



# Creating Partners in Public Safety

## Challenges and Choices for the New Mayor

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**Public safety in the District of Columbia has improved significantly over the past 10 years. Homicides have plummeted, and violent crime rates are the lowest they have been in decades. Despite these accomplishments, some areas of the District continue to experience high rates of violence. In addition, many of DC's remaining homicides are highly concentrated in a few communities, and a sizable share occur indoors or as the result of domestic violence. Addressing these issues offers the Bowser administration an opportunity to lead the way in innovative public safety strategies.**

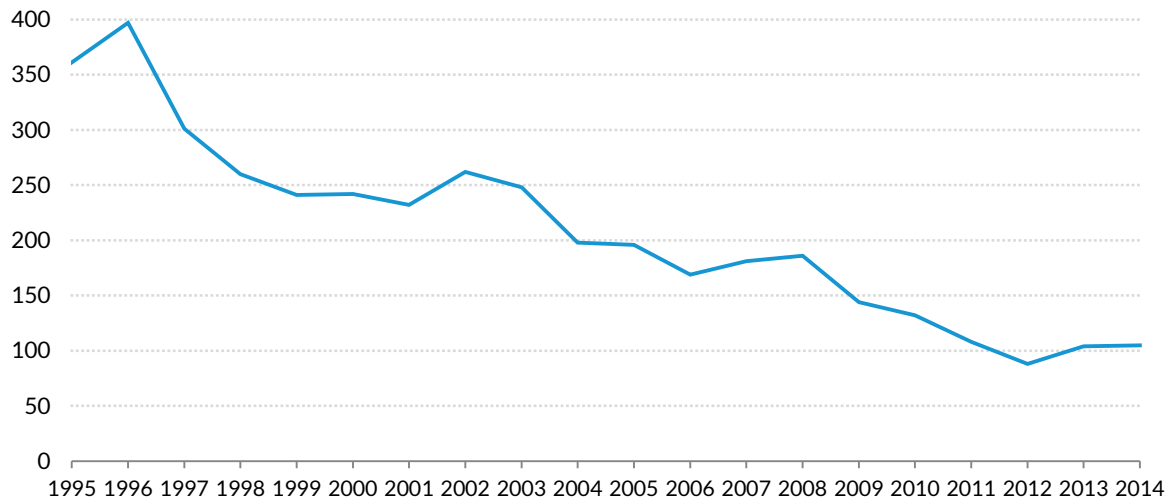
The new mayoral administration should build on the progress of the past decade with a holistic approach to public safety that incorporates social service delivery into existing law enforcement responses and emphasizes prevention over reaction. The mayor's strategy should include integrating and mapping data across city agencies, soliciting perspectives from community members, and partnering with nonprofit service providers to deliver all-inclusive public safety solutions.

## Violent Crime Is Highly Concentrated in Some DC Neighborhoods

DC has seen an historic drop in violent crime, particularly homicide. Between 1996 and 2014, homicides fell from 397 to 105. In the past three years, annual homicides have stabilized at around 100 (figure 1).

FIGURE 1

Homicides in Washington, DC, 1995–2014



Source: Metropolitan Police Department “District Crime Data at a Glance” <http://mpdc.dc.gov/node/197622>.

While the number of homicides has declined, the nature and place of the remaining violence in the District has changed. Many homicides in DC now occur indoors or are associated with domestic violence. These incidents occur away from police supervision and patrol. In addition, high rates of violent crime persist in small, concentrated areas that are often only a few blocks wide.

Violent crime has remained high in five police service areas (PSAs): 507, 601, 602, 603, and 604. These five Northeast and Southeast DC PSAs include neighborhoods that have had persistently high poverty and unemployment rates, low educational attainment, and other social and health measures correlated with violence and crime (table 1). These neighborhoods are also often geographically isolated by major roadways, highways, and rivers; have limited access to public transportation; and have lower rates of car ownership—factors that further compound social and economic isolation.

Over the past 10 years, neighborhoods like Columbia Heights, LeDroit Park, Shaw, and the U Street Corridor have undergone rapid business and residential development and benefited from the accompanying improvements in neighborhood safety and infrastructure. However, neighborhoods like Kenilworth and Carver-Langston have not gained as much from these investments and improvements.

TABLE 1

## Characteristics of Police Service Areas with Persistently High Violent Crime Rates

PSA	Neighborhoods	Population, 2010–11	Median income (\$)	Race (%)	Unemployment rate, 2007–11 (%)	Poverty rate, 2007–11 (%)	Change in median household income, 2000–07/11 (%)	Reported violent crimes, 2011 (per 1,000 pop.)
507	Carver-Langston, Rosedale	11,538	53,504	Black, NH: 92	22	29	12	16
601	Kenilworth, Eastland Gardens, Mayfair	7,536	43,315	Black, NH: 97	18	34	-13	12
602	Deanwood, Central Northeast, Lincoln Heights	9,647	54,542	Black, NH: 96	24	27	5.7	25
603	Fort Dupont, Greenway	10,997	56,533	Black, NH: 97	18	26	25	19
604	Marshall Heights, Capitol View, Benning Ridge	13,174	50,623	Black, NH: 96	19	22	-1.2	16
Citywide average	All	10,745	118,384	Black, NH: 51 White, NH: 35 Hispanic: 9.1 Asian/PI: 4.2	10	18	16 Low: -29 High: 114	12

**Sources:** “DC PSA Profile: PSA 602,” NeighborhoodInfoDC, [http://www.neighborhoodinfodc.org/psa/nbr\\_prof\\_psa33.html](http://www.neighborhoodinfodc.org/psa/nbr_prof_psa33.html); and “DC Police Crime Map,” Metropolitan Police Department, <http://crimemap.dc.gov/Report.aspx>.

**Notes:** NH = non-Hispanic; PI = Pacific Islander.

To help increase public safety across the city, Mayor Bowser should enhance the partnerships between communities, governments, and nonprofits. Reducing homicides or robberies is only part of building healthy communities. Public safety includes a wide range of factors above and beyond traditional crime measures, such as how safe residents consider their neighborhoods. We suggest the mayor take a holistic approach to defining and measuring public safety, adopting strategies to enhance it, and engaging a wide array of DC agencies, nonprofits, and community members to achieve it.

# Recommendations

A new mayoral administration presents an opportunity for innovative approaches to the District's evolving public safety challenges. Together with community members and service providers, the mayor and her administration can ensure that all residents enjoy safer homes and communities.

To help accomplish this objective, the Urban Institute convened District residents and public, private, and philanthropic community safety experts to provide recommendations on reducing crime in targeted precincts and within homes. As a result of this convening, we recommend four steps, with immediately actionable items.

## 1. Develop a Strategic Plan to Create Safe Neighborhoods in Washington, DC

- *Action Item:* Convene a Safe Neighborhoods strategic planning group in the second quarter of 2015 to identify key public safety goals.

DC has an enormous range of government agencies, nonprofit organizations, and community groups with the resources and expertise to improve neighborhood safety. However, integrating the activities of these groups and directing resources toward goals that are meaningful to city residents will require coordination, planning, and outreach.

In the second quarter of 2015, the mayor should convene a Safe Neighborhoods strategic planning group to identify short-, medium-, and long-term public safety goals and to develop clear action plans for how to achieve these goals. The group should meet regularly to assess progress and identify strategies for addressing challenges. Developing a meaningful strategic plan will require bringing a wide array of actors to the table, including DC law enforcement and agency heads, nonprofit staff, and community leaders. Importantly, the plan should be codified through memoranda of understanding and be designed to live beyond the current administration in order to address longer-term problems and sustain efforts over time. Building these meetings into the newly revived CapStat program will further help DC build a data- and community-driven approach to delivering services.

- *Action Item:* Rapidly turn around Community Safety Projects in the third and fourth quarters of 2015.

The Safe Neighborhoods planning group should set long-term goals, but it should also help agencies and residents identify opportunities for immediate action. A subcommittee representing residents, service providers, and law enforcement should work together to identify four Community Safety Projects: tangible issues and neighborhood challenges that are amenable to rapid action.

Community Safety Projects could range from making capital improvements (like boarding up and securing vacant houses) to helping nonprofit groups that provide neighborhood services launch social programs tailored toward idle youth. Once these projects are identified, they should be executed as soon as possible: at least two projects should be executed in the third quarter of 2015, and the remaining projects in the fourth quarter. Delivering concrete results will facilitate trust between

working group members, demonstrate the advantages of participation, and build momentum for long-term strategic goals. Many such small projects have had an outsized impact on crime and safety: cities like Seattle, Boston, and Sacramento made small structural changes that have notably reduced violence and improved community engagement in the selected neighborhoods.

- *Action Item:* Create the mechanisms to sustain and reassess progress toward public safety goals.

An effective strategic plan is both sustainable and adaptable. From the start, the Safe Neighborhoods group should consider—and continue to reassess—what activities need to be sustained, what resources are necessary for maintaining those operations, and how the group’s activities can be integrated into ongoing community and organizational operations.

The group should reassess its strategic goals every year to ensure that they remain relevant to the changing safety needs of DC’s neighborhoods. Drawing on data from the strategic planning process, the Safe Neighborhoods group should assess the progress it has made toward their goals, devise solutions to any roadblocks, and identify new objectives.

## 2. Solicit Community Perspectives

- *Action Item:* Launch regular community surveys to create a critical data pathway between community members and government agencies.

In neighborhoods where violence remains high, it is critical to build community support for public safety initiatives and work with residents to find and implement solutions. Residents can offer crucial insights into the nature, prevalence, and location of crime and violence. Their perceptions of police-community relations are also vital components of creating safer communities.

The mayor’s office should survey DC residents to find out how they feel about safety in their communities and what they consider important safety goals. In the second quarter of 2015, the administration should convene public agency and community leaders to identify which neighborhoods to survey. In the third quarter of 2015, the office should launch the first round of community surveys, aiming to complete them and submit a report of their findings in the first quarter of 2016. These surveys should be conducted annually alongside community meetings to reassess what information is necessary to develop neighborhood safety plans that meet residents’ needs.

The evaluation of the Chicago Violence Reduction Strategy (VRS) is a model for this type of data collection. The Chicago VRS model relies on a research partnership between the Chicago Police Department and the Safer Foundation of Chicago. The foundation trains people with criminal records and other community residents in need of employment as door-to-door field interviewers who collect detailed and reliable community data.

### 3. Promote an Accountable Multiagency Approach to Public Safety

- *Action Item:* Launch a research partnership to evaluate the Community Stabilization Protocol.

Mayor Bowser has taken the first important steps in developing effective public safety programming with the launch of the Community Stabilization Protocol. The Protocol brings together a dozen agencies to respond to violence in the District and to ensure that victims, suspects, their families, and their communities are brought together to find solutions to end the violence.

This multiagency response is a forward-thinking strategy that could be a national model for how to respond to violence. However, developing a system to coordinate the response of multiple agencies and to troubleshoot operational and communication issues presents a significant challenge that could limit the effectiveness of an otherwise innovative program. Having researchers test the implementation and effectiveness of the Protocol in its early stages will improve the efficiency of its service delivery and determine how it can most effectively help DC's communities respond to violence.

- *Action Item:* Leverage body camera data to improve police-community relations.

Following a successful pilot, Mayor Bowser has announced plans to have body cameras for all MPD patrol officers in the next 18 months. The expansion of this technology could help improve police accountability and transparency. It also offers a chance to explore how police officers and communities communicate with each other. Body cameras provide unprecedented information about police-community interactions, and leveraging these data to improve those interactions will make DC a leader in the innovative use of camera data.

During the 18-month rollout of the new cameras, the Mayor's Office and MPD should identify the communication and outreach strategies they would like to test to improve community relations. Once these strategies are in place, the effectiveness of these new methods in improving communications and building community ties should be tested by examining body camera footage. Based on these findings, successful strategies should be adopted, and strategies that create friction with the community or that do not improve officer safety should be discarded.

- *Action Item:* Build strategic planning measurement into Track DC.

Every DC agency should measure its progress toward achieving the city's short-, medium-, and long-term public safety goals. By the third quarter of 2015, those measures should be added to the agency's page on Track DC, a government transparency website that provides public performance measurement data on a wide array of DC agencies. Publicizing this information will promote transparency and accountability. Putting more agency data on Track DC will also help measure the impact of new multiagency initiatives like the Community Stabilization Protocol.

Integrating data requires the collaboration of multiple agencies and sectors. Geospatial information systems can help with this process by using common geographic units like PSAs to integrate data. This process should be used to expand connections across agencies and sectors, with regular meetings between agencies to discuss strategic plan implementation and data reporting.

## 4. Secure New Funding Sources to Expand Approaches That Work

- *Action Item:* Convene the philanthropic community around public safety issues.

During strategic planning, the Safe Neighborhoods group should identify promising social service programs delivered by government agencies and high-performing nonprofits and consider whether the scale of such programs meets community needs. Promising programs should deliver preventive services that address risk factors and promote healthy youth and neighborhood development. To bring innovative programs that support this strategy to scale, stakeholders should consider all possible financing options, including engaging the philanthropic community. Stakeholders should also consider new funding models, such as Pay for Success and other social financing mechanisms. With Pay for Success, philanthropic and private groups invest capital, and the government pays only if the program successfully achieves its objectives. This agreement allows governments and nonprofits to provide essential services to a larger population while experimenting with new delivery models. The Urban Institute's Five Steps to Pay for Success Toolkit provides practical guidance for how to launch evidence-oriented social financing projects.

## Adopting a Holistic Approach to Public Safety

Crime, particularly violent crime, has fallen dramatically in DC over the past 10 years. But these improvements have been largely concentrated in neighborhoods that have experienced greater economic prosperity. Though past public safety efforts have often focused solely on reducing violent crime rates, the new mayor should examine public safety holistically. The city should consider broader metrics that incorporate qualities known to create and maintain safety, such as economic opportunity, educational achievement, community connectedness, and the quality and perception of relationships between law enforcement and community members.

The administration should capitalize on the country's increasing attention on public safety and interest in interagency collaboration and comprehensive approaches to addressing social issues. Together with nonprofits, community members, and philanthropic organizations, the administration can promote a safer District for everyone.



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