

GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
Metropolitan Police Department



Budget Oversight Hearing on the
Metropolitan Police Department

Testimony of
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Chief of Police

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

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John A. Wilson Building, Room 500



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).

Two weeks ago, Mayor Muriel Bowser presented her Fiscal Year 2026 (FY26) Budget and Financial Plan for the District of Columbia, *Grow DC*. Mayor Bowser knows that a safe DC is necessary for a strong DC, so her FY26 budget continues her steadfast commitment to public safety in the District of Columbia. At a time when difficult decisions are being made, I appreciate that Mayor Bowser's budget ensures MPD will be able to continue full operations, including recruiting and hiring new officers, deploying technology to help combat and deter crime, and purchasing critical equipment to keep officers safe. Today I will brief you on the Mayor's FY26 budget for MPD, and how it supports our shared goal to have a safe city for all our residents and visitors.

Public Safety Update

To begin, I would like to provide a brief update on crime. When I testified at MPD's performance hearing, I was pleased to report a 35 percent reduction in violent crime in 2024 when compared to 2023. Now I can report that we have a 22 percent reduction in violent crime¹ for 2025 to date, on top of last year's reduction. In addition, property crime² is down 4 percent, on top of an 11 percent decrease in 2024. Overall crime is down 6 percent, on top of the 15 percent last year. It is challenging to sustain large decreases in crime in consecutive years, so I am grateful for MPD's dedicated sworn and professional staff, who bring their passion for DC and for policing every day, helping to bring down crime.

But as always, there is room for continued progress. Although there has been a 22 percent reduction in people wounded by gunfire this year, tragically a greater proportion of the shootings have been fatal, increasing from one in five shootings being fatal last year, to about one in four this year. I am especially concerned that this year, more of the victims are youth, rising from 10 percent last year to 15 percent so far in 2025.³ This rise in victimization seems to mirror an increase in antisocial behavior from youth this spring. The behavior runs the spectrum from disorderly crowds and fights to carrying guns and committing armed assaults. In fact, I think one of the reasons we are seeing more shootings recently is because more juveniles are illegally carrying guns. In addition to a range of law enforcement and criminal justice responses, MPD has increased resources in key areas where youth have been gathering, such as Navy Yard, the Wharf, and U Street. We have also continued our very successful programs to combat crime from last year, including THRIVE, ATLAS, and the Robbery Suppression Initiative.

We know that law enforcement is not acting alone in this arena. As DC leaders, the challenge for all of us is to find ways both to protect youth in our city and prevent them from endangering others. MPD and our partners have planned many ways to engage youth throughout the summer.

¹ DC Code index violent crime includes homicide, sex abuse, assaults with a dangerous weapon, and robbery. Data is through June 8, as of June 9, 2025.

² DC Code Index Property Crime includes burglary, motor vehicle theft, theft from auto, and other theft.

³ Data on shootings through May 29th each year.

MPD is launching a new Badger Bear Camp, which will engage 12 youth aged eight to 11 years old, to participate in outdoor adventures, creative activities, and cultivate a love for learning and nature, all while building relationships with other campers, Officer Friendly, and Badger Bear. DC's Marion Barry Summer Youth Employment Program, which employs approximately 12,000 youth each summer, provides work experience and life skills training to help foster success for DC youth, now through adulthood. MPD alone will hire more than 60 youth to support MPD's community outreach, Junior Police Academy, and Stars Summer Camp.

In addition, every Friday from June 6th through August 22nd, MPD and the Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR) will host a Beat the Streets and Late Night Hype event at rec centers across the city. More than 9,600 community members of all ages are expected to come together over the summer to enjoy musical performances from local bands and artists, dancing, free food, local vendors, and information on government and community services.

These are great ways to engage youth to reduce at-risk behavior. But unfortunately, sometimes engagement activities alone are not enough. Asking parents and guardians to keep their kids at home isn't enough. Waiting until midnight to start curfew hours – when nearly half of all violent crimes committed against youth happen from 6 p.m. to 11 p.m. – isn't enough. That is why Mayor Bowser is considering options to strengthen curfew laws in DC to allow for greater flexibility to address emerging or urgent public safety risks.

Although public safety in DC is still heading in the right direction, we cannot be complacent. While there is still gunfire in our neighborhoods and cars stolen from our streets, I will not be satisfied. I have spoken with all members of the Council and know we share a vision for a city where people are safe and feel safe. We are not there yet, but we are continuing to make progress. As I will outline here, Mayor Bowser's FY26 budget provides critical investments so that next year we can build upon this progress for all residents of and visitors to this thriving, vibrant city I am proud to call home.

FY26 Budget Overview

The Mayor's FY26 operating budget for MPD provides funding of approximately \$601 million, an increase of 5 percent from the approved FY25 budget. As always, most of MPD's local budget, or about nine out of every 10 dollars, is for people, otherwise known as the Personal Services (PS) budget. The remaining local budget (\$56 million) covers a variety of Nonpersonal Services (NPS) costs, including recruiting and retention efforts, specialized law enforcement purchases, such as uniforms and ammunition, and contracts for the Police and Fire Clinic, fleet maintenance, and information technology. Of the local budget, only about \$1.9 million – or just one-third of 1 percent (0.33 percent) – is not already committed to salaries, benefits, major contracts, and vital programmatic spending. This fraction of a percent covers a wide variety of small but necessary operating expenditures, such as language access interpretation and translation services, promotional testing, and subscriptions to legal databases. The Mayor's FY26 budget supports MPD's mission with critical investments in people, crime-fighting technology, and essential safety equipment.

Investing in People

MPD's top priority remains hiring and retaining dedicated and talented sworn officers. Mayor Bowser's budget will enable MPD to hire as many officers as we believe we can, with a projected total of 3,244 sworn members in September 2026. But we need Council support to reach our aggressive goals. With 3,189 sworn members right now, MPD continues to operate at the lowest sworn staffing level in more than 50 years.⁴ At the end of FY24, it appeared that staffing was beginning to turn around. In FY24, the number of new recruits hired increased 12 percent, and MPD reached a 10-year low in sworn separations. MPD's cadet program is also growing into the strong recruiting pipeline we envision. In FY24, 30 cadets rolled over to become recruits, and 21 have already rolled over this year. However, progress has slowed this year. Although sworn separations have remained at the same low rate as last year, recruit hires have dropped, despite recruiting strategies that are recognized as among the best in the nation.

The local and national competition for recruits is fierce, and DC's requirement to have 60 college credits before being hired as a police recruit puts DC at a disadvantage. Few state and local agencies require similar levels of education. This Committee is considering an alternative proposal that will allow recruits to earn those credits through the MPD Academy. This does not eliminate the requirement, and recruits would still need to complete all other requirements, including passing an entrance exam. However, if the legislation is passed, recruits would be able to earn some of those credits while at the Academy through colleges that have agreed to grant credits for successful completion of MPD's comprehensive recruit curriculum. Recruits would still have 60-credit hours before leaving the Academy and being deployed in patrol.

Preliminary agreements from two accredited colleges to grant credit hours for MPD coursework demonstrate that MPD's recruit academy prepares officers to work in and serve DC well, which is the goal of the college requirement. The District should leverage the investments and improvements in MPD's training academy by providing alternative ways to reach the 60-credit hour requirement, enabling MPD to recruit more people to become police officers. I would like to thank you, Committee Chair Pinto, for championing this important effort on our behalf. I appreciate your steadfast commitment to public safety, and to supporting MPD so that we are in a position to succeed in our mission.

It is important to note that this change would not eliminate the need for the MPD Cadet Program. Cadets could not participate in this program until they are at least 20.5 years old, the minimum age for entering MPD's recruit academy. The Cadet Program is still needed as part of a comprehensive effort to help young DC residents succeed in a career as a police officer. It begins with the Junior Police Academy and continues with the part-time Cadet Corps High School Program, which is designed to prepare them for entrance into the full-time Cadet Corps. This creates a pathway for success for DC youth and a strong recruiting pipeline for MPD.

I would also like to briefly highlight a new mentoring program at MPD launching in July that demonstrates our commitment to fostering a lifetime of personal development. I believe it is truly never too late to develop new work or life skills. The mentoring program pairs sworn and

⁴ All current staffing figures as of May 31, 2025. Historical figures available at <https://mpdc.dc.gov/node/1653316>.

professional staff with experienced MPD members to foster an environment for growth and a culture of leadership. These relationships can promote professional development, encourage positive mental health, and assist members as they navigate their career. The program is also expected to support retention efforts by improving morale through positive engagement.

Investing in Crime-Fighting Technology and Safety Equipment

Strategic investments in technology will help make our crime-fighting efforts more effective and efficient. Mayor Bowser's FY26 budget demonstrates her steadfast commitment to these investments that will make our communities safer.

Closed-circuit television cameras (CCTVs) and license plate readers (LPRs) are a force multiplier for public safety, allowing MPD to provide real-time information to responding officers. Cameras also support better investigations and prosecutions and deter crime. Last year, Mayor Bowser launched a multi-year effort to expand MPD's CCTV capacity. We are currently awaiting delivery on 100 new CCTVs, and 100 additional are pending award. The Mayor's FY26 capital budget will enable MPD to purchase 234 cameras, bringing the total deployed by the end of next year to 854 CCTVs.⁵ The FY26 capital budget also funds the purchase of 50 new LPRs, which are used to help locate missing persons, carjacked or stolen vehicles, and vehicles used in violent crime. They also help in the deployment of resources for special events and motorcades.

In addition, MPD is testing a new way to procure and use CCTV cameras and LPRs, through Software as a Service (SAAS). This allows MPD to essentially rent the equipment through the operating budget, instead of purchasing with capital funding. We expect these will be especially useful to deploy for large scale events. However, the equipment available through SAAS does not have all the same functionality as the equipment we own, so it would not replace our current inventory.

The FY26 budget funds an expansion of MPD's drone program, with the purchase of five indoor and six outdoor drones. The indoor drones are needed for use in barricades and other life safety missions. The additional outdoor drones are needed to ensure equipment is available for operations and training, even when some are out of service for maintenance or repairs.

The FY26 budget also invests in what we might call different types of transportation to support police operations in a variety of scenarios. First, the budget contains the annual routine investment in replacement vehicles, including 240 marked and unmarked cruisers, 210 mountain bikes, and 23 motorcycles. Our mountain bike units are a vital resource on patrol in our neighborhoods and during critical incidents, and are popular in the community. The budget will also allow MPD to revive its Mounted Horse Unit. Horses are particularly useful during events with large crowds as they provide a higher viewing point for the rider, whether on the periphery or in the middle of the crowd.

The budget provides funding to replace 20-year-old vehicles that are critical to MPD capacity to protect the city during emergency situations: an Armored Personnel Carrier, a Bomb Response

⁵ Future numbers are estimates only. Actual purchases may vary depending on supply chains, tariffs, and other factors.

Vehicle, and a Total Containment Vessel. In critical situations, the Armored Personnel Carrier safely moves the emergency response team, while the Bomb Response Vehicle transports equipment, bomb technicians, and the bomb robot. The Total Containment Vessel is used to safely detonate explosive devices or transport suspected explosive devices to a safer location for disposal. These investments help to keep the city and the police force safe during high-risk situations.

In addition to replacing these aging safety vehicles, we must also replace critical safety gear for our officers. These necessary investments include response equipment that has reached the end of its lifecycle and is no longer funded by federal grants. This includes HAZMAT suits, breathing apparatus, and ballistic shields. These items are essential for keeping our officers safe so that they can protect our residents and visitors.

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In addition to the funding that I've highlighted, the *Fiscal Year 2026 Budget Support Act of 2025* (BSA) includes a provision to support greater efficiency in handling fingerprinting and FBI background checks. MPD processes about 25,000 sets of fingerprints a year for individuals needing a criminal background check for a variety of reasons, such as licenses for security personnel, teachers, home health aides, or limousine operators. Since the demand for the service is not steady throughout the year, staffing for peak periods can be challenging and may result in longer lead times to schedule an appointment.

This BSA provision will enable MPD to apply to the FBI for authority to address this challenge in two ways. First, it would allow those needing this service to use a private channeler if they wish. Channelers are approved by the FBI to take fingerprints, electronically submit them to the FBI, and receive the results to give them to the individual. Once the FBI approves MPD to use a channeler, individuals applying for the relevant licenses will be able to choose from multiple locations to get their fingerprints taken, or they could still come to MPD for the service. Second, some applicants may choose to be enrolled in the Rap Back program, which allows for the continuous monitoring of individuals who have undergone a background check. This service eliminates the need for repeated fingerprinting with every license renewal, saving the applicant time and money. The Rap Back program also protects the public by more quickly identifying potentially disqualifying arrests—especially those that occur in other jurisdictions. Multiple agencies and industries have asked for this opportunity to help streamline their administrative processes. I encourage the Council to support this provision.

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In closing, I would like to thank you for the opportunity to present Mayor Bowser's FY26 budget for the Metropolitan Police Department. Needless to say, this has been a unique budget season so far. I know that Mayor Bowser has had to make tough choices, and that the Council is now faced with the same situation. The funding for MPD in the Mayor's budget is critical so that we can continue the significant progress we have made in the past two years. As we know, a safe city makes all other progress possible. Therefore, I strongly urge this Committee and the Council to fully support MPD's FY26 budget.