

**GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA  
OFFICE OF NEIGHBORHOOD SAFETY AND ENGAGEMENT**



**Fiscal Year 2023  
Performance Oversight Hearing**

Testimony of

**Kwelli Sneed  
Interim Director  
Office of Neighborhood Safety and Engagement**

**Before the  
Committee on the Judiciary and Public Safety  
Council of the District of Columbia  
Councilmember Brooke Pinto, Chairperson**

**1350 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW  
Washington, DC 20004  
Room 412**

**February 14, 2024  
9:30a**

Good morning, Chairwoman Pinto, members and staff of the Committee on the Judiciary and Public Safety. I am Kwelli Sneed, Interim Director of the Office of Neighborhood Safety and Engagement, also referred to as 'ONSE.' I am pleased to present testimony today on the work of ONSE and its impact for the fiscal year 2023. Joining me is ONSE Deputy Director of Strategic Planning and Programming Ta-Tanisha Wallace, Chief Operations Officer Yasha Williams-Robinson, and Julia Irving, Deputy Director of Government and Community Relations.

ONSE was created to address gun violence reduction in the District while assisting the community with the trauma caused by these incidents. Our mission is to foster community-based strategies that help prevent gun violence to increase public safety. ONSE programs provide vital services and engagement to our client base which includes families that have lost loved ones from gun violence, individuals at risk of participating in and/or becoming victims of violent crime, those at imminent or immediate risk of victimization or involvement in violent crime, and students of middle and high school age who are at risk of being victims of, or participating in, criminal or violent behavior.

As you may know, I began my tenure with the ONSE in February 2023 as Chief of Staff, serving alongside Director Linda Harllee-Harper, who simultaneously served as the Director of the Office of Gun Violence Prevention. Before the untimely passing of Director Harllee-Harper, together, we envisioned the direction of ONSE – or ONSE 3.0. where we discussed the ONSE and how best redefine, realign, and re-energize staff effort to maximize impact of agency programming and ultimately, to reduce the impact of violence on the community. Director Harllee-Harper cared deeply about each client, each family member, and every ONSE staff member, and was committed to returning District neighborhoods to the safe places they should be. Her legacy remains with us in this critically important work. Now I would like to turn to our programs during the fiscal year 23.

### **Pathways Program**

In FY23, the Pathways Program successfully enrolled 80 high-risk male residents – our Ambassadors – between the ages of 18 to 35. Pathways achieved a two percent (2%) increase in promotion rates compared to FY22, promoting a total of 64 residents. In partnership with the

Division of State Initiatives of the Department of Employment Services (DOES), fifty-nine percent (59%) of promoted participants secured subsidized work placements, and an additional twenty-three percent (23%) successfully obtained full-time unsubsidized employment in FY23. Three Pathways participants were featured in news coverage with NBC4 and The Washington Informer, where they shared positive experiences about the program, while emphasizing the benefits they received. FY23 ended with Cohort 14, and Cohort 15 is now underway for FY24.

### **ONSE Leadership Academy**

The ONSE Leadership Academy – or OLA – completed its first full school year with expanded programming at three middle Schools: Paul Public Charter Middle School, Kramer Middle School, and Kelly Miller Middle School. Pre-existing OLA programming is provided at Paul Public Charter High School, Anacostia High School, and H.D. Woodson High School. OLA staff held more than 250 mediations or interventions throughout these six schools during school year 2022-2023. As a result of the mediation success at H.D. Woodson, OLA staff were asked to host all mediation for the entire student body. I am pleased to report that in FY24, MacFarland Middle School was added to the school roster. Additional highlights with OLA include providing case management for 107 students, running 40 school events centered around gun violence prevention, and each OLA school holding 40 group sessions during the school year. The OLA program focuses on a student’s ABCs – attendance, behavior, credits, and course performance, as well as safe passage. Moreover, the OLA program uses a model of Positive Youth Development, which has origins in the field of prevention that promotes positive outcomes.

### **Family and Survivor Support**

The Family and Survivor Support Division – or FSS – serves residents of all ages who have experienced a traumatic loss or hospitalization caused by gun violence. FSS serves as the District’s response to community violence by coordinating multi-agency emergency critical responses if a violent incident becomes a homicide, involves a juvenile being shot or stabbed, or is believed to be gang or crew-related. In FY23, FSS successfully completed 683 referrals from the Metropolitan Police Department (MPD). The majority of these referrals were for emergency or temporary hotel placement and housing-related support. FSS hosted three ‘AFTER’ events, which stands for ‘A Family That Eternally Remembers,’ serving 43 families to assure them that they are not alone in

the loss of a loved one. These events are facilitated by licensed clinicians. The FSS team is at the center of the after-impact of violent crime – they serve as a direct link between survivors, immediate family members, and government and community-based service providers, to ensure that connections are made on a host of support services. In partnership with DC Water and the District Department of Transportation, FSS held an AFTER event at the DC Water Headquarters for these families on September 25 in recognition of the National Day of Remembrance for Homicide Victims. On that night, the Frederick Douglass Bridge was lit in orange in their honor – the official color of this event – which was covered by Fox5, WJLA, and WUSA9.

In FY23, FSS received 703 critical response notifications from the Metropolitan Police Department, requesting the division to engage with survivors and family members of homicides cases. From this number of notifications, 683 service requests made by families to FSS were secured. These services included burial services, emergency temporary housing, and behavioral health support for adults and children. The division partnered with the D.C. Courts' Crime Victims Compensation Program to strengthen our relationship and provide a more streamlined approach to service delivery. FSS also partnered with MPD's Victim Services division to facilitate case information sharing, and ensure effective and efficient service delivery to families impacted by homicide and survivors of gun violence

### **People of Promise**

The People of Promise Initiative – or PoP – is an interagency strategy designed to disrupt cycles of violence, poverty, and incarceration by strategically reaching individuals at imminent risk of victimization or involvement in violent crime and connecting them to support and services. During FY23 and FY24 to date, 153 Persons of Promise received Case Management Services through ONSE Outreach Specialists.

PoP staff hosted three (3) back-to-school resource fairs serving approximately 150 families in ONSE priority communities. At these fairs, three hundred (300) backpacks and hygiene bins were distributed to students and families. PoP case managers forged a partnership with Bread for the City, where each month, our case managers retrieve up to fifteen (15) grocery bags to distribute to clients. PoP case managers completed an onsite learning session at the Goodwill Excel Center, to

gain information on matriculation options for PoP clients who are interested in earning a high school diploma.

In total, there have been 2,016 successful contacts and communication exchanges in FY23 and FY24 to date, and 105 individuals have obtained service referrals across various areas such as employment, education, transportation, and housing.

### **Violence Intervention**

The ONSE Violence Intervention Program is designed to work collaboratively with community-based organizations to reduce violent crime throughout the District. This program uses tactics to address potential conflicts, stabilize communities after a violent conflict, and provide support to individuals at high risk of being directly involved in violence. In FY23, 344 neighborhood mediations and ceasefires were conducted, and 471 ‘community touches’ – or engagements - were made across the District.

Violence Interrupters also attend Advisory Neighborhood Commission (ANC) meetings to strengthen community ties and keep dialogue open. During FY23, ONSE attended approximately 54 ANC meetings. The Violence Intervention Division partnered with the Department of Parks and Recreation in an Art for Change contest for gun violence reduction that engaged 61 young people in a creative expression while raising awareness from their perspective on the devastating impact of gun violence around them. The VI program held 77 events and activities engaging hundreds of community members and clients, including a job interview seminar and weekly client group sessions.

I want to thank the many facilitators, clinicians, case managers, providers, graduates – our Pathways Ambassadors – of Cohorts 12, 13, and 14, the dedicated staff at ONSE, and all the people who work behind the scenes on the mission of preventing gun violence in the District. This work is critical and courageous, and it must be continued to keep our residents and neighborhoods safe.

This past fiscal year has presented numerous challenges that have tested the true grit of every person on the ONSE Team. The work of ONSE is important, and it is valued. To the ONSE team,

I appreciate how we have come into our collective roles with eyes wide open, with a focus on staying bonded while staying on mission. Each ONSE team member has a positive impact on the District, and I am proud to work alongside you.

I thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today, and I welcome any additional questions.