



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

February 23, 2023

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

Dear Mayor Bowser:

As you prepare your proposed fiscal year 2024 budget, I would like to bring your attention to several shared priorities for your consideration. My budget requests seek to address many longstanding disparities, specifically in education and economic opportunity, access to safe and affordable housing, access to culturally responsive health care, and protection from crime and violence. But I wanted first to take a moment to highlight two requests that I believe are particularly important to include in your budget proposal this fiscal year.

As the new chair of the Committee on Housing, I have oversight jurisdiction of the DC Housing Authority (DCHA). One of our most basic responsibilities to residents who live in public housing is to ensure their homes are safe, sanitary, and healthy. We have been hearing from residents for many years about the state of DCHA properties. The US Department of Housing and Urban Development recently underscored residents' longstanding concerns and pleas in its October 2022 assessment of DCHA. The report stated that DCHA "is not maintaining units in decent, safe, and sanitary condition," and highlighted DCHA's low occupancy rate as a result of the 1,628 vacant units.¹ These conditions have been documented for years. The Council included \$50 million in capital funds for repair and maintenance starting in the FY 2021 budget and has worked together with you to include the same amount in subsequent fiscal years. Now, we need to move more aggressively.

¹ U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. "District of Columbia Housing Authority Assessment." Accessed February 16, 2023. https://www.dchousing.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/DCReview_Final-9302022.pdf.

I urge the District to do more. DCHA needs an infusion of significant and predictable funding over several years. I propose the District provide \$100 million in capital funding each year for the next five years to improve public housing properties, totaling half a billion dollars. Residents cannot wait for basic quality housing. This funding must be accompanied by strong oversight by the Council and DCHA Board, transparency from DCHA, and a shared commitment to meeting DCHA's mission.

My second priority for the FY 2024 budget seeks to address the mental and behavioral health crisis that District residents are facing. Since before the pandemic, residents have been telling us that they cannot find a therapist or counselor, and the need has only become more acute. District government agencies and community-based organizations consistently report high staff vacancy rates that make it difficult to get mental health and case worker support to residents who need it. These vacancies directly affect access to District services, including access to housing vouchers that unhoused residents need to stay off the street. To address these challenges, I introduced the "Pathways to Behavioral Health Degrees Act of 2023".

This bill opens a pathway for more people to pursue mental health degrees by launching a Master of Social Work degree program at the University of the District of Columbia (UDC) and making it completely free for DC residents. This bill also has the potential to increase the number of people of color entering a field that needs more clinicians with cultural competency. A 2020 report found that nationally 22% of new social workers were African American, and 14% were Latino. Closer to home, a 2016 community needs assessment conducted by the District of Columbia Healthy Communities Collaborative found that DC community members believe that cultural competency is a priority need in mental and behavioral healthcare settings. This measure will cost \$1,242,180 in the first year, and \$6,257,103 over the financial plan. The addition of this funding in the FY 2024 budget will proactively build behavioral health career pathways in the District, ensure a diverse cohort of future behavioral health specialists, and help the District provide services to residents that are delivered by social workers.

In addition to these investments in DCHA and UDC, I ask that you consider the additional investments outlined below in your budget proposal to Council.

Housing

During the last several fiscal years, the District has dedicated significant funding to our major housing programs, including the Housing Production Trust Fund and voucher programs for individuals and families through Permanent Supportive Housing, the Local Rent Supplement Program, and Targeted Affordable Housing. Continued and increased funding for these programs is necessary to make the kind of progress we need to ensure residents can afford to stay in the District. In addition to working toward the necessary funding, I will focus on accountability, transparency, and ensuring we get a return on these investments. I also will work to address the delays in getting people housed with the housing vouchers we have funded to-date. In addition to your assistance with this oversight, I am requesting funding for the following:

- \$117 million for the Emergency Rental Assistance Program;

- \$1.5 million to the Department of Human Services to provide storage for unhoused residents' belongings;
- Sufficient funding to ensure homeless service providers can offer competitive salaries and bonuses to attract case managers and other staff needed to scale their capacity to swiftly get unhoused residents into housing;
- Funding set aside to ensure the District is prepared to acquire multi-family buildings that will preserve affordable housing and reduce displacement;
- Increased funding to the DC Affordable Housing Preservation Fund;
- 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; and
- Additional funds for housing vouchers set aside for seniors.

Early Childhood, Education, and Workforce Development

- Provide funding in the financial plan to begin phasing in childcare subsidies for families to reach Universal Child Care by 2028;
- \$14.5 million to subsidize increases in pay for childcare program directors;
- \$1 million increase to home visiting programs to fund compensation increases for program employees;
- Funding to expand restorative justice programs that provide high-quality training in schools to promote school safety and align with the Council mandate to use a restorative approach rather than punitive discipline practices;
- Increase grants to community-based organizations participating in the School-Based Behavioral Health program to provide \$103,000 per clinician to ensure stable funding and provide an inflationary adjustment;
- \$25 million in recurring funds for out-of-school time programs to increase pay for teachers, school staff, college students, and community organizations to run programs and to expand access to scholarships, vouchers, and financial aid;
- Funding to increase access to food education and outdoor programming, including \$1.9 million to fund the FoodPrints program and increased funding for schools to partner with outdoor education providers;
- Increased funding to job and apprenticeship opportunities for high school-aged students to expand year-round employment opportunities and provide deeper experiences that offer a meaningful career path;
- Continued funding, at \$750,000 per school, to support the teacher wellness pilot programs funded in the FY 2023 budget;
- Funding for a flexible scheduling pilot program to allow schools to innovate and test modified schedules that support teacher wellness and retention and allow for a more diverse learning experience for students; and
- \$3 million total for the Grow Your Own program to allow more students and paraprofessionals to become teachers.

Community Safety and Criminal Justice Equity

- Increased funding for the Office of Neighborhood Safety and Engagement's (ONSE) violence interrupters and the Office of the Attorney General's (OAG) Cure the Streets program to further scale violence interruption programs beyond pilot programs, 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 the serious public safety programs they are;
- Funding to study best practices and how to merge the two violence prevention programs operated by ONSE and OAG in the future;
- Increased funding to the Safe Passage program to include more robust training for Safe Passage workers, and to continue to expand the program by increasing the number of schools participating and the number of workers per school;
- Expand small grant programs to support homegrown community-based organizations that develop relationships and connections with young people to expand their reach and ability to serve more youth;
- \$9.6 million to the Office of Victims Services and Justice Grants to increase funding to programs that serve victims of domestic violence because more residents have reached out for services during and after the pandemic;
- Increased funding to equitably expand access to high-quality drug treatment programs and \$15 million for two 24-hour harm reduction centers; and
- Additional funds for housing vouchers dedicated to returning citizens and support for returning citizens as they seek housing.

Advancing Justice and Equality for Residents

- \$7.5 million to increase the Medicaid local match payments and \$1.9 million to increase Department of Behavioral Health local dollar payments to fund the full cost of these services so residents can access a variety of mental and behavioral health supports in their communities;
- \$740,000 in the first year and \$2.5 million over the financial plan to fully fund the Domestic Workers Employment Rights Amendment Act of 2022, which would put domestic workers on equal footing with other workers in the District and end their exclusion from workplace and worker protections, and at least \$300,000 for grants administered by OAG that will provide community-based organizations with sufficient funding to develop guidance and outreach plans to domestic workers and hiring entities to inform them of domestic workers' rights;
- \$270,000 in FY 2024 and \$1.1 million over the financial plan to fully fund the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women Amendment Act of 2022, which when fully implemented would serve to eliminate discrimination against people of all genders and ensure that everyone can meaningfully and safely participate in all District government agencies;
- Funding for an Employment Coordinator or Employment Case Management Advocate in the Office of LGBTQ Affairs to help LGBTQ+ residents navigate workforce programs by serving as point of contact for the community and interagency coordination; and

- \$200,000 in recurring funds to support the DC LGBTQ+ Community Center.

Ensuring the Government Works for Residents

- Maintain funds for 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;
- Adequate funding to transform the Crummell School into a community center that fully meets the needs identified through robust community input;
- Fully fund the Greener Government Buildings Amendment Act of 2022 at \$8.4 million in the first year and \$9.9 million over the financial plan to take climate action and make DC a leader in green construction;
- \$1.1 million in FY 2024 and \$5 million over the financial plan to fully fund the Procurement Agencies Alignment Act of 2022, to strengthen the District's procurement processes and ensure taxpayer dollars are spent responsibly; and
- An additional \$250,000 to fully fund Around Town DC, a program that allows homebound older adults to join virtual classes and remote community spaces, which experienced a budget cut in FY 2023.

I know that we share many of the priorities outlined above and I look forward to working with you during the fiscal year 2024 budget season. Thank you for your consideration of these recommendations.

Sincerely,



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