



OFFICE OF COUNCILMEMBER ROBERT C. WHITE, JR
CHAIR, COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS AND FACILITIES
THE JOHN A. WILSON BUILDING
1350 PENNSYLVANIA AVENUE, NW, SUITE 107
WASHINGTON, DC 20004

March 2, 2022

The Honorable Muriel Bowser
Mayor of the District of Columbia
John A. Wilson Building
1350 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20004

Dear Mayor Bowser:

Each year as you developed your proposed budgets, I have sent you letters contrasting the positive financial outlook of the District with the inequity experienced by many District residents. Our financial position has improved, yet we have not seen the same progress for Black, Latinx, and Indigenous residents nor have we prioritized these communities in a real way. I am concerned that much of the progress we often highlight has occurred without regard to, and sometimes at the expense of, residents of color, especially Black residents. These inequities do not only harm people of color, but when we prioritize access and opportunity for underrepresented residents, all residents will benefit.

The Fiscal Year 2023 budget is an opportunity to change this trajectory and capitalize on the District's wealth to ensure that Black communities and other communities of color can take full advantage of city services, rising land values, safe neighborhoods, job opportunities, and good schools. To do this, we must relentlessly focus on equity and self-determination.

We must weave racial equity into every aspect of our government because it affects people's everyday lives, from access to housing and jobs to the provision of government services. Prioritizing investments in housing, education, workforce training, support for LGBTQ communities, and the justice system will drive equity in the District.

The Department of Corrections requires particular attention. Reforming the justice system and our approach to incarceration is critical to our fight for racial equity. Black residents make up 47% of the District's population but represent the vast majority of people we arrest and jail.¹ These disparities are a symptom of a wide range of racist policies, the result of which is greater harm and trauma in Black and Brown communities. There are many solutions, but one solution

¹ According to the District Task Force on Jails & Justice's Phase II report, Black people compose 47% of D.C.'s population but 86% of the people we arrest, 92% of the people we jail, and 95% of the people in prison serving D.C. Code sentences.

that I believe we must begin to address in the Fiscal Year 2023 budget is a new approach to detention and the construction of a new correctional facility.

The DC Jail has a long history of poor conditions, including excessive use of force, improper food storage and safety, inadequate education, and deteriorating conditions that have gotten worse as the facility has aged. Many of these conditions have been well documented by the Office of the District of Columbia Auditor in its 2019 report, “Poor Conditions Persist at Aging D.C. Jail; New Facility Needed to Mitigate Risks” and in a series of reports documenting inspections conducted by the Department of Health in 2020 and 2021.²

The District Task Force on Jails & Justice released Phase II of their effort to develop a more equitable vision for the future of jails and justice in the District. The report recommends the construction of a new, non-traditional correctional facility that includes a safe, healthy environment with programming designed “to support each resident’s safe return to the community.”³ The facility would be part of broad change in approach to incarceration and the overall criminal justice system. The other 80 recommendations from the Task Force deserve careful consideration, including proposals to invest in community safety and restore local control of the District’s criminal justice system. These changes will not only ensure that the District treats all residents with humanity, but it will also help reduce recidivism and crime by focusing on rehabilitation.

As the 2019 Auditor’s report points out, we as a city have failed to fully address the needs of the Department of Corrections. As a result, we need substantial investment now. I am committed to working with you to ensure a swift and equitable transition to a criminal justice system that focuses both on the District’s safety and the rehabilitation needs of our residents and reflects thorough consideration of the recommendations put forth by the District Task Force on Jails and Justice.

In addition to the investment in the construction of a new correctional facility, I ask that you consider the following investments in your budget proposal to Council:

Housing

- \$70 million for rental assistance in the supplemental budget to provide immediate assistance for residents still experiencing difficulties paying rent due to pandemic related hardships⁴;
- \$30 million for the Emergency Rental Assistance Program;

² Office of the District of Columbia Auditor, Poor Conditions Persist at Aging D.C. Jail; New Facility Needed to Mitigate Risks, (2019), https://dcauditor.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/D.C.Jail_Report.2.28.19.pdf;
Department of Health, Environmental Inspection DC Central Detention Facility, November 6, 2020 to December 17, 2020, <https://lms.dccouncil.us/downloads/LIMS/48710/Introduction/RC24-0123-Introduction.pdf>;

Department of Health, Environmental Inspection DC Central Detention Facility, April 19, 2021 to May 5, 2021, <https://lms.dccouncil.us/downloads/LIMS/48711/Introduction/RC24-0124-Introduction.pdf>.

³ District Task Force on Jails & Justice, Jails & Justice: Our Transformation Starts Today, (2021), <http://www.courtexcellence.org/uploads/publications/TransformationStartsToday.pdf>.

⁴ Data from the [National Equity Atlas](#) indicate that District residents still owe an estimated \$69.6 million in rent.

- \$50 million in each year of the Capital Improvement Plan to fund urgent repair and maintenance needs at DC Housing Authority properties;
- Funding to study social housing and opportunities for the District to implement a social housing program;
- Funding set aside for the District Opportunity to Purchase Act to ensure the District is prepared to purchase multi-family buildings that will preserve affordable housing and reduce displacement;
- Adequate additional funding for the Local Rent Supplement Program to ensure that at least half of the funds disbursed through the Housing Production Trust Fund support housing for extremely low-income residents;
- Continued funding for Permanent Supportive Housing vouchers to prioritize providing housing for unhoused residents;
- Additional funds for housing vouchers set aside for seniors; and
- Increased funding for Targeted Affordable Housing vouchers, particularly for residents who have participated in the Rapid Rehousing Program but are not yet financially stable to pay market-rate rent and are at risk of returning to homelessness at the end of the program.

Early Childhood, Education, and Workforce Development

- Ensure \$53.9 million is distributed to childcare teachers in Fiscal Year 2022;
- Fully fund and implement the Birth to Three Act, including Healthy Futures, Healthy Steps, expansions to home visiting programs, and providing funding in the financial plan to begin phasing in subsidies for families for childcare in order to reach Universal Child Care by 2028;
- Continue funding for financial support grant programs to further stabilize childcare centers as they will continue to need support into FY 2023 as recovery continues;
- Funding to support educator wellness, which includes increasing staffing to ensure appropriate class sizes, an adequate substitute teacher pool, piloting a flexible scheduling initiative to give teachers more planning time and students more experiential learning opportunities, and training for school staff on leadership, emotional intelligence, and anti-racism;
- Funding to increase the ratio of in-school mental health professionals (social workers, counselors, and psychologists) to students, and to develop pipelines to recruit and train mental health providers, as the need for intensive supports has risen beyond what our current capacity can handle;
- \$2.4 million in additional funds for the School Based Behavioral Health Expansion Program to maintain Fiscal Year 2022 funding levels;
- Funding to expand restorative justice programs that provide high-quality restorative justice training in schools to promote school safety and align with the Council mandate to use a restorative approach rather than punitive discipline practices;
- Funding to ensure fully functional HVAC systems at all District schools;
- Additional local funds for out-of-school time programs to ensure that, as federal funds expire, programs do not experience a financial cliff;

- Funding to increase access to food education and outdoor programming, including \$1.5 million to fund the FoodPrints program and increased funding for schools to partner with outdoor education providers;
- Continue Fiscal Year 2022 investments in Safe Passage programs, including recent expansions to new areas, and invest sufficient funding to ensure every school has the crossing guards needed for students to safely cross streets near schools;
- Fully fund the Office of the State Superintendent to re-evaluate STAR Framework;
- Establish investments to begin doubling the number of Community Schools, or Connected Schools, over the next 3 years;
- Funding to expand job and apprenticeship opportunities for high school aged students to provide year-round employment opportunities and deeper experiences that offer a meaningful career path; and
- Increased funding in workforce training programs that focus on high need or emerging industries, including behavioral and mental health, and renewable energy and energy efficiency.

Public Safety and Criminal Justice Equity

- Increased funding for the Office of Neighborhood Safety and Engagement’s violence interrupters and the Office of the Attorney General’s Cure the Streets program to further scale violence interruption programs beyond pilot programs to expand to additional neighborhoods and meet the full need of violence prevention in the District;
- Funding to expand training and increase pay and benefits for violence interrupters to ensure they have adequate resources and support, and are treated like a serious public safety program;
- Funding for homegrown community-based organizations that develop relationships and connections with young people to expand their reach and ability to serve more youth;
- Increased funding to equitably expand access to high-quality drug treatment programs; and
- Additional funds for housing vouchers dedicated to returning citizens and support for returning citizens as they seek housing.

Support for LGBTQ Communities

- Funding for a housing specialist in the Office of LGBTQ Affairs to manage housing vouchers reserved for LGBTQ residents and to support LGBTQ residents accessing vouchers;
- Funding for capacity-building and support for LGBTQ serving community-based organizations to ensure that organizations continue to provide services; and
- Funding to expand access to gender neutral restrooms in government buildings and schools, including adjusted signage and construction of new restrooms.

Ensuring the Government Works for Residents

- Ensure that the increase in federal infrastructure spending is driven by equity, including by swiftly deploying available federal funding to move toward universal broadband for District residents; investments to create and update parks and playgrounds, including by providing lead remediation for playgrounds; and ensuring lead service line abatement is distributed equitably;
- \$160 million for excluded workers who did not have access to traditional government supports during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic and the continued recovery;
- Increased funding for staffing at the Office of Administrative Hearings to stabilize the agency, reduce case backlogs, and expand transparency by developing a searchable online database of all cases;
- Funding for a public work order portal at the Department of General Services (DGS) to ensure transparency on the status and completion of work orders submitted to DGS;
- Continue to fund the Public Restroom Facilities Installation and Promotion Act of 2018 to ensure that the Public Restroom Facilities Working Group's recommendations are supported, and installations begin this calendar year;
- \$250,000 for public restrooms at Oxon Run Park to support outdoor extracurricular activities for students and accessible outdoor spaces for residents;
- Adequate funding to transform the Crummell School into a community center that fully addresses the needs identified through robust community input;
- Ensure adequate funding for all new government buildings to comply with net zero energy standards and to maximize on-site renewable energy generation;
- Increased staffing to support Advisory Neighborhood Commissioners in their work representing their communities; and
- Additional funding to the Office of the Inspector General to ensure adequate oversight of the District's growing budget.

I want to acknowledge your commitment to increasing the Uniform Per Student Funding Formula by 5.9% and to the stabilization funds for schools. Our education system is a particularly appalling example of racial disparities in the District. We must ensure these additional funds get us closer to a system that works as well for our Black and Latinx students as it does for white students.

I know that we share many of the priorities outlined above and I look forward to working with you during the Fiscal Year 2023 budget season. Thank you for your consideration of these recommendations.

Sincerely,



Robert C. White, Jr.
Councilmember At-Large
Council of the District of Columbia