

**Statement on behalf of the
American Civil Liberties Union of the District of Columbia
before the
D.C. Council Committee on the Judiciary and Public Safety
Budget Oversight Hearing for the
Metropolitan Police Department
By
Ahoefa Ananouko, Policy Associate
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Hello Chair Pinto and members of the Committee. My name is Ahoefa Ananouko, and I present the following testimony on behalf of the American Civil Liberties Union of the District of Columbia (ACLU-D.C.) and our over 14,000 members in all 8 wards.

ACLU-D.C. works to protect and advance civil liberties and civil rights for people who live and work in, and visit D.C. Among ACLU-D.C.'s top priorities is ensuring that D.C.'s leaders are allocating the District's limited resources in these challenging economic times in ways that address the most pressing needs of District residents. This testimony will focus on the mayor's fiscal year 2026 (FY26) proposed budget for the Metropolitan Police Department (MPD, the Department), which saw approximately a \$30 million increase. In particular, the testimony raises concerns about investments in recruitment and the purchase and use of surveillance technologies.

MPD Recruitment

Every year MPD leaders, the Mayor, and the president of the D.C. police union come before the Council requesting more resources for recruitment, claiming that there are not enough officers on the force.^{1,2} And this year is no different. This is driven in large part by a desire by the Executive and MPD for the staffing level of sworn officers to reach 4,000.³ This desired number has not been substantiated with any evidence to support why it is critical to have

¹ Oberg, T. "Chief: DC Police Staffing at Its Lowest in Decades." NBC Washington, February 23, 2023. <https://www.nbcwashington.com/news/local/chief-dc-police-staffing-at-its-lowest-in-decades/3286158/>.

² Ashley, F. "DC police union claims MPD needs more officers, auditor says no data supports that." ABC News/WJLA, January 15, 2025. <https://wjla.com/news/local/metropolitan-police-department-staffing-shortages-officers-risk-patrols-low-staff-numbers-mpd-chief-pamela-smith-investigations-kathy-patterson-fraudulent-washington-dc-dmv>.

³ Mayor Bowser press release on pathway to 4,000 sworn officers. <https://mayor.dc.gov/release/mayor-bowser-highlights-pathway-4000-sworn-officers#:~:text=Monday%2C%20April%204%2C%202022,on%2Dboarded%20in%20one%20year>.

this large and specific number of officers, or what that number would do for the safety of our communities.

Besides the fact that there is no evidence to support the notion that increasing the number of police officers leads to less crime or safer communities, the millions of dollars invested in large recruitment bonuses for MPD and police departments across the country, has not yielded the significant return on investment they promised.⁴ Attrition, one of the reasons often cited as justification for increasing money for recruitment, “has slowed considerably since peaking in late 2022.”⁵ Meanwhile, recruitment continues to lag, showing clearly that throwing more money at the issue will not fix it.

It is also important to emphasize that at the same time the force has seen a reduction, the Mayor and police chief have praised the fact that crime rates continue to trend downward.^{6,7} The Mayor’s FY26 budget presentations notes that violent crime is at the lowest it has been in three decades.⁸ And the police chief noted during her testimony before the Judiciary Committee during MPD’s FY26 budget oversight hearing on June 10 that violent crime is down 22 percent and overall crime down six percent on top of the 15 percent decrease last year.⁹

In ACLU-D.C.’s testimony for MPD’s FY24,¹⁰ budget we recommended that the Council wait until the D.C. Auditor’s office (the Auditor) concluded its MPD staffing assessment before proceeding with more investments in resources aimed at increasing the size of the force. The Council moved forward with funding the mayor’s proposals for recruitment incentives anyway at the time and also for the FY25 budget. The Auditor’s office published its report¹¹

⁴ Asher, J. “Recruitment Bonuses Haven’t Led To More Officers.” June 1, 2025.

https://jasher.substack.com/p/recruitment-bonuses-havent-led-to?utm_source=post-email-title&publication_id=1234332&post_id=163812259&utm_campaign=email-post-title&isFreemail=true&r=32d0vz&triedRedirect=true&utm_medium=email.

⁵ Asher, J. 2025.

⁶ Uliano, D. “What DC’s police chief believes has led to a ‘33% reduction in violent crime.’” WTOP, July 18, 2024. <https://wtop.com/dc/2024/07/dc-police-chief-marks-one-year-on-the-job-by-highlighting-dropping-crime-rate/>.

⁷ Ashley, P. “DC officials highlight crime reduction efforts, address juvenile violence concerns.” ABC News/WJLA, December 9, 2025. <https://wjla.com/news/local/washington-dc-crime-trends-2024-mayor-muriel-bowser-public-safety-violent-gun-violence-homicide-data-numbers-residents-businesses-district-city-resources-deputy-mpd-police-department-investigation>.

⁸ Mayor’s FY26 Budget Presentation, presented to the Council on Tuesday, May 27, 2025. https://mayor.dc.gov/sites/default/files/dc/sites/mayormb/page_content/attachments/FY26-Budget-Presentation-Deck.pdf.

⁹ Committee on the Judiciary & Public Safety, Budget Oversight Hearing for MPD, June 10, 2025. https://dc.granicus.com/MediaPlayer.php?view_id=2&clip_id=9649.

¹⁰ ACLU-D.C. testimony for MPD FY24 budget hearing. March 31, 2023.

<https://www.acludc.org/en/legislation/aclu-dc-testifies-budget-oversight-hearing-metropolitan-police-department-0>.

¹¹ Officer of the D.C Auditor. “MPD Needs Improved Data Analysis, Targeted Deployment, and More Detectives.” September 12, 2024. https://dcauditor.wpenginepowered.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/MPD.Staffing.Report.MPD_.9.12.14.pdf.

in September 2024, and the conclusion was clear: MPD has adequate staffing; what it needs is to learn how to better deploy its officers.

According to the Auditor's report, "MPD urgently needs to gather more comprehensive data¹² on how [Patrol Services] and [Investigation Services Bureau] personnel spend their time," including having a better understanding of time consumed on activities like guarding arrestees at hospitals and homeland security duties. With regard to Patrol Services, the Auditor recommended that MPD address "where and when patrol officers are needed rather than increasing or decreasing them."¹³ With regard to the Investigative Services Bureau, the Auditor recommended that MPD make policy changes or practices for specific units and fill some of the positions with other professional staff (i.e., staff to handle administrative tasks), which would in turn free up detectives. The Auditor further recommended that MPD develop a workload-based staffing model that allocates officers and professional staff to areas that reflect needs (types and volumes of community service calls, crimes, and proactive policing functions). ACLU-D.C. supports the Auditor's recommendations, to both better serve the D.C. community and to make MPD more cost-effective.

As is shown by the Auditor's report, the structural issues that continue to be present at MPD are not going to be resolved with more funding or more officers on the force.

Surveillance Technology

A major concern ACLU-D.C. has brought before the Council for many years is the unchecked use of surveillance technology by MPD and other District entities. Technology advances faster than our laws and policies. As they continue to proliferate, it is critical that the Council asks important questions and performs its oversight duties to ensure that surveillance technologies are not being used in ways that impede the rights of D.C. residents and those who visit the District.

The mayor's proposed budget allocates \$825,000 for the purchase of technology and software, and an additional \$800,000 for "systems support." The budget does not specify what this technology will be and what it will be used for, nor the type of support the funds will be going towards. The D.C. Council must ensure that the use of any current or new technology does not impose further risks, especially on individuals and groups already subject to over-policing and surveillance—namely Black and brown communities, low-

¹² The lack of adequate/comprehensive data is a concern ACLU.D.C. has raised about MPD for years. See ACLU-D.C. 2022 and 2023 MPD performance oversight testimonies: <https://www.acludc.org/en/legislation/aclu-dc-testifies-performance-oversight-hearing-metropolitan-police-department> and <https://www.acludc.org/en/legislation/aclu-dc-testifies-judiciary-and-public-safety-performance-oversight-hearing-metropolitan>.

¹³ Auditor's report, p.1.

income communities, politically active groups, immigrants, Muslims or those perceived to be from the Middle East, and members of the LGBTQ+ community.

While surveillance technologies are lauded as better and cheaper alternatives to police in some instances, they are riddled with significant privacy issues. These tools can have a chilling effect on speech and human rights,^{14,15} and modern surveillance technology has dramatically increased the scope and scale of the already-concerning surveillance of protests. Further, new forms of biometric tools like facial recognition are racially biased,^{16,17} and can track thousands of protesters from each surveillance camera, without the consent or any notification to those being surveilled.

Additionally, databases created by these technologies are vulnerable to breach and exploitation,¹⁸ including by private companies and federal agencies. The lack of transparency into how agencies like MPD acquire and use these technologies, how they store the data, and who has access to said data, increases these vulnerabilities. The Council must ensure both itself and the D.C. community are informed of all uses of the data collected and that they are not shared improperly.

D.C. already has a very extensive web of surveillance that includes hundreds of CCTV cameras, license plate readers, and traffic cameras, among other tools. These devices monitor schools, roadways, and even public housing complexes. Additionally, the Private Security Rebate program allows residents and businesses to opt in to share their camera feeds with MPD.

ACLU-D.C. acknowledges concerns District leaders and some residents have about crime. However, we caution against expanding government surveillance. At a time when we are seeing increased federal infringement on people's rights to free speech and assembly, as well as attacks on immigrants' and LGBTQ+ rights, and there seems to be disregard for law and procedures at the federal level, the D.C. Council's responsibility to protect District residents and visitors is more important than ever.

We share a common goal of living in a safe D.C. The District's budget should reflect that goal by ensuring that our approaches to safety are broad, address root causes of crime,

¹⁴ Gullo, K. "Surveillance Chills Speech—As New Studies Show—And Free Association Suffers." Electronic Frontier Foundation, May 19, 2016. <https://www.eff.org/deeplinks/2016/05/when-surveillance-chills-speech-new-studies-show-our-rights-free-association>.

¹⁵ Murray, D. et. al. "The Chilling Effects of Surveillance and Human Rights: Insights from Qualitative Research in Uganda and Zimbabwe." <https://academic.oup.com/jhrp/article/16/1/397/7234270>.

¹⁶ Johnson, T. & Johnson, N. "Police Facial Recognition Technology Can't Tell Black People Apart." Scientific American, May 23, 2023. <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/police-facial-recognition-technology-cant-tell-black-people-apart/>.

¹⁷ Electronic Privacy Information Center. "Privacy & Racial Justice." <https://epic.org/issues/democracy-free-speech/privacy-and-racial-justice/>.

¹⁸ Eye Spy Supply. "Privacy Concerns in Surveillance Technology." September 4, 2023. <https://blog.eyespy.com/2023/09/04/privacy-concerns-in-surveillance-technology/>.

and include the safety of our most vulnerable residents. Traditional approaches to community safety are not enough. Evidence on recidivism and violence has shown that policing and incarcerating alone do not meaningfully reduce either, whereas a growing body of evidence supports adding approaches that address root causes of violence, insecurity, and crime. As the ACLU-D.C. has shared with The Council in previous testimony, the Council needs to ensure the budget reflects this reality by not investing more in failed and harmful methods.

Thank you for your time and attention.