

**GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA**  
*Metropolitan Police Department*



Gun Violence Prevention and Reduction Initiatives in the District,  
Including Building Blocks D.C. Hearing

Testimony of  
*Robert J. Contee III*  
Chief of Police

Before the  
Committee on the Judiciary & Public Safety and  
the Committee on Housing & Executive Administration  
Charles Allen, Chairperson  
Anita Bonds, Chairperson  
Council of the District of Columbia

Virtual Hearing  
July 29, 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.*

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Good morning, Chairperson Allen, Chairperson Bonds, members and staff of the Committees, and everyone watching this hearing remotely. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today regarding the critical topic of gun violence prevention in the District of Columbia. Deputy Mayor Geldart talked about some of the recent violence in our communities. I believe we all agree that this is unacceptable, and I ask that you join with me to help safeguard the residents of our city who are sick and tired of the ongoing violence throughout our neighborhoods.

Mayor Bowser has made extensive investments in violence prevention programs through Building Blocks DC, the Office of Neighborhood Safety and Engagement, and other important programs. She has authorized me to use any overtime necessary to meet the public safety needs of the city, which I appreciate. But the Mayor also recognizes that we cannot continue to overburden our officers who have already worked more overtime this year than is healthy because of unrest dating back to last summer, through the January 6<sup>th</sup> insurrection, the inauguration, and other times requiring heightened security and preparation. Overtime may be a necessary tool, but it is no substitute for a well-rested, fully trained, and stable workforce. In the past couple of weeks, I challenged my staff to take a new look at our recruiting processes and pipeline to see if we could hire any sooner. In response to these efforts, the Mayor will be sending to the Council a supplemental budget request for additional funding that will hire 20 officers before the end of Fiscal Year 2021 (FY21), and 150 additional in FY22. The request includes approximately \$121,000 for salaries and benefits this fiscal year, plus \$8.3 million next year. It also includes \$2.7 million in non-personal services such as retention and recruitment incentives, marketing, uniforms, and clinic and wellness costs. I want to thank Mayor Bowser for responding so decisively to the concerns of our community and our police force and urge the Council to support this request. We can and must continue to invest in violence prevention, but it has not supplanted the need for police to safeguard our communities and hold offenders accountable.

We heard a lot of speculation over the past year that police do not prevent crime. That is absolutely incorrect. Every day, community members share information with police that helps us to help people and to prevent crime. But we must recognize that while Building Blocks, the ONSEs team, MPD, and many other District agencies can help individuals to choose a different path in life, some people will not choose a different path. And for those that still choose to commit violence, who hurt our community, we must hold them accountable. And make no mistake, accountability helps to prevent the *next* crime. Every time we get a violent offender off the street, we are preventing them from committing more violence in our community. Yesterday's arrest of the suspect in the shooting death of 6-year-old Nyiah Courtney will not bring her back to us, but it will help to protect other children and adults in our neighborhoods. It will also send a message to others who may not be ready to choose a more peaceful path that they should reconsider. They should think about taking advantage of the help that is offered, the opportunities for training or housing support. Above all, they should put down their guns,

because I promise you, MPD will not rest while we still have people brazenly shooting in our communities.

In the past few months, you've no doubt heard me speak about my goal to be more strategic about getting the right guns out of the wrong hands. This included shifting resources to focus on an intelligence-based policing approach to identify, interdict, and interrupt violent offenders within the District. The goal is to build strong criminal cases on offenders and groups to ensure those repeat offenders cannot continue to endanger our communities. This work of MPD's Violence Reduction Unit, in partnership with the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives (ATF), the Drug Enforcement Administration, and US Attorney's Office, led to yesterday's announcement of the indictment of 13 individuals on federal charges stemming from a drug trafficking network that sold cocaine, crack cocaine, Fentanyl, PCP, and other drugs.

The NIBIN Investigations Unit (NIU), another intelligence-based policing effort, was announced last week. This partnership with the ATF and USAO will help investigate and prosecute non-fatal shootings and violent gun offenders in the District. The NIU will consist of a dedicated team of MPD Detectives, ATF Special Agents, ATF Intelligence Analysts, and an Assistant U.S. Attorney focused on investigating leads generated by ATF's National Integrated Ballistic Information Network (NIBIN). NIBIN is a proven investigative and intelligence tool that can link firearms from multiple crime scenes, allowing law enforcement to identify, investigate, and prosecute the trigger-pullers who terrorize our neighborhoods. Removing shooters from DC's streets is a necessary step in breaking the cycle of violence gripping our communities.

Last week, MPD also launched the new Community Focused Patrol Unit. This data-driven patrol unit has been deployed to supplement MPD's existing patrol districts in areas of the city that are experiencing higher volumes of criminal activity, emerging crime trends, and/or significant events. The Community Focused Patrol Unit are primarily deployed on mountain bikes and scooters. The unit will operate at specific times and areas identified based on analysis of violent crime from the last 14 days of this year, and the next 14 days of the previous year. The initial deployment focuses on Columbia Heights/Parkwood, Washington Highlands, and Bloomingdale. Using data to ensure officers are deployed strategically allows for more focused violent crime prevention.

The unit is comprised of three squads, each led by one sergeant with eight officers. They are mobile and can easily move and be redeployed citywide throughout their tour of duty to address critical incidents and emerging crime trends. This unit will increase the visibility of officers throughout the neighborhoods most affected by violent crime and reinforce the Department's priorities of directly engaging with the communities we serve every day. Crime is not tied to geographical boundaries of wards, districts, PSAs, ANCs or any other artificial structure. Having officers on mountain bikes and scooters maximizes the opportunity for community engagement and communication with residents in our neighborhoods.

Lastly, MPD is conducting the 13<sup>th</sup> annual Summer Crime Initiative. Throughout the summer months, MPD will focus available resources, incorporate the latest technology, and call upon partner agencies and organizations to assist in a coordinated effort to reduce violent crime in these areas. To identify the SCIs each year, MPD focuses on areas in the city with elevated levels

gun violence. This year, the SCIs are in Potomac Gardens, Rosedale/Langston Carver, Greenway/Fort Dupont, Marshall Heights/Benning Ridge, Douglass/Shiple, and Washington Highlands. For each area, MPD dedicates a captain to manage resource deployment, facilitate community engagement and outreach activities, and work closely with partners. Our team incorporates crime and investigative analysis to track and address crimes in near real-time. Historically, the SCIs produce results, with violent crime reductions ranging from nearly 15 percent to more than 35 percent. So far this year, violent crime is down 17 percent in the SCIs, and homicides are down 25 percent.

In addition to focused law enforcement efforts, I have made a commitment to public service in our community. Every MPD bureau must be in our community, engaging with our residents. So far, these have resulted in efforts such as:

- MPD partnering with a local non-profit agency to outfit over 400 people including homeless and youth with shoes and essential items.
- 100 Blocks in 100 Days: The Fourth District is focused on going out to 100 blocks to directly engage with and introduce themselves to the community.
- Green Team Keeping it Clean Initiative: MPD is leading neighborhood beautification projects (including tree trimming, trash-clean ups, etc.) in several communities across the city.
- A calendar full of our popular “Beat the Streets” events in neighborhoods all across our beautiful city. You are certainly invited to come out and enjoy our event with community members.

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In closing, I want the community to know the Metropolitan Police Department stands with them and will work to hold perpetrators of this ongoing violent crime accountable. I look forward to continuing to work with our communities, our agency partners, and your Committees on the shared goal of improving public safety in the District.

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