

GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
Metropolitan Police Department



Fiscal Year 2020 Budget Oversight Hearing

Testimony of
Peter Newsham
Chief of Police

Before the
Committee on the Judiciary & Public Safety
Councilmember Charles Allen, Chair
Council of the District of Columbia

March 27, 2019
Council Chambers
John A. Wilson Building
1350 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20004



Good afternoon, Chairperson Allen, members and staff of the Committee, other members of the Council, and guests. Last week, Mayor Bowser presented “A Fair Shot,” the Fiscal Year 2020 (FY20) Budget and Financial Plan, the District’s 24th consecutive balanced budget. I am pleased to provide testimony today on Mayor Bowser’s FY20 budget for the Metropolitan Police Department.

* * *

Briefly, the Mayor’s FY20 budget for the Metropolitan Police Department (MPD) provides local funding of approximately \$512.3 million. Most of MPD’s local budget, 91 percent, is for personal services (PS). The remaining 9 percent of the total budget, approximately \$44.1 million, covers a variety of Nonpersonal Services (NPS), including specialized law enforcement purchases, such as uniforms, firearms, ammunition, and contracts for the Police and Fire Clinic, fleet maintenance, and information technology. Of the local budget, less than \$800,000, or less than two-tenths of one percent, is not tied up in salaries, benefits, and major contracts and programmatic spending. This \$800,000 covers a wide variety of small but necessary operating expenditures, such as language access interpretation and translation services, stenographers, and subscriptions to legal databases.

The Mayor’s investments in MPD will allow us to continue to build upon our success last year, when we finished with approximately 2,200 fewer violent crimes in 2018 than in 2015. Violent crime¹ dropped across the city, with a reduction in six of the seven police districts. Robbery fell 7 percent, sexual abuse decreased 8 percent, and assaults with a dangerous weapon dropped 10 percent. Reported violent crime in the District was 33 percent lower than in 2014.

Despite the remarkable progress we have made in reducing reported violent crime in our city, I know that this reduction is not comforting to crime victims or to families who have lost someone to violence. As I say frequently, even if the statistics show progress, any violent crime is one too many. And we continue to lose too many members of our community to senseless homicides. Preventing the next violent crime and its devastating impact is, as always, our central focus. That is why it is critical that the District continue to invest in police staffing as part of its long-term strategy to help make our city safe for everyone.

As an initial matter, it is important to acknowledge that increasing the number of police officers is just one part of the strategy to support a safe and vibrant city, but it is also a vital part. In her State of the District Address, Mayor Bowser spoke of a commitment to both policing and healing. She and the Council have invested significant resources in a number of areas that help to develop and support healthy individuals, families, and neighborhoods. This includes funding for education, training, job development, treatment for mental health, trauma, and substance use disorder issues, reentry services, as well as more direct violence prevention efforts.

¹ DC Code Index Violent Crime includes homicide, sexual abuse, assault with a dangerous weapon, and robbery.

All of this is important. All of these investments are for functions that are not carried out by police. However, police officers are essential to do things that other government agencies or community groups cannot do. When community members call 911, MPD officers respond. When an individual is the victim of a crime, MPD detectives investigate the crime. Having more officers does not necessarily mean more arrests. Arrests by MPD officers continue to trend downward, with a 7 percent decrease last year and 12 percent since 2014. Indeed, the more officers we have, the more we are able to use negotiation, education, and community partnerships to find other solutions to critical issues.

We also need police officers to ensure that the needs of residents and visitors are met while the District hosts large, high-profile events. For three major venues for professional sports teams, and hopefully more All-Star games and championship playoffs and parades, the District needs a fully staffed police department. As the nation's capital, the District needs a police department prepared to support national events, such as state funerals and presidential inaugurations. We also need to help keep residents safe when they have smaller events in city streets.

A fully-staffed MPD is needed to facilitate and safeguard the daily First Amendment assemblies in the city, including ones of significant attention, such as the Unite the Right rally, or size, such as the Women's March and the March for Our Lives. The District has always been the site of First Amendment assemblies, but they have become more frequent over the past two years. Regardless of the type of event or its message, MPD's members work long hours to protect the constitutional rights of all participants and ensure that the District and event participants are safe.

MPD officers are also needed to address concerns related to homeland security and other emergencies. MPD plans extensively with local and federal partners to prepare for any threat or contingency. We provide training to groups to prepare for active threats. We work year round with our communities that are possible targets of attacks, and increase outreach when threats or anxiety rises. We also protect our neighborhoods during more mundane and frequent events, such as storms that topple trees and utility poles.

All of these activities take time and resources to prepare and respond. And too often, they might happen at the same time or rapid succession. For example, in 2017, the Women's March happened the day after the Inauguration, meaning most of our officers were working 12-hour shifts for multiple days in a row, which can be an exhausting pace, especially for an officer standing at a post for a parade or march. Later that week, our Special Operations Division also had to staff the annual March for Life. In June 2018, MPD officers were deployed outside of the Capital One Arena for five Washington Capitals' play-off games, followed by the championship parade. Three weeks later, MPD was fully deployed for the Fourth of July, and then supported the Major League Baseball All-Star Game a few days after the sold-out opening match at Audi Field. We prepare for events and emergencies, but we cannot plan them to meet our scheduling. MPD must be able to meet the needs of both our residents and the national city, at all times. The

District cannot afford to be complacent in its hiring of officers. And the bottom line is that failing to fund the Mayor's proposed budget will mean fewer MPD police officers serving and safeguarding the District, and greater pressure and overtime on current officers.

These factors support not just continued investment in hiring, but a continued commitment to the senior law enforcement program. Three years ago, the Council enacted legislation authorizing hiring Senior Sergeants and Detectives to help ensure the Department could maintain the expertise and leadership of those members while protecting public safety. The program allows the District to benefit from the 25 or more years of training and employment it has already invested in these employees. Without this program, other jurisdictions or the private sector would be hiring these sought-after sergeants and detectives.

However, under current law, Senior Sergeants and Detectives can only serve for three years from the date of hire. This premature sunset provision will launch another retirement bubble and deprive the Department and the city of their experienced leadership and investigations. Over the course of FY20, the Department will lose the services of more than 60 senior detectives and sergeants. This is roughly as many separations at these ranks as we had in FY17 and FY18 combined. Keep in mind, we will continue to see regular attrition of our veteran sergeants and detectives.

Since this law was enacted, MPD has continued to use the civil service promotional process to work to fill these positions. In the past 15 months, MPD has promoted 77 sergeants and 30 detectives (grade 1). It is imperative that District law be amended to postpone this sunset provision for an additional two years before the affected employees begin to look for other positions. During this time, MPD will continue to promote officers to sergeants and detectives through the civil service promotional process. The loss of more than 60 experienced officers due to an unnecessary and unwise sunset provision can easily be avoided. We hope Council will act on the Mayor's proposal to retain the critical service of these dedicated officers.

* * *

Mayor Bowser's strong support for investments in public safety continues with the FY20 budget and its support for MPD staffing. FY17 was the first year that MPD had net positive hiring since FY13, and it continued in FY18. The Department currently has 97 more sworn officers than at the end of FY16. The Mayor's investments in staffing, recruitment and retention incentives, and civilianization over the past four years have helped to ensure that we have sufficient officers on the street, which continues with the FY20 budget. In fact, Mayor Bowser and I have committed that the new officers will all be deployed to patrol on foot, bike, or scooter. I know that it is easier for police to get to know the community – and vice versa – when officers are out of their cars, walking and biking in neighborhoods.

- The FY20 budget continues to invest in current officers with a student loan forgiveness program. Since FY16, more than 230 officers have taken advantage of the program, in exchange for a commitment to stay with the Department for three or four more years. Mayor Bowser's FY20 budget invests \$600,000 in this program, which provides up to \$12,500 in student loan forgiveness to eligible MPD officers.
- The FY20 budget continues funding for eligible new recruits to receive a housing allowance of \$1,000 per month for six months so they can live in the District and deepen their knowledge and experience with the communities they serve. Since FY18, 37 recruits have received this incentive to live in the District. The FY20 budget includes \$200,000 in funding for this program.
- The budget fully funds the Police Cadet Program at 100 cadets. The Police Cadet Corps helps ensure that a steady stream of DC residents have a viable pathway to the middle class through a career as an MPD officer. The program provides for graduates of District high schools to obtain up to 60 college credits through the University of the District of Columbia Community College while working part-time at MPD.

Since FY15, 31 cadets have become recruit officers. In the past four years, the Cadet Program has more than quadrupled, growing from 16 cadets in FY14 to 76 cadets today. In FY19, we received funding to expand the program to 100 cadets. We have already hired 21 cadets this year.

Our current cadets come from neighborhoods around the city. Almost 40 percent of our cadets are women, which is a great asset to MPD. Currently, 22 percent of MPD's sworn officers are women, significantly higher than the national average of 13 percent. But I believe we can continue to recruit strong female candidates to serve their community in law enforcement. Our cadets will help us to get there.

* * *

In addition to investing in MPD staffing, the budget also takes the important step of moving the District's Automated Traffic Enforcement program from MPD to the Department of Transportation (DDOT). Under MPD's leadership for the past two decades, automated traffic enforcement has helped to improve safety on our roads by deterring speeding and red light and stop sign running. During that time, our traffic fatalities have been cut in half, from a high of 72 in 2000 to 36 last year.

Automated traffic enforcement has played an important role in this decrease, but we believe the resource can be better leveraged if it is combined with DDOT's focus on engineering and education. Residents will have a one stop shop for reporting concerns about roads in the District. Where appropriate, DDOT will be better able to deploy cameras to immediately address a traffic

safety issue, while determining whether an engineering solution is a better long-term remedy. We will, of course, continue to work closely with DDOT on education campaigns and to ensure that our Traffic Safety Branch focuses on the most dangerous intersections and roads. This shift in resources from MPD to DDOT will better support Vision Zero and safer roads for all.

* * *

In closing, I recognize that there are many competing priorities in budgeting for a safer and stronger District of Columbia. However, it is clear that having a safe city makes all our other progress possible. The Mayor's investments in MPD will contribute to a strong Department and safer city. The Council and this Committee are critical partners in this effort, and I appreciate our partnership to achieve our shared goals.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. I welcome your questions at this time.