

GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
MAYOR'S OFFICE OF COMMUNITY AFFAIRS



Fiscal Year 2024
Performance Oversight Hearing

Testimony of
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Director

Before the
Committee On Public Executive Administration and Labor
The Honorable Anita Bonds, Chairperson

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9:30 a.m.

Good morning, Chairperson Bonds, members, and staff of the Committee on Executive Administration and Labor.

My name is Jackie Reyes-Yanes, and I am honored to serve as the Director of the Mayor's Office of Community Affairs (MOCA) under the visionary leadership of Mayor Muriel Bowser. Thank you for this opportunity to testify today regarding the performance of MOCA in Fiscal Year 2024.

The Mayor's Office of Community Affairs(MOCA), houses 13 cultural and constituent-based offices that serve the over 700,000 residents of DC. These agencies are the advocates and community contacts for residents and groups across the District. Several of the offices under my purview provide a language access and cultural accessibility that helps to overcome barriers so that all residents can enjoy the same services and support, whether they have been here for five minutes or five generations.

As the community's link to District government, we act as the community's voice in our government's actions and work. Our offices understand that through this connection, we can foster and develop meaningful relationships for all we serve. As trusted messengers, our offices act as a hub to disperse information in a way that is culturally sensitive and linguistically relevant to our communities. The agencies responsible for this work include the following:

- Mayor's Office on African Affairs
- Mayor's Office of African American Affairs
- Mayor's Office on Asian and Pacific Islander Affairs
- Mayor's Office of Caribbean Community Affairs
- Mayor's Office of Deaf, Deafblind, and Hard of Hearing
- Mayor's Office on Latino Affairs
- Mayor's Office of LGBTQ Affairs
- Mayor's Office of Nightlife and Culture
- Mayor's Office on Religious Affairs
- Mayor's Office on Returning Citizen Affairs
- Mayor's Office on Veteran's Affairs
- Mayor's Office of Volunteerism and Partnerships (Serve DC)
- Mayor's Office on Women's Policy and Initiatives

Through these offices, we build partnerships to engage our community, disperse information regarding mayoral and administrative projects and initiatives, and provide engagement events that are culturally relevant for our community.

Our offices continue to connect constituents to relevant information and the critical resources and services necessary to keep them informed and safe.

Programing:

MOCA and its offices regularly partner with District government agencies, host events, and conduct outreach in all eight wards to hear from and engage with community members who may have accessibility issues or hesitation in coming to a government building. Our motto at MOCA is that we have to meet the people where they are.

Such engagements have kept us closely connected to ensure that constituent issues and concerns are addressed, appropriate resources are introduced, and issues that require immediate attention are handled promptly. This connection also influences our programmatic efforts and strengthens our outreach to the community.

I want to highlight some of the events and programs that MOCA led and participated in during Fiscal Year 2024:

Events:

In FY24, across the 13 MOCA offices, directors and their staff hosted, partnered, or participated in 250 engagements, with touchpoints across over 60,000 constituents. While many of these events are community cornerstones, such as Mi Pequeno El Salvador and Lunar New Year, others are new initiatives like Drag Yourself to Better Health and the Silver Signers Celebration. One of the prides of my leadership is that we are expanding and developing our signature events to be bigger and better.

In celebration of family connection and unification, the Mayor's Office on Returning Citizen's Affairs expanded their Keeping it Reel program to help connect returning citizen families with a fun day of fishing lessons, skating, boat rides and more. Hundreds of returning citizens, families, friends and allies met with resource providers to build upon existing networks while enjoying the beautiful Anacostia Park.

As a Latina, I am particularly proud to see Hispanic programs grow and improve year after year. The Mayor's Office on Latino Affairs (MOLA) rose to the challenge by expanding the AfroLatino Festival, a celebration of the African diaspora from Latin countries, to the District's Downtown. Franklin Park was filled with vendors and community organizations to showcase this diverse community. Cultural showcases and music entertained thousands, highlighting our DC values. I also want to share a few other significant milestones from the past year:

For Hispanic Heritage Month, MOLA made history by breaking the Guinness World Record for the World's Largest Pupusa, a first for the Nation's Capital.

MOCA has improved our communication strategy, garnering over 16 million earned media impressions, with many of our offices being more front-facing in print, TV, and streaming news opportunities.

Combined, we held 79 events with 26,442 attendees in 2024.

These are just a few examples of the engagements that continue to help bolster our communities and display the wonderful cultures of the people here. Mayor Bowser knows that through investments, we can continue to strengthen our communities and showcase how DC is a vibrant, metropolitan city.

Grants:

Thanks to Mayor Bowser's investments in FY24, community-based organizations received \$6.6 million in grant funding to support community, cultural, and job-based programming for residents across all eight wards. 136 non-profit community-based organizations created 166 programs targeting cultures and communities across the District. Their programming reached over 500,000 residents through direct programs or events that showcased our diversity and DC values.

I want to highlight several of the stories and successes shared by our grantees. The first is from MOAPIA, through their grantee AALEAD. With grant funding, they launched the Navigating Your Future program, where youth met with seasoned professionals from various fields and

received resources for professional development to help them pursue brighter futures.

Another powerful story comes from the African Women's Cancer Awareness Association (AWCAA). With expanded outreach funded by the Mayor's Office of African Affairs, they were able to connect with a mother of four who was diagnosed with breast cancer after seeking a free mammogram through their services. Thanks to their work, she received life-saving care and continues to receive support through their health partnerships.

Public Safety:

Public safety remains a hallmark of the Bowser Administration, and the offices under my oversight continue to promote new initiatives in partnership with the public safety cluster.

One office that I must highlight is the Mayor's Office of Deaf, DeafBlind and Hard of Hearing (MODDHH). As one of the newest offices in the cluster, they have excelled in ensuring that this sometimes-overlooked community had access to resources and services. One such

initiative was a partnership with MPD's Deaf and Hard of Hearing Unit through their Community Engagement Academy, which allowed residents to meet with officers who could sign in ASL and learn about public safety tips and resources. They also collaborated with ServeDC to host the first annual Deaf, Deafblind, and Hard of Hearing class on emergency preparedness, graduating 14 CERT specialized volunteers who can now assist their community.

Revitalizing Downtown:

As we move into the new era of DC's Downtown, we continue to build upon and expand our programming there. One of MOCA's signature events, the Caribbean Cultural Concert, was brought back right here on Freedom Plaza to hundreds of residents. Acts from across the Caribbean diaspora performed for residents and visitors drawing crowds to this now annual event.

To showcase the rich diversity of cuisine, MOAPIA held the first annual Night Market in Chinatown Park, where thousands of residents enjoyed some of the best dishes the District has to offer.

We are also assisting with bringing national events to the District.

ServeDC worked with the National CERT Team to bring their annual conference to the Convention Center, bringing thousands of CERT professionals from across the nation to experience our wonderful city.

We are proud of our efforts to serve our community by providing culturally relevant programming, advocacy, and resources to help our residents progress. We understand now more than ever that we, as a city, need to come together to work—both in office and in person—to bring back our downtown and thrive. We will continue to disseminate our colleagues' messaging and partner with all agencies to ensure that our residents receive the services and support they deserve.

I want to thank the MOCA directors and their staff, as well as my core team, who work across the District to ensure that community voices are heard and culture is celebrated.

For MOCA, serving and partnering with our community is an honor and privilege that we do not take lightly. The impactful work of the offices,

events, and programs I mentioned today only scratch the surface of the work that takes place across all eight wards.

We are committed to serving the constituents of the District and removing barriers for all residents hoping to access our services and resources. The partnership we build between our offices and District constituents is critical to making our government actions more responsive to the immediate needs of all Washingtonians.

What makes me so proud to be Director of MOCA is that the Mayor's voice is heard in the language that people know and is said in a way that is culturally appropriate for them. Community outreach programs and hosting cultural events ensure that we respect the diversity and heritage of our constituents. We are always ready to answer the call, support, and serve our District residents.. As Mayor Muriel Bowser has said, "MOCA is my eyes and ears... they serve as the heartbeat of our great city, and the best way to reach me is through them."

In closing, I want to thank Mayor Muriel Bowser for her leadership and the opportunity to serve in this capacity. It is an honor to serve my neighbors and our beautiful community in such a direct way. I also want to thank you, Councilmember Bonds, and your colleagues for being a partner in our work .

Once again, thank you all for this opportunity to testify. I welcome any questions from the Committee. And I invite anyone who might be interested in contacting our office to please do so by calling us at 202-442-8150, emailing us at communityaffairs@dc.gov, or visiting us online at communityaffairs.dc.gov.