



Testimony of Becky Strauss

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Committee on the Judiciary and Public Safety
Councilmember Brooke Pinto, Chair

Budget Oversight Hearing

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I am representing the Federal City Council, which is a business civic organization whose 240 members are some of the District's most civically engaged CEO-level leaders. Our purpose is to work towards making the District a better place for all its residents.

First, we'd like to thank you, Councilmember Pinto, for everything you have done to make the city safer. Your Secure DC Act helped reverse the 2023 crime wave. And thank you for fighting to re-authorize juvenile curfew zones.

This morning I want to call attention to perhaps the greatest problem now threatening the city's progress on crime—the MPD's worsening manpower shortage.

The Mayor's FY27 budget does not reflect new large investments in the MPD that will help it recruit and retain officers. Her budget funds existing pay agreements already negotiated with the police union. Existing pay grades and signing bonuses are already not drawing in the numbers the MPD needs to recover from the year of "no new hires" in 2020. The force is actually smaller today than it was a year ago. At 3,150 sworn officers, the force is well below its 4,000 manpower target.

It's not just recruitment. Retention has also become harder. According to MPD Chief Carroll, only one-third of MPD officers have been on the force for longer than six years. This harms crime-fighting. Experience and community relationships matter in local law enforcement.

Manpower strategies must account for the new fierce competition for local police talent. Other law enforcement agencies are offering more generous pay with a better work life balance. A new MPD officer can expect a starting salary of around \$70K with a \$25K signing bonus. ICE is offering a \$50K signing bonus and the National Park police \$75K. This summer, Arlington will begin offering a starting police salary of \$90K. With manpower stretched thin, MPD officers are increasingly likely to be called in for extra shifts at short notice. Morale suffers and then more want to leave for cushier options nearby.

More generous salaries or bonuses may not be the only answer. Chief Carroll has told us that better facilities, more mental health support, and gym access could make a difference.

Here is where the Mayor's FY27 budget really falls short. It contains few new investments in police facilities.

Yet the MPD's Union last year called police facilities deplorable. They said "MPD facilities are in shameful disrepair, with non-functional bathrooms, mold-infested locker rooms, and dilapidated buildings that endanger officer health and morale."

Her budget funds other facilities that fall under the public safety umbrella, from youth rehabilitation centers to the city jail and fire & EMS buildings—but nothing for the police themselves.

We support Mayor Bowser's overall budget approach for the city. She is right to focus on strengthening core government systems and removing barriers to economic activity so that the city can build back what was lost from last year's federal cuts. The only sustainable way to increase tax revenue is to get the economy back in gear. But public safety is a necessary condition for economic recovery. Restoring the city's police force should be a top priority. We hope that the version of the FY27 budget passed by this Council takes extra steps to deal with the MPD's manpower shortage head on.