



529 14th Street NW  
Ste 722  
Washington, DC 20045  
(202) 457-0800  
[www.acludc.org](http://www.acludc.org)

Council of the District of Columbia  
1350 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW  
John A. Wilson Building  
Washington, DC 20004

May 11, 2026

Dear Councilmembers:

On behalf of the American Civil Liberties Union of the District of Columbia (ACLU-D.C.) and our over 14,000 members and supporters in all 8 wards, I am writing to you today about priorities for the fiscal year 2027 (FY27) budget.

We appreciate the Council giving the public the opportunity each year to testify on pieces of the budget. Crafting a budget that best serves D.C. residents involves making a set of resource-constrained decisions with a tight deliberation window. With this in mind, we thought it important to highlight some key principles and areas of investment that we hope the Council will prioritize as you look at the budget holistically. While many of these priorities were shared with the Council in our testimony at hearings, we don't want that information to be siloed by committee, as so many of these issues cross agencies.

ACLU-D.C. is committed to working to dismantle systemic racism, safeguard fundamental liberties, and advocate for sensible, evidence-based solutions. If budgets are moral documents, then these are the values that must be reflected in the D.C. budget as a whole.

With economic challenges facing D.C. residents, D.C. government should especially protect our most vulnerable residents. However, the Mayor's proposed budget does the opposite. It leans out from rather than into supporting D.C.'s young people, families, immigrants, and LGBTQ+ residents. Without action from the Council to right divestments and add support at a time when many in our community are under attack, the FY27 budget could exacerbate already extreme racial and economic inequities in the District.

Outlined below are priority issues the Council should consider when finalizing the FY27 budget.

### **Support the Rights of D.C. Residents**

The rights guaranteed to criminal suspects, defendants, and those incarcerated are not mere technicalities. They are fundamental rights guaranteed to all people in the United States. The budget must provide for the various ways that the government ensures these rights are protected.

We urge the Council to:

- Ensure funding for capital improvements to the D.C. Jail. Conditions at the D.C. Jail require immediate fiscal attention, which is evident in the report, “*Urgent Need for New D.C. Jail*”, done by the D.C. Auditor and the Council for Court Excellence (CCE).
  - o With key funding delayed for a new D.C. jail yet again and zero publicly available details on a proposed public-private partnership, the mayor’s plan raises a broad range of concerns. Delaying the funding until FY32 is further delaying a process that has been ongoing for over a decade, which is especially concerning considering the findings of the referenced report. Residents at the D.C. jail should not be given a potential death sentence just for being held there.
- Support a stable funding level for the Department of Youth Rehabilitation Services (DYRS) in local funds for FY27. However, funds must be used to address existing issues and improve overall quality and delivery of programming and services to youth. Basic health and safety concerns continue to be at issue for youth in DYRS custody, including issues with overcrowding, physical altercations, and access to behavioral health services and adequate programming. And when it does come time for a young person to return to their community, discharge and reentry planning undertaken by the agency continues to fall short. Funding for DYRS needs to address these concerns, rather than be used to create more beds for more D.C. youth to be locked up.

### **Support Safety in our Communities**

We share a common goal of living in a safe D.C. Our D.C. budget should reflect that goal by ensuring that our approaches to safety are broad, address root causes, and focus on leveraging the resilience of our people while protecting our most vulnerable residents. Evidence on recidivism and violence prevention shows that policing and incarcerating alone do not meaningfully reduce either problem. Better approaches to community safety leverage this growing body of evidence by funding diversion, restorative justice, reentry, and victim support programs. Our communities deserve better than continually spending more money on policing.

We urge the Council to:

- Support the current funding levels for the Restorative Justice Program at the Office of the Attorney General (OAG). The program provides closure and empowerment to participating victims of crime and allows the person who caused harm to learn from the incident, thus supporting reintegration.
- Limit increases in MPD’s budget and prioritize funding that has positive impacts on community safety and wellbeing, such as funding for behavioral health, early intervention, diversion, reentry, and victim support services.
  - o According to the D.C. Auditor, MPD has adequate staffing but needs to work to better deploy officers and make policy changes to use professional staff to fill roles with largely administrative tasks. MPD should be required to follow these recommendations rather than being granted increased funding for overtime and new officers.

- Do not fund unspecified technology for MPD without a separate hearing process and briefing on it. Surveillance technologies raise significant privacy concerns, which are exacerbated for groups subject to over-policing and surveillance—namely Black and brown communities, low-income communities, politically active groups, immigrants, and members of the LGBTQ+ community.
- Support increased funding levels for the Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR) site-based programming, specifically programming for teenagers. The Mayor and the Council have focused much attention this year on a juvenile curfew, recently passing new legislation. In those discussions everyone has agreed that our communities need more programming options to provide safe, pro-social, developmentally appropriate, educational, and career-promoting programming for the District’s young people. In order to expand these programs, DPR needs increased funding.

### **Support Families**

D.C. has shown a strong commitment to providing economic support to families. Continuing that commitment is even more critical now. D.C. residents have been impacted by federal layoffs and inflation, and businesses and workers are on high alert due to the threat of immigration raids. Furthermore, continuous threats of cuts to federal programs create an environment that is straining the safety net on which families can rely for support.

Families living in or close to poverty are more vulnerable to economic downturns, and support for these families should be prioritized. Likewise, the magnitude of racial inequity in the District requires that more be done to shore up the cash resources of Black and brown families, particularly those with low to poverty-level incomes. Poverty and economic hardship have deep, long-lasting effects on children and their lives, including how long children stay in school and how well they do in school. Longer-term research shows that experiencing poverty in childhood can impact a person’s earning potential as an adult.

Even in a year with an expected reduction in the overall budget, D.C. must continue its work to keep families healthy and safe.

We urge the Council to:

- Support programs that provide financial assistance to families in need. These programs provide stability for the health and safety of the District’s children.
  - Fully fund Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), including returning the annual cost of living adjustment, and rejecting the Mayor’s proposal to eliminate TANF benefits entirely for adults who have received assistance for more than 60 months, beginning in FY 2028. TANF provides cash assistance for families on very low incomes and who have children, and is critical to ensuring families can pay rent, keep the lights on, and can afford other basic necessities.
  - Fully fund the DC Child Tax Credit and the planned increase to D.C.’s Earned Income Tax Credit that would boost the value from 85 percent of the federal tax credit to 100 percent, both of which work to reduce racial, income, and wealth gaps.

- Increase funding to the DC Child Care Subsidy Program. The Mayor’s budget only allocates \$114.2 million for FY 2027, falling short of funding the full cost of the program. Due to this, the Office of the State Superintendent of Education has announced a child care subsidy waitlist will go into effect on May 12 and remain in place unless the Council increases funding. The program supports low and moderate income families as well as families with other special circumstances, providing access to high-quality education and child care in the district.
- Maintain the D.C. Paid Family Medical Leave program. The Mayor’s budget is asking employers to continue paying the same amount of Universal Paid Leave tax into the system while the District provides their employees with less benefits. This will not only harm small businesses, but also the people who own or work for these small businesses, and the families they support. The Mayor’s proposed budget takes more than \$95 million from the paid leave fund in FY 2027 and makes massive cuts to benefits. This includes:
  - Eliminating medical and family caregiving leave benefits for FY 2027.
  - Reducing the maximum number of weeks for these benefits from 12 to 8 beginning in FY 2028.
  - Permanently caps the weekly benefit amounts for all types of leave at \$1,000, instead of the current max of \$1,190, adjusted annually for inflation. Without inflation adjustment, this program will continue to have diminishing benefits for the people of D.C.

The Council must support and maintain this program that has been working well for the District, both by helping small businesses and helping families.

### **Support Vulnerable Communities**

D.C. is known for being a welcoming community, and that is why so many people choose to make the District their home. But that does not mean the work to protect vulnerable communities is over, particularly at a time when the federal government is targeting these same groups. The District must reaffirm the commitment to protect and uplift these groups, and the budget should reflect that.

We urge the Council to:

- Oppose the proposed 86 percent cut to the Office of Victim Services and Justice Grants’ (OVSJG) Access to Justice Initiative (ATJ). Over 44,000 District residents received life-changing civil legal services from District non-profits through ATJ last year alone. More than 200 District agencies and community organizations like health clinics, schools, libraries, and social services agencies rely on partnerships with ATJ-funded legal services organizations to help the people they serve. These cuts would be felt by residents across all eight Wards. In fact, in the past, the Council has noted that a cut to Access to Justice funds could cost the District upwards of nearly five times as much by having to provide other services for residents in need, while also causing long-term harm.

- Support stable funding for small grant programs that have an outsized impact for vulnerable populations.
  - For example, the Transgender, Non-binary, and Gender-Nonconforming (TGNC) Workforce Programs, funded through the Department of Human Services at approximately \$600,000 a year, provides essential employment pathways in a labor market where TGNC individuals face entrenched discrimination and instability. Continued investment and stable funding that adjusts for inflation would help to ensure long-term economic equity and build a stronger, more inclusive workforce.
- Support funding for programs that assist with the reentry process for those who are returning to our communities from incarceration.
  - For example, the MORCA-Georgetown Paralegal Program, which serves formerly incarcerated D.C. residents and helps to address barriers to legal employment as they pursue full-time paralegal and legal support roles upon completion of their coursework. Since 2018, 70 returning citizens have completed the Paralegal Program, many gaining employment with OAG.

We share a common goal of living in a community that is safe for all and provides opportunities for all. While a leaner projected budget means making difficult cuts, we hope the Council will ensure that D.C.'s budget reflects the values of the D.C. community. The ACLU-D.C. looks forward to continuing our work with the Council to achieve these goals in budget season and in other legislation.

Thank you for your time and attention.

Sincerely,



Alicia J. Yass  
Policy Advocacy Director