

GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
METROPOLITAN POLICE DEPARTMENT



Public Oversight Roundtable on
Policing and Public Safety in Wards 7 and 8

Testimony of
Chief Peter Newsham

Before the
Committee on Judiciary & Public Safety
Councilmember Charles Allen, Chairperson

Hearing Room 412
John A. Wilson Building
1350 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20004

9:30 am
July 12, 2018



Good morning, Chairman Allen, members and staff of the Committee, and guests. I appreciate the opportunity to open up this hearing on policing and public safety in Wards 7 and 8, or the Sixth and Seventh Police Districts. With me are Chanel Dickerson, Assistant Chief for Patrol Services South, which includes the First, Sixth, and Seventh Police Districts, and Robert Contee, Assistant Chief of the Investigative Services Bureau.

You may not know this, but when I joined the police department in 1989, my first assignment was as a patrol officer in the Sixth District. A few years later when I was promoted to Sergeant, I was assigned as a patrol sergeant in the Seventh District. In the late 80s and early 90s, Washington, DC was at the height of the crack epidemic, and my earliest experience as a police officer was patrolling the neighborhoods that make up Wards 7 and 8. That was an extremely violent time in our city, and I personally witnessed that violence, and was able to get a firsthand view of how that violent crime impacted not only individuals who were the victims of violence but their families and entire communities. The wake of unimaginable trauma left behind by that violence is something that I will never forget. That experience is what drives me today to do everything I possibly can to reduce violent crime in our city.

And while over the years we have been very successful in reducing violent crime across the city, Wards 7 and 8 still continue to shoulder the greatest proportion of violent crime. You have heard me say this before, and you will hear me say it again: the biggest drivers of violence in our city and particularly in the Sixth and the Seventh Districts are illegal firearms and repeat violent offenders. These have been the top two violent crime priority areas for the Metropolitan Police Department since I was appointed the Chief.

The men and women of the Metropolitan Police Department have accepted this challenge, and have been more than willing to take on this extremely dangerous and difficult mandate. Our police officers on countless occasions have chosen to place themselves between the community and the illegal guns and repeat violent offenders that are responsible for the violence in our city. Last year, MPD officers removed more than 2,100 illegal guns off the streets of the District of Columbia, and so far this year they have recovered over 900; 481 of those guns have been recovered from the streets of the Sixth and Seventh District.

This incredibly dangerous but important work is having an impact. In the first six months of 2018, violent crimes in the Sixth District are down 18 percent from 2017 and 33 percent from 2016. In the Seventh District, we've seen an uptick in gun related homicides and robberies this year, however this is still 33 percent lower than it was in 2016. While we don't want to let violence regain any ground, we are still seeing far fewer gun crimes in the Seventh District than we did just two years ago.

This agency is committed from top to bottom to reducing violent crime in our city. But as you have heard me say on multiple occasions, MPD cannot reduce violent crime alone. At the core of successful policing is establishing trust and legitimacy with the community that we serve. We need the community's trust to be successful, and trust and legitimacy can only be achieved



by open and honest dialogue, and I appreciate you holding this hearing so MPD can listen to concerns that some may have with the Department.

One thing that I would urge our community to do is to gather all of the facts on any single incident before you pass judgment, and not to use any one single incident of police misconduct as illustrative of the work of this entire agency. MPD officers, on a daily basis, are doing generous, compassionate, empathetic and heroic things. They are forging bonds with the community we serve, and we don't want any one incident to get in the way of that progress.

The leadership team at MPD is committed to fair, unbiased, and constitutional policing. If we have members that do not uphold those principles or meet those expectations, both I and my command staff will hold them accountable.

This concludes my prepared statement. My staff and I are available to address any questions you may have.

