



Testimony of Becky Strauss
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Federal City Council

Committee on the Judiciary & Public Safety
Chairperson Charles Allen

Budget Oversight Hearing on the Metropolitan Police Department

Wednesday, March 30, 2022

My name is Becky Strauss and I work at the Federal City Council on economic initiatives. I am here today to support the funding allocated to the Metropolitan Police Department in Mayor Bowser's FY23 budget proposal.

Let me begin by commending our men and women of the Metropolitan Police Department and Police Chief Robert Contee. They have been through a lot the last few years. The city faced instability, with large scale protests in the summer of 2020. They came to the defense of our nation's capital on January 6th, ensuring a peaceful transfer of power. Many continue to struggle to recover from the trauma of that day.

They have continued to serve honorably amid a crime wave, even as their force has dwindled to its smallest size in 20 years. Many have had to work mandatory overtime and cancel their days off to keep DC residents safe.

Their job has become harder because, over the past two years, the DC Council decided to restrict funding to allow the force to naturally dwindle by attrition. The force is now down to 3,500—which is so low that response times could soon slow. It's time to increase the force back to 4,000, and the Mayor's proposed budget will get us there.

There are many city police departments that need serious reform, but our Metropolitan Police Department is not one of them. As you may know, the MPD went through its era of serious internal reforms over twenty years ago after the federal Department of Justice determined the MPD had fallen into a pattern of using excessive force compared to its peers in other cities. Under Mayor Williams, Police Chief Chuck Ramsey started a careful process of turning the department around. Developing better relationships with the community was a big part of that transformation. The MPD is a minority-majority police force. Its officers go to great lengths to volunteer in the local community, nurture a positive image and establish a legacy of trust.

We agree that there are some functions civilians can take over from police, but it's not realistic to place all mental health calls in the hands of social workers. If there is a chance a situation could turn violent, they must be accompanied by police. The way to make policing better is by training for crisis management, not defunding or reducing the size of the force.

We also agree that crime prevention and rehabilitation is just as important as enforcement for public safety. And here the Mayor's budget gets it right as well. There is more funding for critical violence intervention services for at-risk individuals, such as life coaching, financial assistance and out-of-school



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programming. Finally, funding for a new Correctional Treatment Facility will help rehabilitate DC inmates so they can better re-enter society and not re-offend.

The bottom line is that today's MPD is a force that the District can be proud of. DC residents—and especially those in vulnerable communities—want to be safe. Police are essential for delivering that service.

In the summer of 2020, we hosted then-Chief Peter Newsham to speak to our members. He described how on July 4th of that year an 11-year-old child named Davon McNeal was murdered in Ward 8. Reporters spoke with grieving community members at a vigil held a few days later. They said they didn't want fewer police, they wanted better police. We can all agree that's something we want.