

GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
Office of Neighborhood Safety and Engagement



**FISCAL YEAR 2019
PERFORMANCE OVERSIGHT HEARING**

Testimony of
Del McFadden
Executive Director

Before the
Committee on the Judiciary and Public Safety
Council of the District of Columbia
The Honorable Charles Allen, Chairperson

John A. Wilson Building
Council Chamber
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9:30 AM

Good afternoon Chairperson Allen, members, and staff of the Committee on the Judiciary and Public Safety. I am Del McFadden, Executive Director of the Safer, Stronger DC Office of Neighborhood Safety and Engagement (ONSE). Thank you for the opportunity to testify today on the progress ONSE has made during Fiscal Year 2019 and on our vision for its future. I am joined today by my Chief of Staff, Marcus Ellis, Agency Financial Officer Tony Iwobi, and Strategy and Innovation Officer, Setareh Yelle.

I am deeply grateful to Mayor Bowser for her unwavering commitment to preventing violence in our city. As the head of ONSE, I share the Mayor's vision that reducing violence cannot be done through law enforcement alone. To make our city safer and stronger, we must develop and scale evidence-based violence intervention strategies that give individuals engaged in high-risk activities a space to heal and services that open doors to new opportunities and possibilities.

While the mission of ONSE is to foster community-based strategies to help prevent violence using a public health approach, our priority is to collaborate with Advisory Neighborhood Commissioners, community activists, advocates, and residents to reinforce our common goal of violence prevention and intervention. I look forward to continuing these relationships and having an ongoing dialogue that contributes to this office's success and the safety of our city.

Before I provide updates on individual programs and their FY19 activities, I want to explain our overall agency model, as it provides a context for the systems and programs we have put in place. ONSE employs a three-pronged model.

The first prong is taking a Public Health Approach - this requires us to define the root problem of violent crime, to work to change norms associated with violence and crime, to identify neighborhood-specific risk and protective factors, and broadly, to always take a transparent and accessible approach to evaluation and improvement of tactics.

The second prong is Multi-Agency Partnerships. The client population we serve overlaps with numerous other District agencies and community organizations - we coordinate strategies with them to ensure clients receive critical supports and services seamlessly.



Our third prong is Focused Intervention. Our Violence Intervention Contracts and Pathways program accomplish this by identifying those at imminent risk of being engaged in, or becoming a victim of, violent crime.

The Pathways Program seeks to decrease criminal justice involvement and improve the outcomes of individuals between the ages of 20-35 known to participate in high-risk activities that could result in violence. Pathways is a subsidized nine-month program with 25 Ambassadors in each cohort. The Ambassadors receive case management, transformative mentoring, mental wellness, and human service supports designed to meet their individual and family needs. Pathways provides life skills and workforce development training which prepare individuals for six-months of subsidized employment or educational advancement and, ultimately, long-term unsubsidized employment.

In less than two years, ONSE has facilitated a total of four cohorts serving 99 individuals with 82 percent promotion. During FY19, 49 Ambassadors were enrolled into the program. Out of those enrolled, 85 percent completed the nine-week life skills and workforce development course. Of those promoted, 91 percent have transitioned to subsidized employment opportunities. The program's recidivism rate currently stands at zero. This is a positive indicator in regards to the Agency's overall goal of reducing violent crimes in the District.

I am proud to say that since the launch of the Pathways Program, we have incorporated additional support services into the offerings. These include enhanced educational enrichment and mental wellness services. In partnership with the Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE), two Ambassadors completed their GED. Additionally, 49 Ambassadors received individual and/or group therapy once per week.

Providing a variety of career options is of utmost importance to the Pathways program and for that reason in FY 2020 we've added a vocational component to include barbering and audio production. These two new components will be offered in our building allowing us to continue to be a one-stop-shop for resources, services, and supports. We are also excited to scale Pathways to three cohorts, serving 75 individuals per fiscal year.



It is very rewarding to witness the amazing transformation with each cohort. Many of the Ambassadors arrive very reluctant on joining the program, however they ultimately leave feeling like it was the best decision of their life. Many credit the Pathways Program for helping them to acquire a better outlook on life and for allowing them to stay off the streets. The skills, lessons learned and connections made in the nine week life skills and workforce development phase, allow Ambassadors to begin to shift mentality, build character, and create long-lasting relationships.

My message to current and future Pathways Ambassadors is that ONSE is here to support you in reaching your goals, assisting your family, and improving your employability, while providing alternative opportunities within your grasp. You are not voiceless or invisible. We see the potential within you and stand ready to make sure you can take full advantage of all the pathways the District has to offer.

I would like to commend the Pathways alumni present today and thank you for sharing your story. I am inspired by their dedication to the program and the bonds of trust and respect they've formed with each other.

Violence Intervention Initiative

The ONSE Violence Intervention Initiative partners with communities across the District to reduce violence and create safe spaces where residents can thrive. In FY 2019, ONSE continued its intervention work with community-based organizations Collaborative Solutions for Communities in Wards 1-5, Training Grounds in Wards 6-7, and Far Southeast Family Strengthening Collaborative in Ward 8. In total, the organizations received \$2.3 million to combat violence.

The investment in intervention and prevention last fiscal year yielded 28 interventions, ceasefires, and mediations. This could not have been accomplished without having Violence Intervention Specialists who are intimately connected to the communities in which they operate. The relationships they established allowed them to build the trust needed to be kept abreast of safety threats and conflicts, help parties involved in conflict broker peace agreements, and reduce the retaliation risks when violent acts occurred.



ONSE firmly believes that an important component of promoting and maintaining peace is helping individuals and families disrupt cycles of violence by providing services that are germane to meeting crucial needs and accomplishing personal development goals. In FY19, our community partners connected 235 individuals and families to supports such as substance abuse treatment, workforce and education programs including Pathways, housing resources, grief and loss counseling, and employment.

In addition to proactive intervention work, the Violence Intervention Initiative partners are responsible for responding to assaults with deadly weapons and homicides in their priority communities on a 24/7 basis. Their response entails going to the scene of the incident; identifying those involved; trying to identify any factors that led to the incident; determining the likelihood of retaliation or additional violence; and interacting with the affected neighborhood. Our partners facilitate triage meetings within 24 hours of critical incidents and conduct hospital and home visits when appropriate. The community partners then send a detailed report to ONSE after every critical incident response.

As a result of our efforts, ONSE has seen a reduction in assaults with dangerous weapons in nearly 60 percent of the communities served during FY19. Despite that positive indicator, we recognize that there is always more to be done. In reviewing past efforts, we spoke to frontline staff about the effectiveness of their work, solicited community feedback, and continued to study best practices in the violence intervention field. After a period of reflection, we were able to identify components of our model that we wanted to refine. Those FY20 refinements include:

- Tailoring intervention strategies to the specific strengths and safety threats of each priority community through the use of neighborhood plans;
- Increasing the number of Violence Intervention Specialists by 59 percent and Case Managers by 67 percent;
- Focusing intervention on the highest risk individuals and families in each priority community; and
- Expanding customized place-based services in each community.



These enhancements to the model will allow ONSE to build an empirical picture of the root causes of violence in each community, work to change the norms and cultures associated with violence and crime and provide a web of support around those who are most prone to causing or being affected by violence. We believe that these strategies will get us closer to our goal of significantly reducing violence in the District.

Family and Survivor Support

As you may remember, in 2015, Mayor Bowser created the Community Stabilization Program (CSP), originally within the Office of the Deputy Mayor for Public Safety, now housed in the ONSE. In FY 2019, after four years of impactful, family-centered work, to better depict our strength-based approach to residents impacted by violent crime, the CSP program was renamed Family and Survivor Support (FSS). The mission of this division is to coordinate the District's critical response if a violent incident becomes a homicide and if a shooting or stabbing involves a juvenile or is believed to be gang or crew related.

Once a qualifying event occurs, staff coordinate and facilitate an emergency critical response conference call consisting of 12 government agencies. The purpose of this call is to determine which, if any, agencies victims and their families were associated with, and how those systems impacted their lives. Upon completion of the conference call, an in-person home or hospital visit is scheduled to identify immediate needs of clients. Those services include but are not limited to burial assistance, coordination of candlelight vigils, grief and loss counseling, employment opportunities, and other quality of life supports.

While this team does phenomenal work with families, they have also forged several partnerships with non-governmental agencies that have proven to be beneficial to this work. In May of 2019, FSS launched a Family Survivor Support Group in partnership with a local organization called Our Hearts Have Wings. The support group began with just five attendees and now regularly hosts over 15 community members who have directly experienced the loss of a loved one to gun violence. Participating members are able to benefit from monthly group sessions, connections to one-on-one counseling, and invitations to participate in related activities including remembrance events and advocacy efforts. Through this group, ONSE is providing a safe space for these community members to gather, grieve, and heal.



ONSE has also partners with Mrs. Fingerhut, the Kendra Smith Family Life Line Movement, and Moms Demand Action to provide meals, uniforms, and toys for children of homicide victims. While these services don't seem major to some, they are extremely important to grieving families.

ONSE Leadership Academy

I am also excited to report that in FY 2019, ONSE established the ONSE Leadership Academy (OLA), in partnership with Anacostia High School to promote school and community safety with a focus on reducing juvenile justice involvement. OLA is facilitated by six full-time Community Outreach Coordinators, who provide attendance monitoring, behavioral supports and interventions, and lunch time mentoring. Staff members also provide Safe Passage support during morning arrival and afternoon release.

The team engages students in intentional, productive, and constructive ways in order to identify and enhance their strengths. They promote positive outcomes by providing opportunities, fostering positive relationships and giving the support needed to develop skills and prevent risky behaviors. With these trusting student-adult relationships, students feel safe and empowered.

The ONSE Leadership Academy has partnered with the Youth Entrepreneur Institute (YEI), through the Department of Employment Services' Year-Round Youth Program, to build successful futures. The program serves nearly forty 11th and 12th grade students after school, and utilizes entrepreneurship as a vehicle to learn marketable skills in science, technology, engineering, art and math.

Community Based Crime Reduction

As you are aware, ONSE received grant-making authority to manage and apply for funding opportunities. The first funding opportunity came by way of the Office of Victims Services Justice Grants in the amount of \$898,000 for the Community Based Crime Reduction Byrne Grant.



The grant's purpose is to improve prosocial behaviors, reduce crime and instances of recidivism, and mitigate some of the drivers of crime in the Woodland Terrace and Buena Vista Terrace Cluster. Further, the dollars are used to develop, maintain, and expand programs and projects which help prevent violence and increase public safety. As a result, ONSE hired a Program Manager and Health and Wellness Coordinator to lead the charge of creating relationships and advocating for community members. CBCR utilizes a public health approach to strengthen and promote community resiliency, improve health/mental health and target the impact of trauma in combination with violence intervention strategies.

In FY19, ONSE initiated its first grant in the amount of nearly \$640,000 and selected two community-based organizations – Far Southeast Family Strengthening Collaborative and Exodus Treatment Center. Much like our efforts through violence intervention and prevention, ONSE works with partners to stay abreast of possible community and interpersonal conflicts that have the potential to escalate to violence. This approach helps us to establish the relationships needed to discourage anti-social behavior. Thus far, ONSE has had four successful Listening Tours to hear the needs of the community. The community expressed wants for safety and greater access to opportunities for economic stability, and desires for safe places for play for their children.

Research & Evaluation

As Director, I am particularly proud of the internal efforts the ONSE team has made to streamline internal operations, facilitate communications, and leverage the expertise of subject matter experts and data and social scientists in the District government and in the larger violence prevention community. These partners help ensure that we are identifying and addressing gaps between research, policy, and practice and that we have the infrastructure necessary to analyze and evaluate our efforts.

Under this priority, ONSE is pleased to have launched a partnership with Johns Hopkins University's Center for Government Excellence, or GovEx, in FY20. GovEx is a center that is dedicated to empowering the public sector through expertise, training, research, and collaboration.



This partnership will support the Agency's continuous improvement in performance management, data transparency, harm reduction, and research and evaluation. ONSE would like to thank the Public Welfare Foundation for making this partnership possible.

ONSE is also pleased to have the support of The Lab @ DC, which provides technical assistance, and will be leading a rigorous evaluation of the Pathways Program. This longitudinal evaluation will help us understand the program's effectiveness and impact on participants.

Finally, I want to take a moment to honor the lives tragically taken by gun violence in the District this past year. When lives are cut short, families are forever impacted. When gun violence steals parents from their children and children from their parents, the entire community is affected in deep and lasting ways. ONSE's greatest commitment to commemorating those lost or injured is by taking meaningful action to reduce gun deaths and injuries in our city.

Transition to PowerPoint Presentation

I would now like to transition to a brief presentation that the ONSE team has prepared that provides some important information about our work in FY19 and plans for FY20.

Closing

In closing, I would like to remind my ONSE team that while the work you do is emotionally challenging, it is invaluable. I want to thank each of you for your commitment and dedication to improving public safety in the District of Columbia.

Thank you, Chairperson Allen, for allowing me to share the work being done by ONSE and our community partners. We know there is a great amount of work to be done, and while we celebrate the successes of the residents we serve, we continuously work to improve individual outcomes and reduce violence.

I am available to address any questions.

