

GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
Metropolitan Police Department



Fiscal Year 2022 Budget Oversight Hearing

Testimony of
Robert J. Contee III
Chief of Police

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

Virtual Hearing
June 10, 2021



It is the mission of the Metropolitan Police Department to safeguard the District of Columbia and protect its residents and visitors with the highest regard for the sanctity of human life.

We will strive at all times to accomplish our mission with a focus on service, integrity, and fairness by upholding our city's motto, Justitia Omnibus -- Justice for All.

Good afternoon, Chairperson Allen, members and staff of the Committee on the Judiciary and Public Safety, and everyone watching this hearing remotely. In May, Mayor Muriel Bowser presented “A Fair Shot,” the Fiscal Year 2022 (FY22) Budget and Financial Plan for the District. The FY22 budget leverages federal funding to invest in the full recovery of the District from the financial impacts of the global COVID-19 pandemic. I am pleased to provide testimony today on Mayor Bowser’s FY22 budget for the Metropolitan Police Department (MPD).

Over the past 18 months, our residents and our police department have faced critical challenges to our health and safety from the global pandemic and a rising tide of gun violence. Each of these have left scars on our families, colleagues, and communities. Working together we have been able to begin to turn the tide against COVID-19 and to resume activity in our vibrant city. Mayor Bowser’s budget makes investments to bring the same level of focus to gun violence. MPD is an essential element of making our city safer, and the investments in our budget are necessary to combat this gun violence.

The Mayor’s FY22 budget for MPD provides funding of \$514 million, a reduction of almost 6 percent from the approved FY21 budget. As always, most of MPD’s local budget, or about nine out of every ten dollars, is for personal services (PS). The remaining 10 percent of the budget, approximately \$52.5 million, covers a variety of Nonpersonal Services (NPS) costs, 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, about \$1 million, or two-tenths of one percent (0.2%), is not tied up in salaries, benefits, and major contracts and vital programmatic spending. This covers a wide variety of small but necessary operating expenditures, such as language access interpretation and translation services, stenographers, and subscriptions to legal databases.

Mayor Bowser’s priority for ensuring sufficient police service to the city is for MPD to be able to hire as many officers as possible to offset the drastic drop in staffing this year. Nevertheless, we expect attrition to continue to outpace hiring because the recruiting and hiring processes had to be shut down this year. We do not anticipate being able to resume hiring until April of 2022. The result of the FY21 budget cuts will be a net loss of more than 200 sworn members, to approximately 3,570 sworn members at the end of this September. And because of the time necessary to refill the hiring pipeline, plus the intense competition for qualified recruits, the best case scenario is that we will end FY22 with around 3,460 police officers – the smallest police force our growing city has had in more than two decades.

This funding is essential to stabilize staffing so that by FY23, we can resume sending new officers to patrol, backfilling the vacancies. For most of the next 18 months, we will be steadily losing officers from patrol. How will this impact our community? Based on data from the Office of Unified Communications (OUC), we are already seeing increased response time to calls for service. While there may be other factors contributing to this, we know that calls for MPD service declined 14 percent in 2020. In the meantime, since 2019, the average response time to Priority One calls, the highest priority for serious crimes, has already increased more than a minute, from just over five minutes to now more than six minutes. If a resident calls 911 with a Priority Two issue – such as a burglary that is not in progress – they will be waiting more than eight minutes for police response—almost three minutes more than two years ago. Response time to Priority Three calls, such as reporting a stolen vehicle, has increased by more than a third, to an average of 12 minutes, 30 seconds.

In addition to basic patrol functions, our other operational functions are also jeopardized. Although we need to respond to calls for service, we also need to continue to have strong criminal investigations, internal investigations, training, and special community liaisons. The Department has experimented in the past with decentralizing functions or trying to make everyone be experts – such as decentralizing homicide investigations and folding the Force Investigation Teams into the rest of Internal Affairs. Ultimately, these efforts were not successful as homicide closure rates suffered and we saw diminished quality of investigations. We need to continue to have the resources to staff, train, and supervise specialized functions.

Though the staffing forecast is concerning, there is some good news. Last month, our first recruit class staffed entirely with graduates of the Cadet Program started at the Academy. As a former MPD cadet, I firmly believe the Department’s cadet program represents the future in policing. We want police officers who come from our neighborhoods and understand our communities. More than half of the current cadets are women and 98 percent are persons of color. Current cadets represent all eight wards, with more than half from Wards 7 and 8. They have graduated from 33 different high schools in the District. Ninety-nine percent of cadets who graduated the police academy since FY15 are still with MPD.

Under Mayor Bowser’s leadership, the program has grown from fewer than 20 cadets in 2015 to 100 cadets in FY21. To continue to ensure good DC jobs for our DC residents, Mayor Bowser’s FY22 budget doubles the number of cadet positions, from 100 to 200 cadets. With this investment, MPD will be able to work toward increasing the proportion of MPD officers who are from and live in the District.

Mayor Bowser’s budget also makes critical investments in key initiatives for the Department.

- It supports victims of crime with technology to allow MPD to provide automated case status updates. (\$300,000)

- The budget supports Officer Mental Health Resources through one FTE to coordinate mental health wellness programs and opportunities for members, as well two additional staff persons for the employee assistance program. (\$437,000)
- The Mayor invests in accountability through Benchmark Analytics, an early intervention system that uses predictive models to identify potentially problematic officer behavior, rather than relying on a system where officers don't cross the threshold for an intervention until after events have occurred. (\$300,000)
- The Mayor's budget supports community policing and innovation with a pilot program of 60 e-bikes to be used by our mountain bike teams. (\$120,000)
- The Mayor supports enhancing MPD's services to individuals in our community with acute behavioral or mental health needs by leveraging federal funds to support the hiring of a coordinator for MPD's programs and partnerships with the Department of Behavioral Health. (\$152,000)
- Lastly, the budget invests in efficiency and infrastructure with report transcription technology to support patrol report writing in the field (\$150,000), lactation pods for MPD employees who are nursing (\$203,000), and a camera system for prisoner transport vans (\$265,000).

Because policing is only one part of Mayor Bowser's citywide public safety plan, her proposed budget also makes unprecedented investments in violence prevention programs and alternatives to police responses. City Administrator Kevin Donahue, Deputy Mayor Chris Geldart, Director Del McFadden, and Gun Violence Prevention Director Linda Harlee Harper have provided details about investments in Building Blocks DC, the Office of Neighborhood Safety and Engagement, and other agencies and programs.

The Mayor's budget also continues her initiative to get the right government response to non-critical 911 callers. The Sobering Center pilot allows first responders to direct patients who are intoxicated, but not in need of emergency care, away from hospital emergency rooms and towards a more appropriate course of care for their medical needs. The Sobering Center will be staffed by health care experts who can monitor the patients' needs and lessen the demand load at our local hospital emergency rooms. The Administration is also launching pilots to enhance responses from the Departments of Transportation, Public Works, and Behavioral Health to 911 calls that previously would have been dispatched solely to MPD. MPD has worked with these agencies and the Office of Unified Communications to help define the pilots and will of course remain ready to respond if a member of the public or a colleague in a partner agency needs assistance. I am encouraged by the work to enhance citywide response to our communities and appreciate the partnership from our fellow agencies. We are looking forward to further development of these pilots in FY22.

Lastly, the budget makes two key capital investments. One, it would fund the construction of a new police station in Ward 8 to replace the outdated Seventh District's building. This is essential

for the health and safety of employees, as the building is deteriorating and plagued with issues such as mold and infestations. It is also a good investment for the community, which will be able to use a modernized facility, much as the community is able to make use of our other renovated stations in the First and Sixth Police Districts.

The second capital investment is to purchase a new helicopter. Both of MPD's helicopters are at or near the end of their useful life. One has nearly twice as many flight hours as the maximum recommended by an analysis performed for the U.S. Park Police. The Mayor's budget would fund a replacement for the 20-year old helicopter with a new model that provides enhanced safety features, ensuring the safety of its operators and the availability of this critical tool for District residents.

* * *

In closing, I recognize that there are many competing priorities in budgeting for the District of Columbia. However, a safe city makes all other progress possible. Mayor Bowser's funding for MPD is just one investment that will contribute to a safer stronger city, but it is an essential one. We urge your full support of the Mayor's proposed budget for MPD.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. I am available to answer your questions.