

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



2026 Performance Oversight Hearing

Testimony of
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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 2025-2026 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; Dr. Lopez Matthews, Jr., State Archivist and Administrator for the Office of Public Records; Director of the Ceremonial Services Unit, Terry Handy; Greer Hill, Director for the Office of Notary Commissions and Authentications; 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 (“the Office”) is part of the Executive Office of the Mayor’s cluster. I want to thank Chief of Staff Tomás Arturo Talamante for his leadership and the support from his 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.

I am a member of the National Association of Secretaries of State (NASS). For the current term, I serve as a member of the International Relations Committee, the State Records and Archives Committee, and the Technology and Security Committee.

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.

For FY26, the Office of the Secretary has a total staff of 29 FTEs, an operating budget of \$5,483,426, and a capital budget authority through FY31 of \$167,064,627.

The Office of the Secretary consists 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 use in foreign countries. ONCA is open to walk-in customers for document authentications and administers the “oath of office” for all notary applicants. ONCA serves an average of more than 50 walk-in customers each day.

Individuals applying to become a notary submit their applications online through the OnBase platform. In FY25, ONCA approved 1,518 applications. During the same period, the office received 170 e-notary applications, approving 152.

Under new leadership, Greer Hill, ONCA conducted extensive research into remote notary solutions. In FY25, ONCA received fewer than 35 inquiries and survey responses expressing interest in remote notary commissions. ONCA also looked into industry-wide data and some states that have implemented remote notary.

Based on this research, ONCA chose not to pursue expensive, contractor-supported technology solutions. Instead, the office planned, designed, and is currently testing an internal remote notary tool using existing OCTO resources. This approach is intended to provide a low-cost, high-impact solution for residents and stakeholders. ONCA’s target is to make a remote notary solution available in DC by Q3 of FY26.

ONCA has also significantly streamlined the notary application process. By improving administrative practices—such as redesigning workflows, strengthening

internal coordination, and optimizing processing protocols—the office has reduced average application processing times from 8–12 weeks to fewer than 3 weeks in most cases.

In addition, ONCA is the only office within the Office of the Secretary that generates revenue. Through fees collected for document authentications and notary commissions, ONCA is expected to generate approximately \$1.1 million in Spending Purpose Revenue in FY26.

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 FY25, the Office of Documents published 15,586 pages of the *District of Columbia Register*. The Office of Documents reviewed, edited, processed, and published 171 rulemakings in FY25, and reviewed, edited, processed, and published 168 Administrative Issuances.

The Office of Documents is also responsible for drafting and compiling the District’s Governmentwide FY25 Annual FOIA Report. The FY25 Annual FOIA Report is expected to be submitted to the Council of the District of Columbia during the month of February. The report will represent the FY25 public disclosure of information by over 80 District government agencies and will include summaries of the Mayor’s Offices of Legal Counsel FOIA appeals results for FY25.

In FY25, the Office of Documents processed 11 OS FOIA requests, of which one request was granted, seven were denied, and three were transferred to other agencies, with one pending request. In FY26 to date, the office has received two requests, and both are pending.

In FY25, the Office of Documents also completed binding the Mayor’s Orders for 2019, 2020, 2021, 2022, 2023, and 2024. This initiative makes permanent the Orders issued by the Mayor and will preserve these documents for decades. The office also created a Pandemic Special Edition Volume of Mayor’s Orders that were issued during the COVID-19 pandemic.

In addition, during the government shutdown from October 1 to November 12, 2025, the Office of Documents was tasked with issuing marriage licenses. The “Let Our Vows Endure Emergency Act of 2025” or “LOVE Act,” signed on October 9, 2025, gives Mayor Bowser the authority to issue marriage licenses and authorize temporary officiants during this federal government shutdown. The office processed and issued 604 licenses. The Office of the Secretary also officiated the wedding ceremonies for couples who obtained licenses from the Office of Documents at the Wilson Building. More than 100 couples were officiated in this building.

The Office of Protocol and International Affairs (OPIA) continues to participate in and convene engagements hosted by the diplomatic community and embassies across Washington, DC. Our outreach reflects the broad and diverse role we play on behalf of the Mayor, rooted in the belief that Washington, DC’s status as a global capital must directly benefit District residents. As home to 181 embassies and foreign missions, the District’s international presence is a tremendous asset. In

FY25, OPIA organized 210 high-level diplomatic engagements, strategically leveraging these relationships to strengthen Washington, DC's global standing while ensuring they translate into meaningful economic, cultural, and community benefits for residents.

The Office of the Secretary holds regular meetings to connect embassies with District resources and foster productive relationships with members of the diplomatic community. While many assume our role ends with hosting international delegations, our work extends well beyond protocol. We serve as a trusted liaison to embassies in resolving neighborhood and community concerns, guiding diplomatic missions through District government processes, and coordinating closely with the U.S. Department of State's Office of Foreign Missions and other federal agencies to address complex operational and regulatory issues.

In January 2025, the Mayor hosted the annual Diplomatic Reception at the Wilson Building, welcoming 61 Ambassadors and representatives from 85 embassies. The Office of the Secretary is organizing this event again this year, to be held next week, and we anticipate even broader ambassadorial participation. We look forward to your presence, Chairperson Bonds. This reception exemplifies how the District convenes global leadership while reinforcing Washington, DC's role as a welcoming and collaborative international capital.

To ensure that our status as a global diplomatic hub coexists harmoniously with residential life, the Office continues to lead the Mayor's Embassy Neighborhood Task Force. This proactive mechanism serves as the primary forum for addressing sensitive issues between diplomatic missions and surrounding communities. Whether resolving infrastructure concerns such as fence heights and rodent control

or operational challenges related to parking and noise, the Task Force provides residents with a direct and effective path to resolution. Throughout FY25 and Q1 of FY26, the Task Force successfully managed 34 specific interventions, demonstrating our commitment to protecting residents' quality of life while upholding the District's unique international responsibilities.

The Office of the Secretary also coordinates the District's participation in the U.S. Department of State's International Visitor Leadership Program (IVLP), a program by the U.S. Department of State that brings international visitors from around the world to DC for mid-career educational exchange programs. In FY25 and Q1 FY26, OS hosted 28 IVLP meetings, serving as the critical bridge between the State Department and District government expertise. Through this work, we ensure that emerging global leaders experience the very best of Washington, DC's governance, innovation, and public-sector leadership.

Our commitment to ensuring that DC's global presence gives back locally is further reflected in our support for flagship cultural and educational initiatives. Through the Embassy Adoption Program—which celebrated its 50th anniversary this past year—more than 50,000 DC public school students across all eight (8) wards have been connected to the world through classroom engagement with embassies. The Office supports this program by recruiting embassy participation and sustaining high levels of engagement across the diplomatic community. We also collaborate on Passport DC and the Around the World Embassy Tour, which invite residents to experience international cultures firsthand, as well as the Winternational Embassy Showcase, where embassies share their art, cuisine, and traditions with thousands of attendees. Together, these programs transform DC's international presence into tangible educational, cultural, and economic value for residents.

Finally, the Office continues to strengthen relationships with national capitals through the District’s Sister City agreements. Our engagements throughout FY25 and Q1 FY26 demonstrated that these partnerships are strategic tools that advance District policy priorities and cultural vibrancy. A signature highlight was the September 14–16, 2025 visit from Bangkok, DC’s first-ever Sister City. Bangkok and the Embassy of Thailand were especially active partners throughout FY25, and the visit set the gold standard for our program. It included the Sawasdee Thai Festival, which attracted more than 50,000 attendees, a high-level bilateral meeting between Mayor Bowser and the Governor of Bangkok, and technical exchanges focused on early childhood education and climate resilience. Building on this momentum, in FY26, the Office plans to further activate our Sister City network through collaborative programming tied to America 250, including a potential engagement with Seoul, South Korea, to mark the 20th anniversary of the DC–Seoul Sister City partnership.

The Ceremonial Services Unit is responsible for processing requests for ceremonial documents from the Mayor, to include proclamations, salutes, citations, certificates of appreciation, public service awards, greetings, congratulatory or condolence letters, and other items of a ceremonial nature. In addition to producing 1,023 ceremonial documents in FY25 and more than 240 documents in FY26 to date, the Ceremonial Services Unit evaluates and researches approximately 2,000 ceremonial document requests annually for validity, proper classification, and to determine appropriate responses.

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.

This year, we will celebrate 40 Years of the DC Archives. We are planning some celebrations for this milestone.

These past few years, OPR has made a lot of progress under the leadership of Dr. Lopez Matthews, Jr., State Archivist and Administrator for the Office of Public Records. Some of them are:

- “Records Management Wednesdays” - This was a series of training workshops for DC Government records managers to learn about our services and records management in general. These sessions were regularly attended by over 50% of DC Government records managers.
- OPR completed the digitization of 5,000 records, which were added to the digital archive. They included 2,000 birth records and 3,000 death records supporting genealogical research.
- OPR digitized over 100,000 land record cards during FY25. They are available online for businesses and residents who seek information on real estate transactions in the District.
- In partnership with the DC History Center, we held the first-ever DC Archives Crawl. This event showed and made available the collections by DC Archives and DC History Center.

We have built a network of 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 continue to work with OCTO to maintain our Collections Management System, ArchivesSpace. The Collection data has been fully ingested into the system, allowing our staff to locate records and assist researchers. OCTO has provided a dedicated systems engineer to maintain the system by performing regular upgrades and troubleshooting to provide steady system performance. Throughout FY26, OS and OCTO will continue to coordinate the ongoing maintenance of the system and upgrades.

For the new DC Archives facility, the FY26 approved Capital budget authority is approximately \$168 million. Based on this budget authority, the project is targeted for delivery in the late calendar year 2030. While the project is now fully funded, cost escalations resulting from pushing the project out are being evaluated. The project team is engaging in value engineering (VE) exercises to ensure the project remains on budget. In FY26, DGS plans to start the Construction Services, including structural demolition of Building 41 and new structural installation for the build-out of the facility.

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 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) and Martin Luther King Day Peace Walk on January 19, 2026. The Commission also participated in the MLK Remembrance and Recognition Luncheon, MLK Library X 1619 Project Celebration, MLK Library Children’s Celebration, International Salute to Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and the 40th Martin Luther King Mural Celebration.

Every year, in collaboration with the Executive Office of the Mayor, the Office of the Secretary and the Emancipation Commemoration Commission, we plan and organize the Emancipation Day celebrations. Last year, we only had the parade, concert, and a lecture series held by the Office of Public Records. This year, as we celebrate the nation’s 250th anniversary, our celebration will be tied to DC250.

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. I am also a member of the DC250 Commission. We play a key role in planning, coordinating, and supporting activities for the 250th milestone in the nation’s capital.

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 FY26 grant was released on November 7, 2025, and awarded to five

organizations. These organizations were selected for their work on voting rights and statehood for the District of Columbia. The objective of the grant is to amplify awareness and support for DC statehood through targeted education, outreach, and engagement with elected officials and Americans nationwide, including visitors to our nation’s capital.

The Office of the Secretary executed another successful DC One Fund Charitable Giving Campaign. Chaired by the Director of the Office of Risk Management, Jed Ross, the 2025 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.