

GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
Executive Office of Mayor Muriel Bowser



Performance Oversight Hearing on

The Office of Victim Services and Justice Grants

Testimony of
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Director

Before the
Committee on the Judiciary and Public Safety
Brooke Pinto, Chairperson
Council of the District of Columbia

January 29, 2025
9:30 a.m.
1350 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Room 500
Washington, D.C. 20004

Good morning, Chairwoman Pinto and members of the Committee on the Judiciary and Public Safety. I am Jennifer L. Porter, Director of the Office of Victim Services and Justice Grants known as OVSJG. I am proud to share today the outcomes and performance of our agency during Fiscal Year 2024 and Fiscal Year 2025, to date.

The mission of OVSJG is to develop, fund, and coordinate programs that improve public safety; enhance the administration of justice; and create systems of care for crime victims, youth, and their families in the District. We deliver on this mission in several ways. OVSJG funds community-based organizations and District agencies that provide services for victims of crime, justice-involved individuals, and juvenile delinquency prevention programs.

As the State Administering Agency (SAA) for 11 federal victim services and criminal and juvenile justice system funding programs, OVSJG engages in planning and coordination with, and provides training and technical assistance to, organizations and agencies receiving grant funding to provide these services.

In addition to the Victim Services and Justice Grants, OVSJG operates the District's Address Confidentiality Program (ACP), which provides a legal substitute address and mail forwarding for eligible DC residents to maintain the confidentiality of their actual address; and the Private Security Camera Incentive Program, which encourages residents, businesses, nonprofits, and religious institutions to install security camera systems and glass break sensors on their property. OVSJG also provides policy making expertise, advice, and counsel to the Mayor on the role of victims and offenders in the criminal justice system, enhancing the District's responses to trauma; and evidence-based practices to respond to, intervene in, and prevent violence.

Today, I will highlight some of the agency's activities and accomplishments in these program areas during FY24, and thus far in FY25.

In FY24, OVSJG administered 147 awards to community organizations and government agencies. These awards funded healing services for primary and secondary victims of all crime categories, training and technical assistance for community leaders and staff, and critical supports for

returning citizens and reentry serving community organizations. As the SAA for 11 federal award programs, OVSJG received a total of seven federal awards in FY24 funded at \$7,519,832 – four were for justice grants and three were for victim services. In FY25, OVSJG received a total of nine federal awards funded at \$6,795,661. Six were for justice grants and three were for victim services. All federal awards are multi-year awards.

As I shared earlier, OVSJG operates the District's Address Confidentiality Program (ACP) which provides a legal substitute address and mail forwarding for eligible DC residents to maintain the confidentiality of their address. Critical to the success of this program are training and informational sessions for community-based application assistants and Metropolitan Police Department (MPD) officers. In FY24, 718 people were trained regarding ACP and 85 participants were accepted into the program. The program is proud to be a lifesaving resource for eligible survivors of domestic violence, sexual assault, stalking, and human trafficking; employees and volunteers of organizations that primarily serve eligible victims; and providers of reproductive healthcare.

OVSJG also administers the Private Security Camera Incentive Program, which encourages residents, businesses, nonprofits, and religious institutions to install security camera systems on their property and register them with MPD. This program is intended to help deter crime and assist law enforcement with investigations. In FY24, 649 rebate and voucher applications were approved, and 1,569 cameras were funded. Since the program's inception, 12,513 rebates and vouchers have been approved, and 29,136 cameras have been funded. In FY24, there were six arrests made in which video footage was extracted from a program participant. There were arrests made in four murder cases, one assault with intent to kill and robbery case, and one assault with a dangerous weapon case.

Additionally, our agency administers the District's State Advisory Group, also known as the Juvenile Justice Advisory Group (JJAG). JJAG spearheads the development and adoption of the District's application for Title II federal formula funds, which includes developing a three-year plan for Delinquency Prevention. JJAG also advises the Mayor and District Government agencies on compliance with the core requirements of the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act

(JJDPA). JJAG facilitates authentic youth engagement and obtains input from youth with experience navigating the juvenile justice system. Finally, JJAG supports the monitoring of all juvenile holding, detention, and correction facilities, as well as grant-funded community programs to ensure compliance with the JJDPA.

In FY24, OVSJG made five awards advised by the JJAG. JJAG's funded Compliance Monitor and Racial Ethnic Disparities Coordinator conducted site visits for 11 sites, including MPD police precincts and Department of Youth Rehabilitation Services' facilities. The Compliance Monitor also worked with agencies to streamline the data collection and data verification processes among system partners to enable effective reporting on the core requirements of the JJDPA. The summary of compliance monitoring deemed that the District of Columbia provided an effective system of monitoring. This designation maintains the District's eligibility to receive 100% of its Title II funding for FY24 and FY25 due to these critical and coordinated efforts. In addition, OVSJG will be developing the JJAG Bi-Annual Report outlining membership, ongoing efforts related to grants management and grant making, compliance monitoring in accordance with the JJDPA, and racial and ethnic disparities works. The report will also highlight key accomplishments of JJAG.

OVSJG also makes grant awards to community-based organizations and District agencies to remove barriers to reentry and break cycles of recidivism for returning citizens. OVSJG enhanced supports and services for justice-involved individuals and returning citizens with other federal and local dollars. In FY24, OVSJG awarded nearly \$11 million for returning citizens and \$1 million for Incarceration Reduction Amendment Act recipients, for services such as case management, housing, trauma-informed mental health services, peer support, mentoring, job readiness, mediation, and returning citizen direct client assistance funding.

I'd like to take a moment to highlight OVSJG's impact related to domestic violence housing and services. OVSJG makes grant awards to community-based organizations to meet the needs of victims of domestic violence and their families. In FY25, OVSJG awarded approximately \$17 million in grant funds for emergency/crisis, transitional, and long-term housing for survivors of domestic violence and their children. This included continued funding for the new SAFE Space Crisis Shelter which offers 24/7 immediate placements for survivors and their families within one

hour of a domestic violence incident. In total, this critical funding provides 283 units of safe housing for survivors.

This past fiscal year, our agency also adopted and implemented a more advanced, user-friendly grant management system, GovGrants®. This change enabled us to better support the needs of our grantees and helps to streamline the grants management process. GovGrants® has improved efficiency with advanced automation features that helps us reduce processing times and minimizes administrative burdens, especially as it relates to submitting project budgets, invoices, and site visit documents. Grantees have been raving about the new system which allows them to easily collaborate with their grant managers for approvals, edits, and responses to their documents.

Next, I'd like to turn my attention to the Community Healing Initiative, our partnership with the MPD to expand their faith-based initiative and convene seven District of Columbia faith-based institutions for the purpose of community-based healing interventions. The community-centered initiative focuses on treating trauma to promote community healing and subsequently prevent occurrences of violence. In addition, the program focuses on nurturing community engagement, novel public private and community-based partnerships, expanding a collective comprehensive understanding of trauma, a community trauma response, and resourcing faith-based institutions to amplify healing resources within their membership and surrounding and serving community. The initiative brings together committed partnerships with the necessary resources to mobilize strong community support.

In FY24, OVSJG staff concentrated efforts to engage and support grantees. OVSJG staff hosted 10 training events on topics such as compliance with language access requirements, racial equity, and how to access key victim services in the District. We also provided training to support the grant application process, including grant writing training and technical assistance, pre-bidder webinars, peer reviewer training, and grantee orientation for OVSJG grantees. We also held a training academy for truancy reduction grantees as well as grantee and staff training on GovGrants®.

In closing I would like to thank you, Chairperson Pinto, for the opportunity to share our accomplishments. Thank you, as well, to the OVJSG public servants who make this work possible and the dozens of community-based organizations that work to heal District residents every day. I look forward to working with you and the Committee. I am available to answer your questions.