

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



**Fiscal Year 2024  
Performance Oversight Hearing**

Testimony of

Kwelli Sneed  
Executive 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 500

February 25, 2025  
Time: 9:30 a.m.

Good morning, Chairwoman Pinto, members and staff of the Committee on the Judiciary and Public Safety. I am Kwelli Sneed, Executive 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 Fiscal Year 2024 and Fiscal Year 2025, to date. Joining me are ONSE Deputy Director of Government and Community Affairs Julia Irving and General Counsel John Cheek.

ONSE was created to reduce gun violence in the District while assisting the community with the impact of trauma caused by these incidents. Our mission is to build partnerships and implement strategies that reduce gun-related violence in the District of Columbia. ONSE fulfills this mission by coordinating the District's gun violence prevention and intervention initiatives, using public health and public safety tools, and focusing on identifying and engaging with those most likely to be involved in gun violence – providing them with an alternative to crime.

ONSE also provides 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 violent crime, and those at imminent or immediate risk of victimization from gun violence.

In 2024, we worked to instill an operational shift, placing a focus on compliance, performance, and stability. These are necessary components that will move ONSE forward, driving growth and innovation and making an even deeper impact on the lives of our residents and the communities we serve. These changes emphasize our values of compassion, resilience, flexibility, and adaptability.

Most importantly, I'm proud to share our primary mission, to reduce gun violence in our 27 Priority Communities, resulted in an overall reduction of shootings (e.g., offenses involving assault with dangerous weapon, homicide, and robbery) by 35%. Priority Communities with the largest decreases in the number of violent gun crimes include Carver Langston, Columbia Heights, and Shaw/Mount Vernon. In fact, ten of our ONSE Priority Communities had no homicides in 2024. Violence intervention and prevention is not the work of the faint of heart and I commend the ONSE staff and our community-based organizations who play a critical role in saving lives and building safer communities.

The ONSE Violence Intervention Initiative is designed to work collaboratively with community-based organizations to reduce violent crime throughout the District, and specifically within our Priority Communities. The program uses tactics to address potential conflicts, stabilize communities after a violent incident, and provide support to individuals at high risk of being directly involved in violence. Our providers conduct neighborhood ceasefires – a short-term postponement of violence that allows for negotiation with people involved in conflict. They also lead mediations by bringing individuals together to resolve conflicts that can lead to violence. In FY24, 18 neighborhood mediations and ceasefires occurred. ONSE staff also host mediations with opposing groups within the DC Department of Corrections. Last fiscal year, we held 41 peacemaking consultations at the DC Jail.

The People of Promise Initiative – or PoP – is now a part of the Violence Intervention Division. 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 case management and supportive services. During FY24, ONSE increased its

engagement rate with PoP individuals from 22% to 65%. An actively engaged Person of Promise has completed an initial intake survey, a needs assessment, and is currently receiving supportive services or meeting regularly with members of our team.

Our Violence Interrupters also attended more than 100 Advisory Neighborhood Commission (ANC) meetings to strengthen community ties and communication. The VI program hosted 85 events and activities engaging hundreds of community members and clients, including a job interview seminar and weekly client group sessions.

The Pathways Program is a transitional employment program for individuals at risk of participating in and/or being victims of crime. During FY24, we successfully promoted three cohorts of young men between the ages of 18 and 35 at risk of involvement in gun-related violence, for a total of 62 individuals. These individuals from cohorts 15, 16, and 17 received 173 certifications in information technology, cybersecurity, and welding, and they received commercial driver's licenses – enhancing their employability. Sixty percent of Pathways graduates received subsidized employment opportunities, and 11% of graduates transitioned to unsubsidized employment at the end of the subsidized employment. In December 2024, we promoted 25 members of our first graduating class of FY25, cohort 18, and cohort 19 is now underway with 24 active participants.

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 FY24, the Metropolitan Police Department made 642 referrals to FSS and 43% of those families received some type of support from the agency, which included emergency housing, behavioral health services, burial assistance, and vigil support. In FY24, FSS facilitated seventeen remembrance events and launched two new support groups – one geared specifically toward adult men who experienced losing a loved one to homicide and a support group for children between the ages of 5 and 18. These groups have positively impacted nearly 300 people as they journey through the grief and loss process. In partnership with Sycamore and Oak and the District Department of Transportation, FSS held an event on September 25 for families in recognition of the National Day of Remembrance for Homicide Victims. On that night, the Frederick Douglass Bridge was lit up in orange in their honor – the official color of this event.

Last Spring, we opened a second office space located in the Brookland neighborhood in anticipation of increasing the number of participants in the Pathways Program and to space for our growing team.

In June, ONSSE held a ‘Healing Centered’ Forum designed to empower credible messengers and help residents build community resilience against the plague of gun violence. More than 400 individuals attended the forum with more than half coming from locations across the United States. This two-day forum created safe spaces for attendees to process trauma, share experiences and skillsets, and build community trust.

For the first time, ONSE provided 27 community and faith-based organizations with \$5,000 mini-grants, allowing their violence intervention programs to operate and expand during the summer months when structured youth engagement is needed. These programs encouraged emotional expression, provided safe and creative spaces. I am pleased to share that more than 8,000 individuals were engaged with and benefited from our mini-grant program. Working with these organizations also helped the ONSE team forge deeper connections with the community. After seeing the success of the ONSE mini-grant program, the Greater Washington Community Foundation awarded \$280,000 to these grantees allowing them to continue their gun violence reduction programming in the Fall. We are grateful to the Community Foundation for recognizing this need and for their collaboration.

Sticking with our mission to build partnerships, the agency paired with the Department of Parks and Recreation in the second annual ‘Art for Change’ contest for gun violence reduction. The contest engaged 136 young people in creative expression while raising awareness from their perspective on the devastating impact of gun violence around them.

This past fiscal year has presented numerous challenges and, together, we have met each one. I have great expectations for our new Ward-based approach to community violence intervention. While we remain focused on the priority communities, this shift provides flexibility and adaptability to support all areas of the city if data shows an uptick in crime in a location outside of priority community boundaries that would benefit from targeted violence intervention or interruption services.

As I shared with the Committee in December, we are strengthening our partnerships with MPD and community leaders to most effectively identify areas where ONSE

will concentrate its efforts. We have instituted a new grant monitoring operation with updated policies, processes, and controls, including in-house grant monitoring with our new Compliance Unit. We have laid out plans to strengthen the Pathways Program to add more workforce development and job readiness training for participants. I have brought on a team of exceptional administrative professionals and subject matter experts to build upon ONSE's existing processes and infrastructure.

We recently selected the providers for the FY25 *Empowering Communities through Innovative Violence Intervention* grant program. They include the InnerCity Collaborative Community Development Corporation, National Association for the Advancement of Returning Citizens, Together We Rise, J & J Monitoring Solutions, and Hillcrest Children & Family Center for Wards 1, 4, 6, 7, and 8. ONSE resolicited for Wards 2 and 5 and will provide an update on the selected provider(s) soon.

We are steadily transforming ONSE into a high-performing agency. I want to thank the many facilitators, clinicians, case managers, providers, graduates, Pathways Ambassadors, the dedicated staff at ONSE, and all the people who work behind the scenes to prevent gun violence in the District. This work is critical and courageous. We are committed to doing our part to keep our residents and neighborhoods safe.

I am honored to be serving as the Director at ONSE. To the ONSE team, I appreciate your support and focus on our mission. Our work of gun violence prevention is important, and it is valued. I am proud to be working with you.

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