But I am confident that we are in a position to continue to make good progress toward achieving our shared goal: making DC the safest city in the country.

¹ DC Code Index Violent Crime includes homicide, sex assault, assault with a dangerous weapon, and robbery. Carjackings are a subset of robberies.



How did we get here?

In addition to the dedication and talent of our workforce, the strategic deployment of resources informed by robust data analysis helped to drive success in 2024. This includes Targeted Homicide Reduction through Intervention and Violence Elimination, or Operation THRIVE, a whole-of-government approach to reducing homicides in areas historically ravaged by gun violence. In 2024, THRIVE focused on three areas: Rosedale, Anacostia, and Washington Highlands. Homicides decreased 68 percent in Operation THRIVE zones in 2024. In 2025, we are focused on Buena Vista, Anacostia, and Rosedale.

MPD's Robbery Suppression Initiative, which strategically deploys officers based on recent robbery trends, has recovered more than 440 firearms and made nearly 600 arrests since its launch in July 2023,² driving a 49 percent decrease in robberies in 2024. Operation ATLAS focuses on quality-of-life issues across the District, and has recovered more than 170 stolen vehicles and 160 firearms, while issuing almost 2,500 tickets and making nearly 2,800 arrests.³ MPD's Carjacking Taskforce has worked with our District and regional partners to hold carjacking suspects accountable during a nationwide increase in armed carjacking and vehicle theft offenses, driving a 49 percent drop in armed carjackings in 2024.

One key to these initiatives was the launch of MPD's state-of-the-art Real Time Crime Center (RTCC), which assists officers on the scene of critical incidents by collecting and analyzing information from various sources to enhance situational awareness, facilitate decision-making, and improve the efficiency of crime prevention and response. The RTCC is able to leverage other key technology investments to amplify their impact. Last year, that included the launch of a new drone program, and the purchase of a replacement helicopter and 57 CCTV cameras. Two hundred cameras will be added in the coming months, bringing the total CCTV deployment to more than 600 cameras to support public safety. All of this provides critical support in situations where a view from above can help solve a case or ensure a safe resolution of a critical incident.

The RTCC has greatly improved the speed at which suspect lookouts are distributed both internally and to the public. Flash lookouts are distributed directly to members on patrol with the goal of increasing the efficacy and accuracy of suspect stops and detentions while simultaneously reducing misidentifications and negative police/public interactions. Verified images of suspects and suspect vehicles have been pushed out on MPD's social media platforms within 10 to 20 minutes of an incident occurring. The RTCC has directly supported MPD units in more than 13,000 calls for service and 100 significant events.

One case alone demonstrates the tremendous value of the RTCC to our crime fighting efforts, and these benefits have been shown repeatedly. RTCC investigators were instrumental in the swift arrest of a homicide suspect when they located surveillance video showing the suspect fleeing the scene of a stabbing and discarding the knife used in the murder. Investigators disseminated that video to MPD officers and detectives responding to the scene. Officers canvassing the neighborhood with

² Through March 3, 2025

³ Through March 2, 2025



the video located the suspect and placed him under arrest. Officers also secured the location where the weapon was discarded, greatly assisting MPD homicide detectives and future prosecution.

As always, MPD is also working with our partners to make our city safer. For example, MPD has been working with the Alcoholic Beverage and Cannabis Administration (ABCA) to inspect and close unlicensed cannabis shops. Since last summer, we have worked ABCA in padlocking 36 illegal cannabis businesses. As a result, MPD has seized 422 pounds of marijuana, 170 pounds in edibles, and almost 80 pounds of illegal mushrooms.

MPD leads the Nightlife Task Force, a multiagency partnership to proactively tackle public safety concerns within designated nightlife areas.⁴ With this collaboration, MPD is able to focus on criminal violations and preventative patrols while the partners conduct compliance and business checks and manage traffic flow. Violent crime decreased in all three nightlife areas: 39 percent in the H Street Northeast corridor, 30 percent on U Street, and 48 percent in Dupont Circle.

Many of these initiatives and partnerships have contributed to higher clearance rates⁵ for violent crime in 2024. For example, in 2024, 60 percent of homicides were closed in 2024, compared to 52 percent in 2023.⁶ Every additional case closed is important. It starts the process to help bring closure to crime victims or surviving family members; our partners in the criminal justice system must take the next steps to hold violent criminals accountable. Over the past 20 months since my nomination, I have maintained a singular focus on getting violent offenders off the street, and we are seeing results. This in turn helps to prevent the next violent crime.

I would also like to sincerely thank you, Councilmember Pinto, for your comprehensive work and partnership to pass Secure DC. I'll highlight for you just a few of the key provisions that are helping to make DC safer.

- Secure DC enables judges to order more violent offenders held before trial. Too many armed and violent suspects had been re-offending while pending trial. Keeping violent offenders off the street is critical to preventing the *next* crime.
- The legislation established two felonies that are hallmarks of gun trafficking: possessing guns with obliterated serial numbers and possessing stolen guns. MPD has made 44 arrests⁷ under the new charges, making it harder for people to sell illegal guns in our city.
- Secure DC strengthened theft laws to reduce theft and to help DC businesses stay in our neighborhoods and provide important products and services to residents. MPD made more than

⁴ Partners include the Mayor's Office of Nightlife and Culture, ABCA, DLCP, DDOT, DPW, Fire and Emergency Medical Services (FEMS), and DFH.

⁵ MPD's clearance rates are calculated according to national standards using the Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR) guidelines established by the Federal Bureau of Investigation and used nationwide for almost 100 years. Under UCR guidelines, the clearance rate is calculated by dividing the total number of cases closed in a calendar year by the total number of cases that occurred in that year. The cases closed can be for those that occurred in the current year or in the prior years and thus the closure rate can be more than 100 percent if the total number of cases closed exceeds the current year total cases.

⁶ MPD's homicide clearances have been higher than the average for comparably-sized cities in the United States for the past 20 years, as reported by the FBI in UCR reports for cities 500,000 to 999,999 in population.

⁷ As of March 3, 2025



1,000 theft arrests in 2024, a 50 percent increase over 2023. Almost 300 of the individuals arrested were arrested multiple times.⁸

- Secure DC also restored the authority of the Chief of Police to declare Drug Free Zones, or DFZs, for five days at a time. Since the bill’s passage a year ago, I have declared a total 115 Drug Free Zones throughout the city, for a total of 575 days – about one and a half years of enforcement days. During this period, just 17 crimes of violence⁹ occurred in a DFZ, and 143 arrests were made.¹⁰ I continually hear positive feedback from our community on the effectiveness of DFZ enforcement. We are reclaiming public space and interrupting behavior that often leads to even more serious criminal offenses, making our communities safer.

Looking Forward

As I said earlier, although we are proud of the successes of 2024, we still have much work to do. We want to continue to drive down homicides in 2025. For homicides in which the incident occurred in 2025 – which excludes the six homicides that occurred in prior years but were ruled this year – we have seen a notable shift to more homicides – 63 percent – happening *inside*.¹¹ In comparison, in the past two years, less than three in 10 homicides happened inside. While cases happening inside may ultimately be easier to solve – for instance more DNA may be available for testing – police deployment in public spaces may not deter these homicides. Because of this, some of our strategies may need to evolve.

Many of the initiatives I have highlighted are rooted in *location*-based policing – focused on increasing patrols in the places and spaces where crimes are happening. I established MPD’s Office of Criminal Intelligence to be more *people* based: identifying the interpersonal conflicts that drive many violent crimes. We know there is small group driving the majority of gun violence in our city, and we are focused on those individuals to mitigate violence and cool off neighborhood beefs before they are escalated with guns. This office has already identified and intervened in several disputes that could have been turned into serious incidents.

The Office of Neighborhood Safety and Engagement (ONSE) is a critical partner in this space. Both MPD and ONSE are working to calm community beefs so that we can prevent retaliatory violence, prevent the next shooting or assault. As a city, we need to figure out how to foster better conflict resolution skills in our youth to prevent arguments that escalate into violence. This is essential to creating and sustaining safe and vibrant communities.

We especially need to do this with DC’s justice involved youth, who are inflicting too much violence in the community. The numbers tell one story, with juvenile arrests for aggravated assault increasing from 12 in 2023 to 31 in 2024, and for simple assault, growing from 171 to 230. But what really stands out to me, even with all that I have seen in more than 27 years in policing, is the

⁸ As of March 3, 2025

⁹ Crimes of violence as defined by D.C. Official Code § 23-1331(4).

¹⁰ As of the zones ending March 3, 2025

¹¹ As of March 4, 2025



level of violence. If you don't see the violence or talk to the victims, it may be too easy to just focus on the numbers, perhaps to think that 31 aggravated assaults *isn't that many*.

I hope instead that you will join me in trying to address the issue of youth committing violence in our community. We know that in order to support troubled youth, we need a whole of government approach. But that's not enough. For at risk youth, we really need a whole of community approach. Everyone should be doing their part to support these youth and their families before they get into the system. Once they are system-involved, it is critical that youth be held accountable for endangering and victimizing others and that they know there are consequences.

In 2024, MPD revitalized our Recidivist Unit focused specifically on deterrence for repeat youth offending. The officers support accountability in the juvenile justice system by working with the Office of the Attorney General (OAG) to ensure the attorneys have the necessary information to build good cases. For youth already in the system, we know that they can have a bright future with no further justice involvement. But strong, consistent boundaries and support are needed. To contribute to that, the officers visit group homes and halfway houses to engage directly with youth. The officers make sure they are enrolled in and attending school. They help to connect youth to resources that can address underlying issues, such as mental health care. They have organized mentorship and creative activities outside the homes that provide a safe opportunity for discussions on developing goals and making concrete plans to achieve them. In 2024, the officers engaged with more than 200 youth through these efforts.

In addition to youth in the juvenile justice system, the Youth and Family Engagement Division works with many youth who are not in the system. For example, Officer Friendly, a program that so many Washingtonians remember fondly, establishes a positive first impression of police with elementary students. Reaching New Heights helps young people in middle school to build skills and confidence. Youth Creating Change encourages 15-to-18-year-olds to support their communities through service. And each summer, MPD is one of the favorite placements for participants in the Summer Youth Employment Program. I encourage community members watching to think about if they can provide better or more support for youth in their lives. I know I am thinking about ways that I will build upon this broad foundation in 2025.

Turning to property crimes, we made progress in driving these down in 2024 when compared to 2023 – with a 9 percent total reduction in property crime that included a 21 percent drop in burglaries and 25 percent drop in vehicle theft. In 2025, I have challenged our members to build on this progress and bring their creativity and focus to addressing serious property crimes. These crimes have a real impact on victims and communities. Our homes are meant to be a safe haven, but home burglaries can leave victims feeling vulnerable. Vehicle thefts or broken car windows can cause additional hardship by preventing someone from getting to work or an important medical appointment. Repeat shoplifting or organized retail theft can discourage businesses from opening or staying open in a neighborhood. What happens to some of our neighbors who can't travel across town to go to the drug store?

Each patrol district has developed a burglary prevention plan. Too often we see the same group of suspects committing multiple burglaries of businesses, particularly at night. Patrol is increasing business checks, with MPD officers making hundreds of checks each night. We are also working with business owners to ensure security cameras and alarm systems are in place. Alarms that tie into



our 911 system give our officers a chance to respond to a call quickly and potentially make an on-scene arrest. To address retail theft, some districts are conducting operations to embed officers into the business with the goal of disrupting theft in progress.

To address residential property crime, we continue to urge everyone to use wheel locks in their vehicles and to consider placing an air tag or tile inside your vehicle for easy tracking if it is stolen. As you may have seen in the news, we have run decoy package theft operations so that offenders think twice before taking packages from your doorstep. Some ways that residents can help prevent this crime are by bringing packages inside as soon as possible or taking advantage of Amazon lockers outside all seven of our district stations. MPD was the first department in the country to launch an Amazon locker program so that orders can be securely delivered.

We are also working to address nuisance properties in neighborhoods. Operation Peaceful Neighborhood focuses on problematic properties that attract or further crime, and are initially identified by investigations or community members. Some owners and managers are very cooperative in this effort. Together with OAG, we have worked with owners and managers on practical steps, such as securing and boarding up vacant property. Operation Peaceful neighborhood has successfully secured seven evictions and one voluntary relocation. MPD has made 57 arrests, seized 44 illegal guns, 60 pounds of marijuana, a pound of crack cocaine, and other narcotics. All of these efforts will help to make DC neighborhoods safer for our residents and business community.

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In addition to the progress made in 2024 in combatting crime, there are so many other positive stories to tell about MPD's work. I will highlight just a few.

MPD has expanded traffic safety efforts in support of Mayor Bowser's Vision Zero initiative. I have assigned four additional officers to the Traffic Safety Branch to focus on citywide strategies. In 2025, we are continuing successful traffic initiatives such as the twice monthly Traffic Safety Checkpoints and the periodic Operation Ride Right, which focused on illegal or unregistered mopeds. MPD also stepped-up enforcement on unregistered cars being driven recklessly on DC streets, almost quadrupling the 2023 total arrests for fraudulent or counterfeit tags to more than 1,300 arrests in 2024.

While public safety is the core mission for law enforcement, good police work requires strong relationships, especially with some of our underserved or vulnerable community members. While our focus may be on youth, MPD also engages with more seasoned residents, visiting senior housing weekly for organized activities, all while connecting with and listening to long term DC residents.

I am also pleased to report that the Co-Response Team (COR) launched by MPD and the Department of Behavioral Services (DBH) is strengthening DC's response to individuals with chronic or crisis mental health issues. The five teams of a trained officer matched with a behavioral health professional have fielded nearly 2,900 calls for service, resulting in 1,500 interactions with individuals experiencing a mental health crisis.¹² Of these, almost half were resolved on-scene

¹² From its partial launch in June 2023 through January 3, 2025.



through stabilization or referrals. Another 47 percent resulted in hospitalizations.¹³ Arrests are made infrequently, in only 4 percent of these interactions. Despite dealing with some potentially dangerous individuals, including subjects armed with knives and even a machete, only five scenes involved uses of force, only two of which were low levels of force by a COR officer.

According to an internal analysis, the likelihood of an arrest is cut in half when a COR unit is dispatched to a mental health-related call, compared to a response to a similar call by regular patrol. One weakness of the program is that COR officers tend to be tied up longer on scene than patrol, even for similar calls, due to the complexity of the joint response. But the initial outcomes highlight the potential of this model for de-escalation and connections to care. MPD and DBH plan to expand the program into the Seventh District later in 2025, although this is dependent on federal grant funding to hire two DBH staff members.

Personnel

Lastly, I will update you on staffing, the perennial issue of MPD's performance hearings. With 3,236 sworn members, MPD continues to operate at the lowest sworn staffing level in more than 50 years.¹⁴ Ten years ago at the end of Fiscal Year (FY) 2014, MPD had 3,971 sworn members. This loss of more than 700 sworn members is the equivalent of two patrol districts. Unfortunately, we all know there is no quick or easy way to close that gap.

However, there is good news. In 2024, the number of new recruits hired increased 12 percent, and we reached a 10-year low in sworn separations. Our cadet program is also growing into the strong recruiting pipeline we envision. We currently have 132 cadets, with more than 100 applicants in background. In FY24, 30 cadets rolled over to become recruits, and 12 have already rolled over this year. Our Recruiting Division is connecting with the organizations and people that help us to build the pipeline, and our marketing team is keeping our message fresh and targeted.

But the challenges in growing police staffing persist here and around the country. Right now, the demands of a 25-year career in law enforcement may seem less appealing to younger generations. Meeting the qualifications is also a challenge. We will continue to try new approaches.

MPD's sworn members are supported by an outstanding professional staff that we are expanding this year. Forty of the approximately 100 civilianization positions are already on board, with the rest in process.

Regardless of the staffing numbers, supporting and developing current staff is always important. MPD offers access to opportunities and development for all, ranging from leadership skills to personal wellness. Just last week, MPD proudly hosted the Second Annual Women's Conference, an empowering event for both men and women, reinforcing the importance of inspiration, connection, and growth.

¹³ Of the more than 1,500 interactions, 35 percent resulted in emergency involuntary hospitalizations and 12 percent voluntary hospitalization.

¹⁴ Current data as of February 28, 2025. For prior year staffing, see <https://mpdc.dc.gov/node/1653316>.



Closing

In closing, I appreciate the opportunity to highlight just some of the good work being done at MPD. We still have many challenges ahead. I am confident that we can continue to make significant progress. However, we need your continued support. Our dedicated members will continue to bring their passion to serving our constituents. I know that Mayor Bowser is steadfast in her support for the Department and its members. I ask the Council to continue to show up for our officers, both literally and figuratively. This means partnering in the places and spaces where our officers are meeting with the community. It also means continuing to invest in MPD – in our members, our recruits, and our initiatives – during the upcoming budget process. I look forward to our continuing discussions in the coming months.

