

**GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY**



2025 Performance Oversight Hearing

Testimony of
Kimberly A. Bassett
Secretary of the District of Columbia

before the
Committee on Executive Administration and Labor
Council of the District of Columbia
The Honorable Anita Bonds, Chairperson

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John A. Wilson Building
1350 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20004

Good morning, Chairperson Bonds, members of the Committee, staff, and guests. I am Kimberly Bassett, Secretary of State of the District of Columbia. I am pleased to be here to discuss the FY 2024-2025 Performance Oversight for the Office of the Secretary of the District of Columbia. I have previously submitted responses to the Committee's questions, which I am prepared to discuss today.

Joining me today are senior members of my team: Alma Candelaria, Deputy Secretary; Victor L. Reid, the Administrator for the Office of Documents and Administrative Issuances who also serves as the Office of the Secretary's General Counsel; State Archivist/Administrator for the Office of Public Records, Lopez Matthews, Jr.; Director of the Ceremonial Services Unit, Terry Handy; Director of International Affairs and Protocol Officer, Anthony Andrews; and Wiwiek Rembrandt, Operations Manager. I would also like to take this opportunity to publicly acknowledge the talent and dedication of my staff and those who work behind the scenes to ensure that the work we do meets the required excellence the citizens of the District deserve.

The Office of the Secretary is part of the Executive Office of the Mayor's cluster. I want to thank Chief of Staff Lindsey Parker for her leadership and the support of her team.

Today, I will share the activities and accomplishments of each of the respective offices and unit within the Office of the Secretary.

The Office of the Secretary is comparable to the Secretary of State in the 50 states, Puerto Rico, the US Virgin Islands, and other US territories. It is the

official resource for protocol, legal records, District of Columbia history, and ceremonial recognitions for the public, governments, and the international community. Our office is also the official custodian of the Corporate Seal of the District of Columbia.

As the Secretary of State, I also serve as the Chief Protocol Officer of the District. OS serves as the official resource on the proper use and placement of both the American and District of Columbia flags. Our website has a dedicated landing page on flag status for DC staff with flag responsibilities. Recently, we had three occasions to lower both the United States and the District flags to half-staff. The US flags were to be flown half-staff in honor of former U.S. President Jimmy Carter. The District flags were flown half-staff to pay tribute to the memory of Lieutenant Robert J. Heaney of the DC Fire and EMS Department and the victims of the tragic airplane collision near Ronald Reagan Washington National Airport.

I am a member of the National Association of Secretaries of State (NASS). Currently, I serve on its executive board and lead the Committee on the State Records and Archives. Last month, we completed the NASS Winter Conference that takes place in Washington, DC every year. Dr. Lopez Matthews presented “The DC Archives Transitioning to the Future” for the State Records & Archives Committee, as one of the three presenters for the archives session.

I also serve on the National Cherry Blossom Festival Board of Directors. Every spring, we help guide the celebration by commemorating the gift of cherry trees from Tokyo to the city of Washington, DC, and celebrating the friendship between the people of the United States and Japan. In October 2024, I was

honored to be invited by the collaboration of Destination DC and the National Cherry Blossom Festival to travel to Tokyo, Japan, as part of its Japan Mission. This trip was part of a series of engagements with the Japanese Embassy, continuing the relationship between the people of Japan and Washington, DC. I was also pleased to take part in promoting the DC Jazz group at the Sumida Street Jazz Festival in Tokyo.

In FY25, the Office of the Secretary has a total staff of 29 FTEs, an operating budget of \$5,333,813, and a capital budget of \$57,802,919.

The Office of the Secretary is comprised of four offices and one unit, located in three different locations. These five components make up the Office of the Secretary's key functions: the Office of Notary Commissions and Authentications, the Office of Documents and Administrative Issuances, the Office of Protocol and International Affairs, the Office of Public Records and Archives, and the Ceremonial Services Unit.

The Office of Notary Commissions and Authentications (ONCA) commissions notaries public and authenticates documents for foreign use. The office is open to walk-in customers for document authentications and administers the oath of office for all notary applicants. ONCA serves an average of 40+ walk-in customers per day.

Applicants seeking to become a notary submit their application online through the OnBase platform. In FY24, the office received 1,426 applications and approved 865 applications. In March 2023, ONCA began accepting applications for those who wish to become an in-person electronic notary. In FY24, ONCA

received 18 requests and approved 8 applicants. To date, there are 22 e-notaries commissioned in DC. To be endorsed as an e-notary, the individual needs first to be a notary and apply before the four (4) months of the expiration date of their notary commission.

ONCA is the only office under the Office of Secretary that generates revenue through its services in authenticating documents and commissioning notaries. In FY25, OS has budget authority of \$1 million in Spending Purpose Revenue funds from the fees collected by ONCA.

ONCA will be onboarding a new Director in Spring 2025.

The primary mission of the Office of Documents and Administrative Issuances (the Office of Documents) is to provide for the prompt preparation, editing, printing, and publication of the *District of Columbia Register* and the *District of Columbia Municipal Regulations* (DCMR) under the District of Columbia Documents Act of 1978.

The Office of Documents continues to publish the *District of Columbia Register* every week. In FY24, the Office of Documents published 16,206 pages of the *District of Columbia Register*. The Office of Documents reviewed, edited, processed, and published 177 rulemakings in FY24, and reviewed, edited, processed, and published 219 Mayor's Orders.

For FY25 and beyond, the Office of Documents will begin to review the online DCMR to update the DCMR by identifying obsolete sections and chapters within the 31 Titles. This is a multi-year project.

The Office of Documents is also responsible for drafting and compiling the District's Governmentwide FY24 Annual FOIA Report. In FY24, the Office processed 22 OS FOIA requests, of which four requests were granted, seven were denied, eleven were transferred to other agencies, leaving no pending requests. In FY25 to date, the Office has received six requests, and they are pending.

The Office of Protocol and International Affairs (OPIA) supports the District of Columbia's thriving international presence, as the District is home to almost 180 embassies and foreign representatives. OS continues to participate in events hosted by the diplomatic community and embassies around Washington, DC. The office conducts its outreach and engagement activities in a myriad of ways to reflect the broad and diverse role we play in the international community on behalf of the Mayor.

The Office of the Secretary holds meetings to connect embassies with the resources that DC has to offer and foster productive friendships with members of the diplomatic community. Many believe our role ends with hosting these international delegations; however, our role extends well beyond this function and includes serving as the liaison to the embassies on solving issues that surface regarding neighborhood and community issues as well as educating, navigating and facilitating government processes. Moreover, we play a pivotal role in liaising between the Office of Foreign Missions at the State Department and other government agencies.

Three weeks ago, the Mayor held the Diplomatic Reception in the Wilson Building, with attendance from 61 Ambassadors and representatives from 85

embassies. The Ambassador to the European Union to the US and the Africa Union Ambassador to the US were also present.

The Mayor's Embassy Neighborhood Task Force has been very effective in solving embassy and neighborhood issues. The Task Force helps manage, mitigate, and resolve issues promptly between DC residents and over 180 embassies around the city by connecting the resources of the DC Government and the US State Department to the appropriate parties. In FY24, the Task Force successfully addressed issues such as neighbor disputes over tree trimming, noise violations and protests, correct permits, watermain breaks, and much more.

The Office of the Secretary also actively coordinates meetings for the International Visitor Leadership Program, a program of the US Department of State that brings international visitors from around the world to DC for a mid-career educational exchange program. OPIA serves as the coordinating office for these meetings with the DC government officials. In 2024, we hosted 23 groups with more than 195 participants from 65 countries.

Currently, Washington, DC partners with 15 Sister Cities. The Sister City program fosters partnerships between cities around the world, focusing on areas of economic development, education, youth and cultural exchange, and government administration. These partnerships lead to collaborative projects, initiatives, and productive relationships between governments, fostering community engagement here and abroad.

The Ceremonial Services Unit is responsible for processing requests for ceremonial documents from the Mayor, including proclamations, letters of

greetings and welcome, retirement letters, congratulatory letters, condolence letters, and more. In FY24, the Ceremonial Services Unit produced 1,036 ceremonial documents, leaving a lasting impact on the lives of DC residents.

The Office of Public Records (OPR) is comprised of three departments—the DC Archives, the Public Records Center, and the Library of Government—with a total of eight staff.

In FY24, the Office of Public Records has continued to develop its electronic records and digitization program. Through our digital archive we have made available over 1,000,000 pages including 10,000 birth records and 10,000 death records, the publicly available marriage record indexes and over 900,000 pages from the Land Record Index. We have also made available our first six finding aids from DC Archives. These are available on our digital repository. To support the preservation of electronic records, the office updated our General Records Schedule 20 to provide records retention guidance for electronic records, including email and social media. In support of this initiative, we have developed a number of training documents to support our work.

Importantly, the OPR team has developed training for DC Record Managers and has made it available via the DCHR certification platform. This training includes six sessions focused on the basics of records management including records scheduling, managing electronic records, and essentials of disaster planning for records. Once all six sessions are completed, the Records Managers receive a certificate of completion from the Office of the Secretary.

Continuing with our work from FY24 to better support our 106 agencies, we

have developed a series of training workshops for DC Records managers called “Records Management Wednesdays” where we meet the second Wednesday of every month to train records managers on topics related to their work and proper records management.

We have also increased the in-person support for our agencies. We regularly make site visits to agencies to appraise records, assist with preparing records for transfer or destruction and review processes. We also meet with records managers to discuss updates to their records schedules and implementation of records retention processes for electronic records.

We have continued to work with OCTO to maintain our Collections Management System and have nearly completed an updated inventory of records held in the Naylor Court Facility.

We have also continued our progress in providing reference support to patrons. Most of our reference requests are now completed within 3 – 5 business days. We have also heard from several long-time users who have complimented us on the improvements we have made in the reference experience.

Progress has also been made with the construction of our new facility on the campus of UDC. The project has received approvals from the Zoning Commission, National Capital Planning Commission, and the Commission on Fine Arts. There have been some delays with the project. The removal of the existing OUC antenna from UDC Building 41 and the installation of the new antenna took longer than originally anticipated. Construction is currently paused while UDC and DGS are working to complete structural repairs to the parking garage. These repairs are

necessary to begin structural demolition to Building 41.

I would also like to share that in support of our DC residents we have also participated in several outreach activities in FY24. We have partnered with the DCPS Inspired Teaching institute to host a real-world history program high school intern, worked with DCHR to host a District Leadership Program Intern and a Marion Barry Summer Youth Program Intern. Dr. Matthews and I also visited with students at Ballou High School to discuss civic engagement and the importance of knowing your history.

As I mentioned in last year's Hearing, working with DGS, we successfully relocated the Office of Notary Commissions and Authentications and the Office of Documents and Administrative Issuances to 899 North Capitol Street, NE. The move took place in September 2024. This new location offers much-needed space for the Office of Notary. There is a conference room in the new location, which gives ONCA the ability to swear in multiple notaries at once.

The Office of the Secretary works with several other organizations and city agencies to coordinate various ceremonies, conventions, parades, and festivals, including the work of the Commission on the Martin Luther King Jr. Holiday and the District of Columbia Emancipation Commemoration Commission. I serve as a Chair and Advisor to the Commission on the Martin Luther King Jr. Holiday, and Chair of the District of Columbia Emancipation Commemoration Commission. The Office of the Secretary also plays an important role in the Mayor's Swearing-In Ceremony and oversees the DC One Fund Campaign and the District of Columbia Voting Rights and Statehood Grant. The most recent commission that OS has joined is the DC250 Commission to

celebrate, commemorate and archive our upcoming milestone independence as a nation.

In addition, every four years following the presidential election, the Office of the Secretary administers the Electoral College for DC. The 16th Meeting of District of Columbia Electoral College was held on December 17, 2024. Under the 23rd Amendment of the Constitution, the District of Columbia is allocated three electors. The three electors appointed for the 16th Meeting were Darryl Wiggins, Russ Breckenridge, and Addison Rose, representing business, labor and the future.

The Commission on the Martin Luther King Jr. Holiday assists the Mayor with the District's celebration to commemorate the birth of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. This year, we just completed a successful celebration with our traditional activities, the annual Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial Breakfast organized by the United Planning Organization (UPO), MLK Wreath Laying, MLK Day of Action on January 17, 2025, and Martin Luther King Day Peace Walk on January 18, 2025.

Every year, in collaboration with the Executive Office of the Mayor, the Office of the Secretary and the Emancipation Commemoration Commission, plan and organize an annual Emancipation Day Parade and Democracy Breakfast or Luncheon event. OPR is also organizing a lecture series to commemorate the April 16 holiday.

For several years, the Office of the Secretary has administered the District of Columbia Voting Rights and Statehood Grant, awarding \$200,000 in grant funds each year to advance the District's statehood effort. In keeping with Mayor

Bowser's priority of finding fresh ideas, we identified organizations through the Request for Applications (RFA) process to promote voting rights and statehood for the District. The FY25 grant was released on November 8, 2024, and awarded to four organizations. OS continues its goal for this program, which is to strengthen awareness for Statehood for Washington, DC, ultimately resulting in true voting rights for the residents of the District.

The Office of the Secretary executed another successful DC One Fund Charitable Giving Campaign. Chaired by the Director of DC Parks and Recreation, Thennie Freeman, the 2024 DC One Fund Campaign raised nearly \$1 million.

In closing, I would like to thank you, Chairperson Bonds, for your leadership and support, without which our work would be immensely more difficult. We appreciate the opportunity to share our accomplishments and plans for continuous improvement and look forward to continuing to work with you and this Committee. This concludes my presentation. My staff and I are happy to address your questions at this time.