

**Testimony on behalf of the  
American Civil Liberties Union of the District of Columbia  
before the D.C. Council Committee on Facilities  
Budget Oversight Hearing  
on the Department of Parks and Recreation**

**Hearing on April 27, 2026  
Submitted on April 27, 2026**

Good morning, Chairperson Lewis George and members of the Committee. My name is Peggy Ramin, and I am the Policy Counsel at the American Civil Liberties Union of the District of Columbia (ACLU-D.C.). Thank you for the opportunity to present testimony today on behalf of our over 14,000 members and supporters across the District.

Our testimony today addresses our recommendations regarding the District's Fiscal Year 2027 (FY27) budget for the Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR). The ACLU-D.C. supports FY27 funding levels for DPR at or above FY26 levels, which will allow the department to continue to invest necessary funds in accessible facilities and programming for all D.C. residents. We are particularly concerned that the Mayor's proposed budget does not fund DPR at the correct level to provide young people and their families with safe spaces to grow and develop. Cuts to DPR's operating budget will make it more difficult for DPR to provide robust, youth-centered programming that is both fully staffed and accessible to residents across the District's eight wards. Our communities can flourish when we take a preventive, rather than punitive, approach to youth development and public safety. We believe funding levels that support DPR's full operating needs will help implement this holistic approach, thereby making our communities safer, and helping the District's young residents grow into healthy, successful adults.

**I. The Department of Parks and Recreation must be fully funded to support investment in programming and resources for young people that reinforce a prevention- and support-based approach to public safety.**

ACLU-D.C.'s recent report, *Building Safety Through Resources: A Better Path to Public Safety in D.C.*,<sup>1</sup> outlines a public safety approach centered on prevention and support, rather than over-reliance on policing and jails. It is well documented that public policy solutions that address the root causes of public safety issues keep our communities safer and more secure. The report details ways that the District can invest in community safety and security through prevention, and by supporting families, youth, and community reentry.

Families in the District deserve access to high quality facilities, services, and programming through DPR, regardless of the ward they reside in. When we invest in families' stability and safety, children can thrive. Unfortunately, for many young people, critical services and supports are offered only after they have already become engaged with the criminal legal system. Research has shown that incarceration undermines public safety, is harmful to young people's physical and mental health, exposes

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<sup>1</sup> ACLU-D.C., "Building Safety Through Resources: A Better Path to Public Safety in D.C.," Feb. 2026, <https://www.acludc.org/app/uploads/2025/10/2025-ACLU-D.C.-Report-Building-Safety-Through-Resources.pdf>.

them to abuse, and impedes their education and career attainment.<sup>2</sup> Early intervention in the form of well-funded and well-implemented programming, facilities, and support can make all the difference in a child's development and their ability to thrive later in life.

## **II. ACLU-D.C. supports a stable and full funding level for the Department of Parks and Recreation for FY27.**

ACLU-D.C. supports funding levels at or above the FY26 level for the Department of Parks and Recreation in local funds for FY27. We are disappointed to see that the Mayor's FY27 budget proposes an 8.1 percent, or over \$6.7 million,<sup>3</sup> cut to DPR's operating budget from FY26 funding levels. This cut includes a 14% cut to DPR site-based programming, which will be reflected in the breadth of offerings residents across the District will be able to access at their local DPR facilities. When fully funded, DPR can create programming and provide places where young people feel that they belong – safe spaces where kids can be kids. Access to these supports during formative stages of brain and social development are<sup>4</sup>critical for a young person's success, especially for those children that have experienced trauma and adverse childhood experiences.<sup>5</sup> Now more than ever, D.C. must prioritize non-carceral approaches to public safety that address the underlying challenges that young people face, partnering with D.C. youth and community leaders to create meaningful interventions. Cuts to DPR's operating budget mean less options for young people and their families who are seeking alternative safe spaces and diverse programming across the District.

The Department of Parks and Recreation must be fully funded to provide programming and facilities designed to meet the community's needs and provide diversionary alternatives for young people. At minimum, communities need equal access to robust programming and services and functioning, accessible facilities across all eight wards, and particularly in those wards that serve lower-income residents. As program enrollment and the number of visitors to facilities continue to increase, the agency must keep up with the needs of communities. This includes the development and implementation of diverse and responsive programming, including youth-centered events like the Late Night Hype series. Aquatic programming, food and nutrition services, and community programs are additional important ways the Department can serve young people and their families.

The imposition of onerous curfew requirements on young people does not make our communities safer; rather, they further criminalize youth and put more kids at risk of getting caught up in an already troubled system. The District should invest appropriate resources in building out its out-of-school time (OST) activities and offerings. After-school and evening programming provide a safe, supportive, and structured after-school environment for kids and teens, providing caregivers with a secure place for their

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<sup>2</sup> Michael Fitzgerald, "Top Scholars Expect Continued Crime Declines, Despite Decreased Incarceration," The Imprint Youth & Family News, October 8, 2020, <https://imprintnews.org/justice/juvenile-justice-2/crime-declines-despite-decreasedincarceration/48044>.

<sup>3</sup> Department of Parks and Recreation, FY 2027 Proposed Budget and Financial Plan, <https://dcbudget.com/pdfs/HA0.pdf>.

<sup>4</sup> ACLU-D.C., "Building Safety Through Resources: A Better Path to Public Safety in D.C.," Feb. 2026, <https://www.acludc.org/app/uploads/2025/10/2025-ACLU-D.C.-Report-Building-Safety-Through-Resources.pdf> (at 11-12).

child to receive supervision and social development. Additional funding is needed to expand operating hours on nights and weekends, and to develop programming that is age-appropriate and responsive to kids' needs. Break camps and teen programming, including leadership development programs and mobile recreation activities, provide additional enrichment and recreation for kids, and require stable funding levels from year to year. DPR must work in partnership with young people to develop programming that is responsive to their needs and interests. We urge the Council to fully fund DPR to allow it to continue to improve and expand the availability of these offerings geared toward our young people.

### **III. Conclusion**

To help our young people thrive, the Council must fully fund the Department of Parks and Recreation to provide continued investment in programming that builds leadership skills and confidence for young people, and facilities that offer a structured, safe environment for kids to grow. The cuts proposed in the Mayor's FY27 budget will create gaps in programming and services that should be maintained and expanded, not reduced. We urge the continued investment in and development of comprehensive, equitable programming, services, and facilities that are responsive to the needs of young people and their families across the city. When we invest adequate funding through the budget in the District's youngest residents, we are investing in solutions that provide a holistic sense of security for our communities across the city.