

**GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA  
DEPARTMENT OF PARKS AND RECREATION**



**Fiscal Year 2021  
Performance Oversight Hearing**

Testimony of  
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Director

Before the  
Committee on Recreation, Libraries and Youth Affairs  
Council of the District of Columbia  
The Honorable Trayon White, Sr., Chairperson

VIRTUAL HEARING PLATFORM  
Thursday, January 27, 2022  
12:00 PM

## **I. Introduction**

Good afternoon, Chairperson White, Sr., Members of the Committee on Recreation, Libraries, and Youth Affairs, and members of the public joining us today. I am Delano Hunter, Director of the DC Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR). I am pleased to testify today on behalf of Mayor Muriel Bowser to discuss DPR's performance during Fiscal Year 2021 and Fiscal Year 2022 to date. I want to thank Mayor Bowser, City Administrator Kevin Donahue, and Deputy Mayor for Education Paul Kihn for their ongoing support and leadership. DPR's success is due to the dedication of our staff who come to work each day to provide not just gold standard programs, facilities, and services for District residents, but also a safe environment where our children, teens, adults, and seniors can come together to develop their physical, mental, and emotional wellness. I'd also like to take this opportunity to reaffirm the commitment of our Executive Team to ensuring that our staff has all that they need to provide excellent service to District residents across all eight wards.

DPR's mission is to provide equal and open access to Gold Standard recreational programs, services, and facilities. Our vision is to be America's Gold Standard for Parks and Recreation agencies. In FY21, DPR was again named #1 in the nation by the Trust for Public Lands' 2021 ParkScore Index, which ranks the park systems in 100 of the largest U.S. cities using a comprehensive scorecard that includes access, equity, and investment. DPR manages an inventory of 68 recreation centers, 34 aquatic centers and outdoor pools, 35 splash parks, 113 athletic fields, 19 dog parks, and over 900 acres of park space.

In FY21, DPR delivered for residents of all ages, offering engaging programming and access to top-notch recreation amenities. As early as October 2020, DPR safely provided residents access to lap lanes for swimming at our aquatic centers and

individual reservations at our state-of-the-art fitness centers. Following all appropriate public health guidance, DPR executed a phased approach to allow safe permitting of DPR facilities for sports and events, issuing over 74,000 permits in FY21 and over 28,000 permits thus far in FY22. To the delight of many, DPR safely reopened our outdoor pools and spray parks in Summer 2021, bringing back an important element of normalcy. We hosted our Summer Camps for 5,600 children ages 3-15 while piloting Boost Camps for nearly 700 students, designed with our education partners to accelerate learning. In addition, we engaged 900 young people ages 14-24 through our continued work with the Mayor Marion S. Barry Summer Youth Employment Program (SYEP), offering Teen Career Camps for youth ages 14-15 and direct workplace experiences for youth 16-24. During FY21, our Roving Leaders connected with over 3,000 youth through innovative engagement activities that promote youth safety and prevent violence through the development of positive relationships.

Operating 365 days a year, DPR provides residents with access to recreation opportunities while working with our partners across the District government to combat the COVID-19 pandemic. When vaccines became available, DPR answered the call to utilize our recreation centers as some of the District's very first COVID-19 vaccination sites, vaccinating nearly 75,000 individuals in FY21. Meanwhile, our DPR Capital Team conducted extensive outreach and analysis to develop our Ready2Play Master Plan, which guides our vision for recreation investments over the next 20 years and presents an equity framework to drive resources where they are needed most.

Throughout FY21, DPR safely reopened our recreation facilities while providing critical support to our citywide COVID-19 response and executing an extensive planning process to prepare DPR to meet the District's recreation needs now and into the future.

## II. Supporting a Strong COVID-19 Response and Recovery

Following the latest guidance from Mayor Bowser and DC Health, DPR once again provided residents with high-quality in-person programming in aquatics, cultural arts, youth development, sports, and fitness in FY21. DPR's Roving Leaders dedicated over 3,500 hours to community engagement, conducting over 300 school visits as part of the District's Safe Passage program, and hosting nearly 100 Roving Leaders special events and movie nights.

DPR plays a core role in the communities we serve. As such, it makes sense for DPR to play a critical part in helping our communities recover from the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. DPR received \$2.6M in federal funding from the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) in FY21 for critical initiatives that advance the District's recovery and promote a safe and healthy life and future for all residents. I will now tell you about a few initiatives supported by these resources that showcase how DPR has adapted its programming to reflect the District's needs.

- **Boost Camps:** To help students accelerate their learning, DPR worked closely with the Deputy Mayor for Education (DME) to launch Boost Camps. This leading-edge summer learning model incorporates the recreational elements of camps, like swimming and outdoor play, with high-impact tutoring for students in grades Pre-K-8. In FY21, DPR served nearly 700 students through partnerships with 6 DC Public Schools and Public Charter Schools. We are excited to expand Boost Camps to even more students as we scale up the program in FY22.
- **Roving Leaders:** In addition to their work with Safe Passage and special events, DPR's Roving Leaders connected with over 1,000 youth through its Mobile at Metro Project, hosting nearly 50 mobile recreation activations at 13

Metro Stops, in partnership with the Washington Metro Transit Authority (WMATA). In addition, as part of our work with Building Blocks DC, DPR's Roving Leaders engaged almost 800 young people in positive youth engagement activities through 20 mobile activations in neighborhoods currently experiencing high incidents of gun violence, advancing the District's comprehensive violence prevention strategy.

- **Access to Late Night Recreation:** Through our late-night programming, DPR directs the focus and energies of our youth to fun and productive endeavors during the evening hours when they are most vulnerable. Beginning in Summer 2021, DPR engaged over 16,000 individuals during the hours of 9PM-11PM at our expanded locations with programming such as "Late-Night Hype" Community Events and "Rec Party" Neighborhood Events. Partnering with local organizations, we expanded our We Own the Night basketball league to include 8 locations, whose tournaments draw hundreds of participants.
- **FITDC3:** FITDC3 is Mayor Bowser's signature fitness initiative that provides free high-level health and wellness services, events, and information across the District. The 3 in FITDC represents the three paths to total wellness: Body, Mind, and Community. FITDC3 concentrated its offerings in Wards 5, 7, and 8 by delivering an event series of engaging and dynamic workouts with popular local trainers. These events seek to spark a desire for participants to continue to engage with DPR and lead more healthy and active lifestyles. Recreation centers that hosted FITDC3 activations included Brentwood, Barry Farm, Fort Davis, Woody Ward, and Douglass.

Throughout the pandemic, DPR recreation centers have continued to serve as hubs to meet residents' most pressing needs. DPR continues to host pop-up COVID-19 vaccination and testing sites as part of the District's response to the pandemic. Most

recently, DPR is hosting 14 Test Yourself DC sites at our recreation centers where residents can pick up and drop off free PCR COVID-19 at-home testing kits. In Summer 2021, DPR's Summer Meals Program distributed over 180,000 meals to children ages 18 and younger, an increase of roughly 75,000 over the prior Summer season. In addition, DPR provided 4,000 meals at 18 recreation centers as part of the Afterschool Meals program. Working with our partners at the Department of Human Services (DHS), DPR temporarily converted the Langdon Recreation Center, King Greenleaf Recreation Center, and Sherwood Recreation Center to emergency shelters for our unhoused residents during the most challenging periods of the pandemic.

### **III. Ready2Play Master Plan**

Now, let's talk about how DPR is working to ensure our gold standard recreation facilities adapt to the District's changing needs. In FY21 and FY22 to date, DPR made strides in finalizing our Ready2Play Master Plan to guide the agency's capital investments for the next 20 years. Ready2Play consists of a strategic plan, planning tools such as our equity framework and an interactive site prioritization tool, and a capital blueprint to guide future investments. I want to thank our Capital Projects Team for their commitment to this project. They undertook an exhaustive analysis of the District's current and future needs and examined District assets using the latest planning and design advancements. This forward-thinking work is critical to maximizing DPR's value to residents as we provide state-of-the-art recreation facilities and program offerings to all eight wards.

Despite challenges presented by the pandemic, the team worked creatively to execute a robust community engagement process, collecting comments on more than 200 parks from over 6,000 individuals through online meetings, a dedicated voicemail line, pop-up in-person events, and our Ready2Play website: [ready2playdc.com](https://ready2playdc.com). Throughout this

feedback process, residents expressed a strong interest in investments in outdoor recreation and highlighted the importance of maintenance and enhancements at existing parks, recreation centers, and aquatics facilities. Additionally, residents prioritized the need for equitable access to diverse recreational experiences. DPR released the findings of the Ready2Play Citywide Survey and a draft of the core components of the strategic plan and equity framework in Summer 2021 for public comment. We look forward to releasing the finalized Ready2Play Master Plan in FY22.

In FY21, DPR worked with our partners at the Department of General Services (DGS) to deliver 32 capital improvement projects, with a total budget of \$82M. I would like to take a few minutes to highlight a few of these projects that have enriched the lives of residents over the past year.

- In Ward 1, we finished Phase 2 of improvements to The Park @ LeDroit, including a new splash park, picnic tables, shade structures, and lighting.
- In Ward 2, we opened the revitalized Franklin Park, working with our partners at the Downtown Business Improvement District (BID) and the National Park Service (NPS). We also opened the fully renovated Shaw Park, complete with a new skatepark, visited by skateboarding legend Tony Hawk, and a new athletic field, track, basketball court, outdoor exercise equipment, and dog park.
- In Ward 3, we completed the renovation of the Hardy Recreation Center, including an addition to the recreation center building and a new playground, splash park, and renovations to the existing ball field.
- In Ward 4, we opened the newly renovated and renamed Lafayette-Pointer Recreation Center with a completely new building using nature-informed design and an extensive, holistic stormwater management system across the

property.

- In Ward 5, we completed a much-needed replacement of the HVAC system at the Turkey Thicket Aquatic Center, providing reliable access to swimming and aquatics programming year-round.
- In Ward 6, we transformed the Eastern Market Metro Park by installing a new playground, splash park, and a performance pavilion.
- In Ward 7, we opened the newly renamed and fully renovated Woody Ward Recreation Center, complete with a state-of-the-art boxing gym, fitness room, dance studio, and basketball court. This is also where Mayor Bowser and many residents, including some of our youngest, gathered on Memorial Day 2021 to kick off the opening of DPR pools.
- In Ward 8, we brought residents a fully rebuilt Ferebee Hope Recreation Center and indoor pool in partnership with KIPP DC. With the Council's addition of \$13M in FY22, we are working with our partners at DGS to update the design of the new Congress Heights Recreation Center to include an indoor pool.

#### **IV. Conclusion**

In conclusion, DPR continues to be at the core of quality life for District residents. In addition to providing gold standard recreation services, facilities, and programs, we are a hub for our communities. DPR provides kids access to high-quality nutritional meals, essential testing and vaccination services as part of the city's COVID-19 pandemic response, and vital resources for youth and seniors who need a safe space to connect with their peers, which is critical for their health and wellbeing. DPR is embedded in the communities we serve, and we value the trust residents place in us to deliver at the highest level. I could not be more excited for DPR's robust operations in the year ahead and the release of our Ready2Play Master Plan, establishing a clear

blueprint for future investments in parks and recreation facilities.

Thank you, Chairman White, Sr., and the rest of the committee, for your leadership and support. I appreciate the opportunity to testify today and look forward to working with each of you in service to all District residents. I am joined today by my colleague Ella Faulkner, DPR's Deputy Director of Administrative Services. We are happy to answer any questions you may have. Thank you.