

GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
**SERVE DC – MAYOR’S OFFICE ON VOLUNTEERISM &
PARTNERSHIPS**



**Fiscal Year 2021-2022
Performance Oversight Hearing**

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

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12:00 p.m.

Good afternoon, Chairman White, members of the Committee, witnesses who joined today, and members of the public. My name is Alexis L. Squire, and I have the great pleasure of serving as the Chief Service Officer for the District of Columbia and the Director of the Mayor's Office on Volunteerism and Partnerships (Serve DC). I am pleased to be here today to discuss the progress and performance status of the office over Fiscal Year 2021 (FY21) and Fiscal Year 2022 (FY22), to date.

Serve DC works to connect people, funding, knowledge, volunteer opportunities and resources to residents, business leaders, and philanthropic partners— all working together to give back and improve the lives and communities across DC. We do this by curating the philanthropic and volunteer ecosystem, by connecting each act of the service from donation to action, responding to our city's needs through targeted philanthropic partnerships, volunteer opportunities, trainings and promoting major gifts and resources as needed. Serve DC's collective actions support Mayor Bowser's priority of creating safer, stronger communities and placing residents on a pathway to the middle class, and I am excited to share the progress made in each of these programmatic areas. FY21 was a year of great resilience, purpose and activation for Serve DC. Our agency pivoted in step with changes to the public health emergency, inspired thousands to activate our DC values during unprecedented times, and proved what is possible when we connect human purpose and power to our greatest challenges and opportunities.

National Service

In FY21, Serve DC awarded more than \$6 million in AmeriCorps grants to District-based nonprofit organizations, schools, and universities as a means to strengthen and support their organizational capacity and programming by recruiting AmeriCorps members to serve at their organizations. AmeriCorps members play a vital role in ensuring our nonprofit leaders have the

support they need to increase academic performance, grow our workforce, mentor our youth, address food deserts, and cultivate environmental responsibility.

For FY22, Serve DC is excited to have been awarded \$1,000,000 in additional Formula funding. These funds will be used to both address experiences of current AmeriCorps members serving within the District, such as increasing the living allowances, and also to create a new AmeriCorps program funding focused on gun violence prevention and response.

In addition to providing grant funding, Serve DC continues to deepen our relationships with sub-grantees through joint volunteer recruitment, collaborative events, and member trainings. In November 2021, we held our 6th Annual All Corps Members Conference, an event that has continued to grow now to engage nearly 300 AmeriCorps members annually. The theme of the conference was “DC AmeriCorps Runs On Service.” We were grateful to host this convening in person after FY21’s conference’s virtual posture.

Serve DC and the national service team continue to build the DC AmeriCorps story: one of equitable engagement, rich engagement and resilient service for all District nonprofits and residents.

Emergency Preparedness

Being fully prepared for an emergency or disaster is another Serve DC priority and extends beyond the limited capacity of government, requiring strong public-private partnerships to support the city in its response. In response to the public health emergency, we found it necessary to leverage all our resources and standing partnerships to offer our emergency preparedness (EP) programs and curriculum virtually. Additionally, we developed an expanded how Serve DC provides its direct service emergency preparedness training and saw cost-savings

as a result of technical trainings that were provided to our EP staff the previous year. Collectively, through our Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) program, CPR training, and our Summer Youth Emergency Preparedness Program Academy (SYEPA), we have provided over 150 emergency preparedness trainings to over 2,100 residents and stakeholders. These trainings were made possible by an MOU with the Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE) and a grant from the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS), with funding administered by the District's Homeland Security Emergency Management Agency (HSEMA).

Over the last fiscal year, we were particularly pleased by the continued success of three major EP programs: Community Emergency Response Team (CERT), our Summer Youth Engagement Program (SYEP), and our DC Volunteer Snow Program.

The CERT program educates and trains volunteers using a consistent, nationwide approach that is relied upon by professional responders, in basic disaster preparedness response skills, such as fire safety, light search and rescue, team organization, and disaster medical operations. The CERT Council has also been a success; the Council consists of one CERT certified specialist based in each Ward that leads their ward's contingent of CERT members. This strategy allows for our CERT coordinator to understand the hyperlocal issues that may arise in an emergency and develop strategies to address them. As Serve DC looks to continue its resiliency work, we know that emergencies and disasters will affect each ward differently and we stand ready to deploy a ward-specific strategy to meet those needs.

We have also witnessed continued success in Serve DC's SYEPA program, which empowers District youth with training to assist their communities in the event of a disaster, while providing career exposure in emergency management and public safety sectors. This year's

cohort focused on approaching both COVID-19 and gun violence as public health concerns. Our students showed incredible leadership as they became certified as contact tracers and produced two PSAs in partnership with Building Blocks that highlighted the unique positions youth face in light of gun violence in their community. We were also proud to have our partners at the Office of Cable, Television, Film, Movie and Entertainment (OCTFME) include the content within their programming for several months.

At the intersection of Emergency Preparedness and Volunteerism and Engagement is one of Serve DC's most high-impact service opportunities, the DC Volunteer Snow Team. We currently have over 500 registered volunteers slated to assist over 700 seniors and residents with disabilities with the removal of snow from their front doors, walkways, and sidewalks in the aftermath of a major winter storm. To more efficiently manage workflow, waivers, and simplify the volunteer sign-up process, we launched snowteam.dc.gov within our volunteer portal. Now, in an instance of significant snow, we are confident in our ability to quickly assemble and deploy volunteers to assist our residents most in need. We are also currently working with OCTO to better match volunteers with residents in need by leveraging ArcGIS mapping technology, which should amplify the impact of our existing volunteer contingent.

Already in FY22 we have deployed the snow team once, resulting in hundreds of residents with safe walkways and hundreds of engaged volunteers. We have and will continue to make intentional efforts to increase volunteer recruitment in Wards 4, 5, 7 and 8 as they currently have the lowest rate of Snow Team volunteers to residents requesting assistance. Our strategies include leveraging relationships with the business community to conduct recruitment outside of highly trafficked establishments and also activating civically engaged community influencers through social media. Additionally, we look forward to continuing to find ways to recognize,

cultivate and engage these volunteers throughout the year, beyond our winter months.

I would be remiss if I did not commend you, Councilmember White, for your support of our recent deployment. I look forward to continuing to work you and with your colleagues on building our volunteer base to serve additional residents in need, especially those East of the River. To actualize this commitment, Serve DC will host Snow Team Info and Recruitment sessions throughout FY22 to match residents immediately with seniors on their block who need assistance. These info sessions will be targeted geographically and by constituent group and we look forward to working with all the members of the committee on this effort.

Volunteerism & Outreach

As the interest and demand for service continued to flourish at Serve DC, we focused on strengthening our philanthropic partnerships and volunteer opportunities to transform DC communities. Serve DC, played a vital role in amplifying to District residents, the need to get vaccinated. Serve DC leveraged the Volunteer and Donations platform in a major way to recruit and activate 1,735 volunteers across 3 Days of Action, in which community canvassing helped to educate community members about their free access to Covid-19 vaccine.

A central theme of our volunteer success has been the leveraging of our both data and technology of our Volunteer Portal. Launched in FY20, the base of volunteers has grown into the thousands and allows Serve DC to recruit hundreds or thousands of volunteers with a much smaller staff footprint than traditional recruitment methods. Currently, there are 95 organizations registered on the portal that have promoted 143 unique volunteer opportunities in support of our essential supports such as addressing food and housing insecurities or providing mentorship to our young people in our most vulnerable communities. Through these volunteer opportunities over 2,600 volunteers were able to deploy across our city. Some of the most successfully

recruited activations included DC COVID-19 Community Corps, Water Bottler Activation, 9/11 Day of Service, Senior Buddy Vaccine Outreach, and the Frederick Douglass Bridge Opening and 5K.

We are proud to remain at the ready to recruit the human power of the District when initiatives arise and look forward to continuing to train, engage and extend our sincere value and appreciation of this amazing group of civic champions. This infrastructure and capability was most recently put to the test in light of our recent COVID-19 variant surge. In partnership with DC Health, volunteers were needed to increase our city's capacity to better inform residents of their COVID status during the holiday season. Serve DC staff organized and mobilized quickly and then put out an urgent call within our volunteer networks, via the portal. Not only did volunteers respond to our initial request, but they continued to respond, in record numbers—over 1600 residents from across our city and region, for seven consecutive days, shift after shift; they graciously and efficiently assembled PCR testing kits, to be checked and distributed to distribution sites across the city. When the opportunity presented again in honor of Dr. King's Day of Service, despite the spotty weather conditions, they responded again, assembling another 10,000 kits. We are most grateful for our DC community of volunteers that continues to foster Dr. King's vision of a beloved community of civic doers.

Donations & Partnerships

Lastly, in the wake of the public health emergency that has impacted our city in unparalleled ways, Serve DC continued to serve as a multi-sector connector among donors and community-based organizations. Serve DC facilitated a total of \$4,137,599.14 worth of COVID-19 related donations to District in FY21. The donations varied from PPE Equipment, hand

sanitizer, to technology to support education, and gift cards to support District residents. In total donations the District received \$35,233,013.14 in FY21.

Serve DC is also proud to partner with and support the 4th Annual Maternal & Infant Health Summit which aimed to build on the growing public awareness and interest of this important issue and the District's continued approach to ensure the health of women, infants, and families. The 2021 Summit addressed changes that have taken place in DC in support of birthing people, families, and babies, as well as District residents at large, the importance of inclusivity in health, and resources that support the wellness of new moms and infants. Serve DC solicited and secured nearly \$250,000 of corporate and philanthropic partnership support to increase capacity and impact of these initiatives.

Another example of our public health engagement is evidenced by our Serve 202: Partnerships and Priorities Series. During our Q1 session, we convened, along with the Center for Nonprofit Advancement, and 55 attendees at Busboys and Poets in Anacostia. Esteemed panelist included Building Blocks Director Linda Harlee Harper, Founder of Guns Down Friday Jawanna Hardy, Vice President of Community Engagement at Children's National Tonya Kinlow, CEO of the Center for Nonprofit Advancement Glen O'Glivie, and award-winning author Jason Reynolds addressed the intersection of COVID-19 recovery and gun violence as dual public health emergencies in the District. Success was evidenced by continued collaboration of attendees in the public health space and the accessed funding and resources featured. An example of one collaboration, initiated within this convening and continuing to grow, is that of Mamas Safe Haven. Native Washingtonian and Founder and CEO, Ms. Beverly Smith-Brown attended our session and left with a new capacity building partner in event co-host, the Center for

Nonprofit Advancement. Through their ongoing networking and collaborations, the organization has received a battery of trainings for over 20 volunteers and staff members free of charge. This budding relationship and access to new resources and supports will better position Mamas Safe Haven to fulfill its mission of providing a bridge of support for those affected by trauma such as gun violence within our city.

FY21 was a significant time for partnerships at Serve DC. We took part in various events to increase visibility and outreach within the city. For the fourth year, Serve DC (previously OPGS) participated in annual DC Startup Week (DCSW) programming, the fastest-growing startup community in the DC metropolitan with over 11,000 entrepreneurs. Serve DC led a panel entitled “Re-imagining Social Impact Through Innovation and Equity,” which featured a discussion of leading impact strategists, as they explore the business value and best practices of creating authentic, accessible, and equitable community engagement initiatives to advance sustainable community investments within our new normal. The panel included Capital B CEO Lauren Williams, Destination DC Vice President of Partnership Alliance Claire Carlin, Covenant House of Greater Washington CEO Angela Jones Hackley, and the Center for Nonprofit Advancement CEO Glen O’Glivie, and I was honored to join the panel as the Director of ServeDC. We continue to build and leverage relationships with the business community, including our tourism arm at Destination DC, as an example of how social responsibility and impact is closely connected with business value and industry leadership.

As always, but especially as we continue to navigate from this public health emergency, Serve DC remains committed to making its operations, both grant-making and community engagement as accessible and equitable as possible. Already we have hosted DC-specific

information sessions about AmeriCorps grant opportunities and plan on continuing these to highlight funding opportunities District nonprofits through our funding and resource alert, the District's grant clearinghouse, social media and our volunteer portal. Additionally, we hope to work in coordination with OPLA to reach out to Councilmembers to bring awareness of funding opportunities to nonprofits in their constituencies. This commitment of greater transparency in our operations is guided by our goal to increase volunteer equity and increased impact through civic engagement.

In closing, I would like to thank Mayor Bowser for this wonderful opportunity to lead our city's efforts to advance service and collaboration, as well as thank the staff of Serve DC who go above and beyond to implement our mission. I look forward to continuing to leverage the support of our Commissioners, and many partners to help us champion volunteerism and service in the District of Columbia. And lastly, Chairman White, I appreciate your being an advocate of our work and for the opportunity to speak before this Committee. I am available to answer any questions you may have.