



April 19, 2022

Members

Council of the District of Columbia
1350 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC, 20004

Dear Members of the Council of the District of Columbia,

We are writing on behalf of our members of the business and employer community to express our support for the new investments in public safety Mayor Bowser proposed in her Fiscal Year 2023 proposed budget.

First, we want to express our appreciation for the men and women of the District of Columbia Metropolitan Police Department (“MPD”) and Police Chief Robert Contee. 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 canceled their days off to keep District residents and visitors 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 about 3,500—which threatens to cause slow response times to emergency or urgent public safety calls. Crime has gone up, making residents feel unsafe and harming the city’s delicate economic recovery. The District should move to increase the police force back to 4,000 sworn officers, and the Mayor’s FY23 proposed budget wisely helps get us there.

Our Metropolitan Police Department has already gone through a series of internal reforms. Twenty years ago, the United States Department of Justice reviewed MPD’s use of force policies and analyzed reported incidents involving the use of force. As a result of this review, DOJ and MPS entered into a memorandum of understanding to implement changes regarding the use of force, investigations of civilian complaints of officer misconduct and other issues. Under former Mayor Anthony Williams and former Police Chief Charles Ramsey MPD started the careful and deliberate work of implementing reforms to address the issues identified by DOJ. Today, the District of Columbia has one of the most diverse police forces in the nation whose 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 officers who are trained to de-escalate dangerous physical violence. Responsible public policy dictates that the way to improve policing is through enhanced training for officers rather than defunding or reducing the size of the force.

We also agree that crime prevention and rehabilitation is just as important as enforcement. And once again, the Mayor's budget gets it right. There is increased funding for critical violence intervention services for at-risk individuals, such as life coaching, financial assistance and out-of-school programming. Finally, the Mayor has included funding for a new Correctional Treatment Facility to give the District the capacity to provide its inmates with rehabilitation services to help them more successfully re-enter society.

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. MPD is essential to deliver the safety residents expect and want.

Respectfully,

Anthony Williams, CEO & Executive Director
Federal City Council

Janene Jackson, Executive Director
Opportunity DC

Liz DeBarros, Interim CEO
DC Building Industry Association

Peggy Jeffers, Executive Vice President
Apartment & Office Building Association of
Metropolitan Washington

Angela Franco, President and CEO
DC Chamber of Commerce

Jack McDougle, President & CEO
Greater Washington Board of Trade

Kathy Hollinger, President & CEO
Restaurant Association of Metropolitan
Washington

Scott Reiter, CEO
DC Association of Realtors