

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



Testimony of  
Peter Newsham  
Acting Chief of Police

***Public Hearing on PR22-0144,  
Chief of the Metropolitan Police Department  
Peter Newsham Confirmation Resolution of 2017***

Committee on the Judiciary & Public Safety  
Charles Allen, Chair

March 24, 2017  
Room 500  
John A. Wilson Building  
1350 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW  
Washington, DC 20004



Good afternoon, Chairperson Allen, members and staff of the Committee, other Councilmembers, and guests. It is my honor to be here today as Mayor Muriel Bowser's nominee to lead the Metropolitan Police Department (MPD) – the finest police department in the country. Serving as the Chief of Police in the nation's capital is an extraordinary privilege. I want to thank Mayor Bowser for placing her faith in me after conducting a nationwide search. And I want you, Councilmember Allen, for moving quickly with a series of public hearings on my nomination.

I want to also thank the many residents of Washington, DC who participated today and at the two previous public hearings for sharing their views on my nomination. I am humbled and truly appreciate both those who expressed their support as well as those who have reservations about my nomination. I listened carefully to each witness and respect their views. I want them to know of my strong commitment to public safety and to fair, unbiased, and constitutional policing in the District of Columbia. If confirmed, my goal is to work collaboratively with all our residents in all seven police districts to make the District of Columbia the safest city in America.

Today, I want to talk to you about the personal and professional experiences that qualify me to be the Chief of Police. And I want to speak to you about my vision for moving the Department forward and building upon what we have already achieved.



Over the past 27 years, I've had the opportunity to work in many of the city's diverse and vibrant neighborhoods and communities. When I started with MPD in 1989, the District was in the very dark days of the crack epidemic. Our city was devastated by gangs, guns, and drugs, and for several years, 400 to 500 people were victims of homicide. Despite that, I considered myself fortunate to begin my career on patrol in the Sixth District, getting to know our residents and communities east of the Anacostia River. There, I learned firsthand how committed our residents are to supporting their neighbors, their neighborhoods, and good police officers. I then served in the Seventh District as a sergeant, the Fifth District as a lieutenant, and went back to the Sixth District as a captain. Those formative years in my career allowed me to develop friendships and partnerships with people in many of those neighborhoods – and I am grateful that those relationships remain strong to this very day.

In 2000, Chief Charles Ramsey promoted me to Commander of the Second District. The invaluable lesson that I learned from my service as the Commander was that regardless of where our residents live, they are all passionate about their police services, and they want their communities to be safe. I carry that lesson with me each day that I serve.

Two years after becoming commander – and only 13 years into my career with MPD – I was promoted to Assistant Chief. During the past 14 years serving as an Assistant Chief, I have gained essential experience in the breadth of operations of the Department. From 2002 to 2004, I served as Assistant Chief for the Office of Professional Responsibility. In 2004, I was assigned to the Regional Operations Command–North, where I was responsible for patrol operations for



the Second, Third, and Fourth Districts. In 2007, Chief Cathy Lanier reorganized the Department and asked me serve as Assistant Chief in charge of the Internal Affairs Bureau. I served in that position for two years until I was asked to lead the Investigative Services Bureau in 2009. Through this wide range of positions, I have been a leader over a range of MPD's critical functions, including patrol – which is the foundation of community policing, all aspects of criminal investigations, and the Department's programs to identify officer misconduct and investigate citizen complaints.

I believe one of the reasons Mayor Bowser selected me to be Chief was the leadership and innovation I demonstrated in the various positions I have held at MPD, including during my time serving as Interim Chief.

For instance, at the Office of Professional Responsibility, and later at Internal Affairs, I oversaw one of the most comprehensive changes implemented at MPD. In 2001, MPD entered into a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) with the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) on use of force reform. The Department's use of force practices in the 1990s were, quite frankly, embarrassing to us who wear the uniform. Our use of force practices hurt individuals, families, and the relationships we needed to build with communities we served. By implementing the reforms outlined in the MOA and successfully concluding the MOA process in 2008, we transformed MPD from a police department with a troubling record on use of force to a national model.

Furthermore, in 2015, the DC Auditor contracted with Michael Bromwich, the former Independent Monitor for the MOA, to evaluate whether the MOA reforms were still being followed at MPD. The findings of review confirmed that MPD continues to be a national leader in use of force practices and "remains committed to limiting and managing use of force – and to fair, unbiased and constitutional policing." The Bromwich report attributed the durability of the progress made since 2002 to the Department's leadership and embrace of the reforms. I'm proud to have worked with Chiefs Ramsey and Lanier as a leader in making institutional and systemic reforms throughout the Department and changing its practices and reputation.

My commitment to you and our residents is to continue to strengthen and build upon the progress that we have made, and to ensure that the Department is accountable for uses of force. Last fall, I gave a presentation at the Council-Mayor breakfast on MPD's use of force history. I have given the same presentation to community forums in all seven patrol districts and to the Mayor's Interfaith Council. My goal has been to educate our residents on MPD's history regarding use of force, and the different responsibilities of MPD and the USAO when conducting use of force investigations. It is essential that our community knows that all allegations of use of force are investigated thoroughly and impartially.

For another example, as Assistant Chief of the Investigative Services Bureau from 2009 to 2016, I focused on improving the Department's investigations so that victims would be treated with compassion and offenders would be held accountable. Working with a multi-disciplinary team, I helped launch the District's first forensic lab and am proud of how far it has come. I emphasized



the importance of investigating “cold cases” because we needed to provide victims’ families and communities with justice and closure. These and other changes, coupled with the strong support from a community willing to work with MPD, have helped to elevate MPD’s homicide closure rate well above that of comparable cities. Since 2009, MPD’s annual homicide clearance rate has been, on average, 23 percentage points higher than the benchmark average.<sup>1</sup>

Sexual assaults can have such a traumatic and lifetime impact on survivors, and police and the entire criminal justice system need to work to avoid causing further trauma to survivors. Because of this, I worked with advocates to modernize the way MPD conducts sexual assault investigations. I am proud that today, MPD has one of the strongest trauma-centered approaches in the country. We require our first responding officers to call a sexual assault detective to any scene where there may have been a sexual assault. To improve the investigation of cases, we increased training for sexual assault detectives and the Department as a whole. We also enhanced resources and services provided to survivors. And we conducted extensive public outreach to encourage the reporting of sexual assaults.

As Assistant Chief, I was also focused on improving the Department’s handling of domestic violence incidents and the service we provided to victims. Under my leadership, MPD worked with partners to launch the On-Call Advocacy Program (OCAP), which provides advocacy to victims immediately after an intra-family incident while police officers are still on the scene. Advocates provide immediate crisis intervention, help find shelter for victims, create a safety plan, make referrals, provide information about the legal system, educate the victim about the cycle of violence, and help the victim receive assistance from the Crime Victim’s Compensation Program. Today, this program serves the entire city and is available 24/7.

To help reduce the likelihood of lethal violence, I supported the implementation of an innovative strategy proposed to MPD by domestic violence advocates. The Lethality Assessment Program enhances the response for cases with a risk of resulting in a fatality. We established a protocol among social service agencies and community organizations to share information, discuss interventions, and deliver appropriate services immediately following the assessments. In high risk cases, an alert is sent out to various agencies to help safeguard the victim. The SAFE protocol – or Survivors for Advocates for Empowerment – requires that if no arrest can be made on the scene because the suspect has fled, detectives will continue to investigate on an expedited timeline and pursue a warrant with the U.S. Attorney’s Office.

These are just some examples of my philosophy on policing and of how I lead—by proactively working with the community, crime victims, advocates, experts, and other agencies to bring about improvements and change. This inclusive approach ensures that we can best serve and protect District residents. Leaders in law enforcement must be open to new ideas and evidence about what works in policing. We must also be open to questions and scrutiny about our policies

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<sup>1</sup> According to the standards and reporting of the Federal Bureau of Investigation’s Uniform Crime Reporting, based on data for cities with between 500,000 to 999,999 residents.



and practices, and I think I have demonstrated time and again that I am. My professional experiences at MPD over the past 27 years have provided me with an in-depth understanding of our city, an empathy for victims of crime, an understanding of our unique criminal justice system, and the needs of our personnel, both sworn and civilian. These almost three decades of experiences have prepared me to lead this great Department.



I want to now talk about my vision and goals for the Metropolitan Police Department. At its core, successful policing is always about the relationship between the community and the officers who serve it. My top two goals reflect this bedrock principle: MPD must have a strong relationship with our communities and our officers must feel satisfied in and committed to their work.

### *Community Trust*

The cornerstone of a successful police department is the relationship it has with the community it serves. MPD officers have a strong and positive relationship with the many communities that comprise our city. My top priority is to continue to build on that and to deepen it further. We will do that in a number of ways.

First, I will continue to deliver a message to all of our officers and recruits that the community's view of the Department depends on each interaction the members of our community have with every single officer. District residents are entitled to have a police department that is professional, responsive, empathetic, and, most importantly, trusted. When we put on the uniform, we must remember that each of us serves as the Department's ambassador to our residents, businesses, and visitors. Each interaction we have with the public should be remembered for its professionalism and helpfulness; one rude comment, one dismissive attitude, one unkind moment, and we have failed to meet our duty to our residents, our Department, and ourselves.

I am not so naïve to believe that we don't have a long way to go. The community's reaction to the Department's fatal shooting of Terrance Sterling underscored the need to keep working to build that trust. This is one of the reasons why I went to every police district in the city to share information about the Department's history with use of force, and how it is investigated now. Moving forward, the way we meet our duty is to ensure that our officers are regularly trained on how to provide fair, constitutional, and empathetic policing. That includes training on important issues like implicit bias and cultural competency. Our officers must reflect the values of our communities, and my job is to make sure that happens every day.

One of the ways we ensure our officers are accountable for their actions is through the body-worn camera (BWC) program. Our BWC program is intended to promote accountability and trust for every police interaction. The BWCs were fully deployed throughout patrol and some specialized units in December 2016. We are working with a team of behavioral scientists,



academics, and analysts to conduct the largest and most statistically-sound study ever completed on the effectiveness of body-worn cameras. Thanks to the support of the Mayor and Council, we are a national leader in the deployment and use of body-worn cameras.

As you all know, the District does not exist in a vacuum when it comes to national politics and its impact on our residents. Over the past several months, some of our most vulnerable communities have become fearful about their safety and whether our city will continue to protect them. I want to be absolutely clear that while the political leadership in our country may change, the commitment of the Metropolitan Police Department to protecting all of our community members will not change.

We are dedicated to serving and protecting every single resident in our city, regardless of race, religion, national origin, gender identity, sexual orientation, or residency status. These are DC values. These are MPD values. And these are my values. If you need us, we will be there to help you.

To better ensure our vulnerable communities understand our commitment to them, I moved MPD's Special Liaison Branch (SLB) directly under the Office of the Chief of Police. This has helped raise the profile of these constituencies in the Department and allows the liaison units to better coordinate across MPD bureaus. With new leadership and energy, SLB is already expanding its network, with additional outreach to the Muslim and Jewish communities, which, regrettably, have suffered an increase in hate crimes last year.

To fight against prejudice, bias, and hate, the Department has joined Mayor Bowser in emphasizing DC Values and in making it very clear that the District government, and in particular the police department, provides services to all our residents, regardless of when or how they got here. MPD's longstanding policy is that we do not ask individuals about their immigration or residency status. Immediately after the president's executive orders on immigration were issued, MPD issued guidance to our officers to make it very clear we had not changed our policy. We are distributing a flyer in multiple languages to our immigrant communities to reassure them that they can report crimes without fear, that our officers will help them, and that our officers will not ask about immigration status.

### *Employee Well-being*

My second top priority relates to our employees' well-being. The well-being and satisfaction of our officers and civilians goes hand-in-hand with better service to the community. You can't have one without the other. The well-being of MPD employees encompasses more than just their physical health. I want our employees to be healthy in body, mind, and spirit. I want the sworn and civilian members of MPD to feel proud of the work they do every single day, and I want them to know that their leadership and community members stand behind them. Over the last few months, I have made it a point to meet with as many of my sworn and civilian employees as I could. I held a series of meetings where I listened to their concerns and suggestions. From those meetings, I was able to learn that while the tone of the national conversation around law





enforcement has taken a toll on police, our officers and civilians remain dedicated to the job and optimistic about what we can continue to accomplish here in the District.

Our city is fortunate to have such a dedicated group of sworn and civilian employees. I think I speak for everyone when I say we are profoundly grateful for the brave and dedicated service of all employees of MPD.

### *Next Steps*

As a Department and a city, we have a number of challenges to face in the coming years. Although we have been very successful in driving down violent crime to its lowest level in a decade, some violent crime persists. Even one violent crime is one too many, especially if it happens to you, someone you know, or in your neighborhood. If confirmed as Chief of Police, I will work with all of our communities and this Council to continue to drive violent crime out of our city.

To do this, we must work together to get illegal guns out of the hands of offenders and get repeat violent offenders off our streets. A Crime Gun Intelligence Center (CGIC) is one innovative strategy we are pursuing to advance our current efforts. In September 2016, we received almost \$1 million from the Department of Justice to formalize and grow a multiagency local-federal partnership to reduce gun crime in the District. Partners include the Bureau of the Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms, the U.S. Attorney's Office, the District's Department of Forensic Science, and other local partners. The Center is helping to facilitate investigations and prosecutions involving multiple jurisdictions as well as data collection on crime guns. The Lab @ DC will be involved with an evaluation of the Center.

But while pursuing these goals, we must never lose sight of two things:

- First, we know we cannot simply arrest our way to a safer city. We must continue to identify better ways to address root causes and to divert from the criminal justice system low-level offenders suffering from mental health or substance abuse issues, or homelessness.
- Second, each and every one of our actions must be respectful of the rights and dignity of every person with whom we interact.

We must work to strengthen the Department from within. Like major city police departments around the country, we are working hard to hire more officers. I am optimistic about our ability to persuade the next generation that there is no better career in public service than law enforcement, and no better police department to join than MPD. We see real enthusiasm in the Public Safety Academy at Anacostia High School, where nearly 60 students are working toward a public service career in criminal justice. And that enthusiasm doesn't fade when they join MPD's Cadet Program. I am very proud of that program because it provides District high school graduates with a paid college education while working at MPD part-time. Once they obtain 60 college credits, they can become a full police recruit.



While we are recruiting and hiring new officers, we also want to make sure MPD works well for our current ones. I will be working with Mayor Bowser and our employees to identify and support improvements and investments in their well-being. Some issues will require long-term planning, while others I hope to be able to address more quickly. I will continue to share information with you as we move forward in identifying specific efforts.

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In closing, it is my distinct privilege to be nominated to serve as the Chief of Police of the Metropolitan Police Department of the District of Columbia. If confirmed, I look forward to working with you, Chairman Allen, all councilmembers, our communities, our local, regional, and federal partners, and MPD's dedicated employees so that we can, collectively, support a vibrant, safer, stronger DC.

By working together will we make MPD a national model for fair, unbiased, and effective policing. Under my leadership, the members of MPD will carry this simple phrase with them every day, on every call for service: "We are here to help."

Thank you for this opportunity to testify on behalf of my nomination. I welcome any questions you may have.

