

GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA



Fiscal Year 2027 Budget Hearing
Office of Neighborhood Safety and Engagement

Testimony of
Kwelli Sneed, Executive Director
Office of Neighborhood Safety and Engagement

Before the
Committee on the Judiciary and Public Safety Council of the District of Columbia
The Honorable Brooke Pinto, Chairman

April 22, 2026
Time: 9:00 am
1350 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Room 500
Washington, DC 20004

Good morning, Chairperson Pinto, members, and staff of the Committee on the Judiciary and Public Safety. I am Kwelli Sneed, and I have the privilege of serving as the Executive Director of the Office of Neighborhood Safety and Engagement (ONSE). I am here today with our Interim Chief Operating Officer Porscha Mills, Deputy Director Julia Irving, and Agency Fiscal Officer Anthony Iwobi to discuss Mayor Muriel Bowser's proposed Fiscal Year 2027 budget and how our priorities reflect the realities of today's public safety landscape and the needs of District residents. Thank you to other members of my team with us today: Strategic Planning and Performance Officer Heather McGowan, General Counsel John Cheek, and Resource Allocation Officer Patricia Ross-King.

Mayor Bowser's proposed FY27 Budget, Grow DC, was formulated with three key considerations in mind: how to drive growth in our economy to fund the services and programs residents count on, how to keep families in DC and attract new residents, and how to create a business environment that draws new investment and creates new jobs. We are navigating a pivotal moment that demands a more deliberate approach to growth. The federal dollars that once expanded our programs in unprecedented ways have been exhausted, and federal workforce reductions have introduced new pressures on our economy and commercial corridors. That being said, it's important to be clear: DC is still growing. Revenues have slowed, but the city maintains a strong financial foundation on which we can build by making the kinds of strategic and targeted decisions that will allow DC to continue growing while delivering the high-quality services our residents depend on.

The mission of ONSE is to build partnerships and implement strategies that reduce gun-related violence in the District. ONSE fulfills this mission by coordinating the District's gun violence prevention and intervention initiatives, using both public health and public safety tools, and by focusing on identifying and engaging with those most likely to be involved in gun violence, providing them with an alternative to crime.

The Mayor proposes a FY27 ONSE budget of \$20.1 million, which supports our core violence prevention portfolio and positions the agency to sustain results while responding to changing needs across the District. Specifically, the budget includes funding for 46 FTEs to support the work in our mission critical programs and \$12 million for our violence intervention grant programs,

enabling continuity, performance management, and targeted expansion where data indicates the greatest need.

The District, like cities nationwide, continues to grapple with gun violence as a public safety and public health challenge with significant economic costs- from emergency medical care, law enforcement response, criminal justice expenses to lost productivity and long-term trauma. Violence prevention saves lives and dollars. Strategic, evidence-based violence intervention yields positive results, particularly when resources are focused where risk is highest and services are integrated.

We have seen the effects of sustained investment in community-based violence intervention. Violent crime and homicides have shown significant year-over-year declines; this year alone, homicides have decreased by 55 percent in the District. We are also experiencing a nearly 34 percent reduction in gun violence year to date. These reductions reflect the value of outreach and engagement, trusted relationships, and coordinated community-level strategies.

This year, we are focusing on our core services to ensure we are aligned with current realities and positioned for long-term impact. In FY27, we are concentrating on services for individuals at highest risk of violence and victimization.

As I detailed during the Performance Oversight Hearing in February, starting at the beginning of the year, ONSE implemented the Agreement for the Success of the Office of Neighborhood Safety and Engagement. To align with the goals of the Agreement, we adopted a Group-Based Violence Reduction Strategy, a place-based and people-centered approach designed to reduce serious violence through consistent outreach, coordinated service delivery, and relentless engagement. Let me share a few highlights from the early implementation of the Agreement for Success of ONSE:

- Data analysis to support decision-making, resource allocation, and VI deployment;
- Structured case management incorporating cognitive behavioral interventions;
- Real-time conflict mediation and post-incident engagement; and
- Data-driven performance management and continuous improvement.

These core elements create the conditions for real progress and offer communities renewed hope for lasting safety.

Violence interrupters are trusted individuals embedded in our neighborhoods, de-escalating in real time, mediating conflicts, and connecting individuals to services. Where community violence intervention programs operate, research has documented reductions in shootings, and we know we are only part of the solution, underscoring the value of trusted outreach and timely intervention.

Our Pathways Program - a behavior modification program - engages with high-risk individuals providing cognitive behavioral therapy, job readiness, and supportive services. We help participants build decision-making, conflict resolution, and coping skills.

ONSE provides crisis response, trauma-informed counseling, and stabilization services for survivors, families who have lost loved ones, and community members affected by gun violence. We collaborate closely with community partners - including hospital-based violence intervention programs, temporary housing providers, and mental health agencies- to deliver early, coordinated support after incidents and help prevent further harm.

When we compare the full cost of violent incidents to the cost of prevention, intervention, and stabilization, the conclusion is clear- effective community-based violence interruption and supportive services is the right choice.

We continue to deepen our collaboration with District agencies and align efforts with local and national partners to leverage best practices. Together, we are building a responsive network that meets residents where they are and sustains long-term progress. We are engaging with residents, businesses, and partners in the community through a range of initiatives, including:

- Our first-ever Capacity Building Seminar is scheduled for Friday, April 24, and is designed to connect our team and providers with critical community resources.
- A new VI Readiness Bootcamp pilot, offering 40 hours of intensive skill-building and experiential learning for Violence Interrupters and Outreach Workers.

- A public awareness campaign with WMATA highlighting National Gun Violence Awareness Month and the importance of community-based violence intervention.
- Our 3rd Annual Healing Communities Symposium this summer will bring together residents for shared engagement, reflection, and healing.
- And this year's mini-grant funding opportunity, supporting local community-based organizations working in prevention, trauma-informed care, and youth development—key pillars in advancing our mission.

Before I close, I want to take a moment to reflect on a milestone that speaks to the heart of our work. Since September 2018 nearly 450 Ambassadors have completed our Pathways Program - each one a testament to what is possible when determination is met with opportunity and community support. We are already seeing its promise continue with the launch of our extended program - Cohort 22, a new class of 20 young men from the District who are embracing their potential and committing to their future. We look forward to celebrating their accomplishments, dedication, and their transformation at graduation this June.

As ONSE approaches its 10-year anniversary this fall, I want to honor the many people who have carried us to this moment - those who embody our values of trust, healing, equity, and collaboration. Their unwavering commitment, especially in the most challenging moments, reminds us that change is not only possible - it is happening every day. As ONSE enters its next decade, we remain grounded in our mission and energized by what lies ahead.

To the ONSE team, thank you for your diligence and unwavering commitment. Chairperson Pinto and members of the Committee, thank you for your leadership and for the opportunity to testify today. I welcome any questions you may have.