

GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
MAYOR'S OFFICE OF NIGHTLIFE AND CULTURE



**Fiscal Year 2020-2021 to date
Performance Oversight Hearing**

Testimony of
Shawn Townsend
Director

Before the
Committee on Business and Economic Development
Council of the District of Columbia
The Honorable Kenyan McDuffie, Chairperson

March 3, 2021
9:00 a.m.

Good morning, Chairman McDuffie, members of the Committee on Business and Economic Development, staff, and viewers. My name is Shawn Townsend, and I have the distinct pleasure of serving as the Director of the Mayor's Office of Nightlife and Culture (MONC). I would first like to thank, both, Mayor Muriel Bowser and Chairman McDuffie for their continued support of the office, and recognizing the economic, social, and cultural impact that nightlife and culture has on the District of Columbia. I look forward to continuing to work with the Executive Office of the Mayor, the Deputy Mayor's Office for Planning and Economic Development (DMPED), and Council on finding ways to support the return of our once thriving nightlife and culture scene.

Last fiscal year, MONC formed strategic partnerships to measure DC's night-time economy. Under the leadership of Mayor Bowser, with the assistance of DMPED, and in partnership with the Washington DC Economic Partnership (WDCEP), funding was allocated to conduct the District's first Nightlife Economic Impact Study to measure the economic impact of DC's night-time economy. The study, released prior to the declaration of the public health emergency in February 2020, revealed that DC's restaurants, bars, nightclubs, and performance venues support approximately 65,000 jobs and contribute nearly \$7.1 billion dollars in annual revenue and \$562 million in tax revenue to the District's economy. Essentially, the study showed what we already know: DC's night-time economy largely contributes to the overall economic framework of the District.

Additionally, in February 2020, MONC hosted an event to celebrate Go-Go music where Mayor Bowser signed legislation, introduced by you, Councilmember McDuffie, making Go-Go the official music of the District of Columbia. We look forward to working with the Committee on

Business and Economic Development and stakeholders to ensure that Go-Go continues to be celebrated and preserved.

In March 2020, the Mayor's Office of Nightlife and Culture led a delegation of District government representatives and DC nightlife stakeholders to the Responsible Hospitality Institute (RHI) Sociable City Summit, hosted in Seattle, Washington. The purpose of the trip was to showcase how District agencies, businesses, and community stakeholders are finding solutions to issues that impact the nighttime economy. Washington, DC was slated to host the 2021 RHI City Summit. However, due to the pandemic, the District will host the 2022 Sociable City Summit.

In March 2020, the rapid onset of COVID-19 immediately affected the nighttime economy, as the city was forced to suspend operations of all non-essential businesses. Although there was much uncertainty about what the future would hold, we remained steadfast in our commitment to the endurance and revival of the night-time economy.

In response to the impact of COVID-19, Mayor Bowser announced a \$25 million DC Small Business Recovery Microgrant Program. The Mayor's Office of Nightlife and Culture worked closely with the DMPED on the structure of the grant, as well as conducted outreach and awareness of the grant opportunity. As a result, over a 1,000 restaurants, bars, nightclubs, and food service businesses were awarded approximately \$10.6 million dollars.

In April 2020, Mayor Bowser announced the Reopen DC Advisory Group, made up of a Steering Committee and 11 Sector Committees, to help envision and plan for a sustainable reopening through community-driven guidance. I was appointed to serve as the Associate Committee Director for the Restaurant and Food Retailers Subcommittee. This subcommittee, composed of

both internal and external stakeholders, was responsible for advising Mayor Bowser on best approaches and innovations on how to reopen Washington, DC's restaurant and food retail sector. The subcommittee produced guidance and recommendations on how to reopen this particular sector of business, of which can be found on coronavirus.dc.gov.

Throughout the summer, we witnessed a period of heightened racial unrest as protests occurred in response to the murder of George Floyd. Many businesses located in the downtown area experienced property damage due to first amendment demonstrations. In partnership with the Homeland Security and Emergency Management Agency (HSEMA), Metropolitan Police Department (MPD), and the Business Improvement Districts (BIDs), MONC was able to host informational calls and provide recommendations on how businesses could prepare for first amendment demonstrations. This outreach continued in January 2021, leading up to the Presidential Inauguration.

One shining moment during the pandemic has been the strengthening relationship MONC has established with the Restaurant Association of Metropolitan Washington (RAMW) and its members. In addition to preserving an open line of communication, MONC has been afforded the opportunity to partner with RAMW in a number of ways. In light of Summer Restaurant Week 2020, MONC and RAMW teamed up to amplify a #MaskUpDC Campaign PSA, produced by the Office of Cable Television, Film and Entertainment (OCTFME) to encourage residents to support their favorite restaurants by dining in or taking out, while adhering to guidance from DC Health.

During RAMW's sponsored Restaurant Week, MONC visited several restaurants to document how they had adapted during the pandemic, as well as learn about their most popular dishes. This digital marketing campaign has and continues to be highlighted on social media.

Last fall, under Mayor Bowser's leadership, MONC, announced the Streatery Winter Ready Grant Program. This program allowed us to provide 586 one-time \$6,000 grants to eligible food retailers to help defray the cost of winterizing their outdoor spaces. Funding was used to purchase items such as tents, heaters, propane, lighting, furniture, advertising cost, among other items to help restaurants remain open outside.

In addition to the grant, the Streatery Winter Ready Grant Program provided for easy activation of outdoor spaces. A new portal was created for businesses to efficiently apply for tent and heater permits. Permit fees were waived and new insurance requirements were postponed.

We established a partnership with Ace Hardware and The Home Depot to secure patio heaters and other winterizing equipment for restaurants with outdoor dining. The BIDS were instrumental in assisting with the logistics of distributing the heaters. After the launch of this grant, we noticed a demand for Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and as a result, we partnered with Business Improvement Districts and Mains Streets to distribute approximately 300 bags of PPE to Streatery Winter Ready Grant recipients.

Now, MONC provides valuable input to the DMPED Bridge Fund Team in managing the \$100 million dollar grant program dedicated to hotels, restaurants, retail, nightclubs, and live performance venues.

While consistently working to provide relief to nightlife businesses throughout the pandemic, MONC has continued to serve as a conduit between businesses, residents, and District agencies. During the past year, MONC has attended 27 Advisory Neighborhood Committee (ANCs) meetings, attended over 190 events, both in-person and virtual, and engaged over 90 nightlife businesses to address issues and concerns related to the Public Health Emergency. To date, MONC has assisted restaurant workers with over 150 Unemployment Insurance claims. Additionally, we have responded to over 930 calls of service in the areas of licensing/permitting, public safety, and enforcement.

More recently, we were proud to join DMPED and Department of Small and Local Development (DSLBD) to announce a second round of citywide PPE care packages to businesses, while celebrating the opening of the first east of the river eatery at Busboys and Poets in Anacostia. Under the Mayor's leadership, we look forward to working with DMPED and DSLBD to bring more dining options east of the river.

Since its inception in December of 2018, MONC has and will continue to host outreach opportunities, but will also seek to find new ways to attract a larger, broader audience that represents all 8 wards. Additionally, we look forward to forging intentional partnerships with community based organizations that can assist with addressing vaccine access and hesitancy of nightlife workers.

I would like to thank my small but mighty team, Roger Sanchez and Jennifer McCahill for their hard work and dedication to the Mayor's Office of Nightlife and Culture. I would also like to thank the Mayor's Office of Community Affairs (MOCA), DMPED, DC Health, the Alcoholic Beverage Regulation Administration (ABRA), The District's Department of Transportation

(DDOT), and the Fire Marshal's Office for working diligently to ensure that we as government continue to think outside of the box to provide relief to businesses. Last but certainly not least, I'd like to thank the nightlife community for being courageous; for adapting; for figuring things out over the past year. MONC looks forward to building a stronger and better night-time economy post-pandemic.

In closing, I look forward to the challenges ahead and I am very confident that we will build a more equitable, resilient, and thriving nightlife. Chairman McDuffie, I would like to thank you for your support. I appreciate the opportunity to share the progress of the Mayor's Office of Nightlife and Culture and look forward to continuing to work with the Committee. This concludes my testimony. I am happy to address any questions you have at this time.