

Government of the District of Columbia
Department of Corrections



FY 2023 Performance Oversight Hearing

Testimony of
Tom Faust
Director

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

Virtual Hearing
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Good Afternoon Chairperson Pinto and members of the Committee on the Judiciary and Public Safety. I am Tom Faust, Director of the District of Columbia Department of Corrections (DOC). Joining me today are Deputy Directors, Michelle Wilson, and Jacqueline Williams along with Anthony Norman, our OCFO Agency Fiscal Officer. Thank you for inviting me to testify today on behalf of Mayor Muriel Bowser and to highlight the Department's performance during Fiscal Year 2023.

DOC operates the Central Detention Facility (CDF), the Correctional Treatment Facility (CTF), the Central Cell Block (CCB), and contracts with the Fairview Residential Reentry Center for the community corrections placement of female residents. During Fiscal Year 2023 the CDF maintained an average daily population of 964 adult male residents and the CTF housed an average daily population of 363 adult male and female residents.

The core mission of DOC is to provide a safe, secure, and humane environment for residents and staff housed and working within our correctional facilities. In achieving this goal, our team remains focused and deliberate as we institute critical safety and security protocols while also prioritizing the delivery of quality education and reentry services, substance use, health and behavioral health services.

During the first quarter of Fiscal Year 23, DOC underwent a full audit by the American Correctional Association's (ACA) Commission on Accreditation in Corrections, which establishes national standards for the safe and effective operation of state, local, federal and private facilities. The initial phase of the audit involved the review of over 360 standards with DOC achieving full compliance with all mandatory standards. In January of 2023, the final phase of the process was completed, resulting in our formal reaccreditation by the Commission on Standards and Accreditation.

This accomplishment is important not only because most jails are not nationally accredited - only about 12% - but also because the largest facility under our oversight, the Central Detention Facility was built over 48 years ago thus presents challenges that require our team and a host of partner

organizations, to work collaboratively to ensure the infrastructure and supporting systems are effectively maintained.

It is important that I acknowledge during every performance hearing that our core mission can only be met with the hard work and dedication of a team of focused and valued corrections professionals. To honor and recognize their accomplishments during 2023, the Department held a Correctional Excellence Ceremony on January 17th of this year during which special awards were given to individuals and work teams in categories including: Execution of Lifesaving Efforts, Safeguarding our Facilities, Exemplary Service, and Demonstrating Innovation. I strongly support recognition events such as this because the work of our corrections professionals, which directly impacts the health, well-being, and safety of our neighborhoods and communities, takes tremendous commitment and is sometimes overlooked and taken for granted.

As we acknowledge the work of our hard-working team members, there is also an awareness of challenges they face each and every day in carrying out their duties and responsibilities. To support our workforce, during FY 23 we recruited and in early FY 24, hired an experienced Wellness Coordinator who will provide support to DOC staff through specialized programming and connections to critical services and supports.

DOC POPULATION

Before moving into further discussion of critical agency functions, I'd like to highlight population trends which directly impact day-to-day operations. During the past few months of FY23 through FY24 to date, there has been a marked increase in the resident population. From July 2023 through today, the total DOC population has increased from an average of about 1,390 to 1,790 – an increase of 400 or about 28%.

CTF ANNEX

Our work on the CTF Annex project is ongoing with Department of General Services (DGS) and their architectural program consultant CGL Companies (CGL). The vision for the project is to create a facility with a state-of-the-art design for living space, comprehensive programming, and

health care services. The DOC team has conducted resident and staff surveys developed in partnership with CGL covering such topics as education, programming, medical and mental health services, daily activities, transportation, and re-entry services.

The programming and conceptual design phase for the project is on track to conclude by Spring 2024, which will lead into the development and issuance of the Architect Engineering RFP for full design services. Phased construction activities are projected to commence in the 1st quarter FY 2027.

RESTRICTIVE HOUSING

We continue to institute policy and operational changes to reduce the use of restrictive housing—with numbers continuing to remain significantly lower than historic highs despite increases in those at risk for restrictive housing placement. Our restrictive housing work group team plays a crucial role in conducting in-depth reviews of existing policy and practices, reviewing post orders, determining staff training requirements, and using data to inform the decision-making process.

One recommendation of the group involved the opening of a restrictive housing step down unit as a bridge between restrictive and general population housing. The unit will offer mental health services and other programming to individuals deemed ready for the transition. A unit has been identified and is being prepared for resident occupation beginning in April of this year. The Special Management Unit (SMU), opened as part of our restrictive housing reform efforts, continues to operate efficiently. This unit houses individuals with non-violent or separation issues pending a hearing, with residents receiving all regular on-unit privileges, and 5 hours of out of cell time daily.

We now also house individuals awaiting administrative or disciplinary hearings on a Pre-Hearing Unit where they retain full privileges—pending the outcome of their scheduled hearing.

SECURITY

To maintain safe and secure facilities, we remain fully focused on curbing the introduction of contraband. Detection, interdiction, and recovery efforts are given high priority with our teams

conducting daily cell and housing unit searches; executing strategic search and contraband recovery operations; continuing escorted movement protocols and using cellphone scanning and enhanced detection devices; and other intelligence gathering strategies. Screening at facility entrances and sally ports is still handled by a private security contractor allowing additional DOC officers to work other critical posts.

To further enhance contraband interdiction efforts, we have added technology that allows our team access to state-of-the-art security screening tools. With enhanced Wi-Fi within our facilities, we are now using MailSecur and Cellsense technology to bolster our detection and confiscation efforts.

FOOD SERVICE

Resident nutrition remains a priority. Based on feedback from the population, our contracted food service provider has begun implementing changes that address their stated preferences--- but do not impact existing contract costs. This includes modifications to the general population, kosher, and halal menus.

We have also been working with our commissary provider to encourage healthier menu options. Items such as high protein shakes, granola bars, nuts and yogurt, bran cereal, and tuna fillets were added to the commissary menu with more expected this fiscal year. During monthly meetings with residents, Operations staff receives input which is shared with the commissary provider-- once required security approvals are made.

OTHER UPDATES

There is a robust network of local and federal criminal justice partner agencies, community and faith-based organizations, advocates, and others invested in and supporting the DOC mission. Recognizing the value of these partnerships is so important as they each contribute to a multitude

of ways to our success. Some of the work we do together will be highlighted in the next part of my testimony.

Prioritizing resident engagement in voting, education, workforce development, training and reentry programming is critical thus, we continue to expand opportunities and use existing and new partnerships to raise the bar and offer new and innovative opportunities.

VOTING

DOC was officially established as a polling place for incarcerated residents per the Initiative and Referendum Process Improvement Act of 2020, with implementation beginning during the 2022 primary election. For both the primary and general elections that year, DOC personnel and BOE staff were on site at our polling locations along with election observers/poll watchers from various partner organizations, League of Women Voters representatives, and University Legal Services (ULS) Disability Rights DC staff.

During FY 23, the Department continued to work with our voting partners including the BOE, League of Women Voters, Office of Human Rights, CIC, CURE, and others to educate residents on the voter registration process. This has involved sharing voting registration information during the resident intake process; conducting unit-based voter education classes; incorporating voter registration information on the inmate tablets; conducting cell to cell information sharing on the registration process - including individuals on general population units along with those in restrictive housing and on other custody statuses. There were 171 male and female residents newly registered in FY 23 and 101 in FY 24 year to date.

In FY 23, work also began on the 7F08 special election that took place with the departure of our formerly elected Advisory Neighborhood Commissioner Leonard Bishop. DOC worked in collaboration with BOE and the Office of Advisory Neighborhood Commissions (OANC) in following special election protocols to include the public announcement, petition process, candidate identification, election date designation; election; vote count and winner designation by the OANC. The election took place on December 14, 2023 (Fiscal Year 24) with Shameka Hayes,

the first female 7F08 ANC, declared the winner and sworn in on January 11, 2024 - a proud moment for Ms. Hayes and everyone involved in this process.

EDUCATION AND WORKFORCE INITIATIVES

DOC is proud to broaden our partnerships with colleges and universities—local and other-- in offering courses to both male and female residents. Some of the continuing, new and innovative course offerings DOC has introduced and enhanced include:

- The **Howard University Crime and Justice Behind the Walls** course brings together current CDF residents and previously incarcerated individuals to discuss contemporary social justice reform and strategies for building community and family capacity.
- The **Howard University Mass Incarceration and the Black Family** course brings together residents female residents housed at the CTF with HU students studying criminal justice reform. The course focuses on strategies to reduce recidivism and promotes success among Black families affected by mass incarceration.
- The **University of the District of Columbia (UDC) Paralegal** course, offered to both male and female residents at the CTF, explores the role, responsibilities, and ethical standards of the profession. along with topics such as law office administration, effective communication, introduction to legal research tools.
- The **Harvard-Trauma Talks** course focuses on understanding concepts associated with trauma and crisis. The course was designed to increase student awareness of the effects of trauma and crisis on individuals, families, groups, and communities and to explore the process of recovery. Both female and male CTF residents participated in the course.

EDUCATION

We remain immensely proud of the work being done by our education team and the achievements of residents enrolled in our education programs. During FY 23, the DOC contract for special

education services was signed and executed with the Forever Foundation chosen to serve DOC residents. There were 77 students enrolled in class during the fiscal year.

Other accomplishments include 12 high school diploma graduates through Maya Angelou Academy; 12 general education diplomas (GED); 50 CTECH certifications; 253 OSHA certificates; and 427 industry certifications earned. Our partners including MIT, Harvard, Fredrick Douglas Project, Petey Green College Bridge Writing and Math Program, and the Georgetown Prison Justice Initiative continue to make tremendous contributions to these programming and educational efforts.

To assist with early identification of basic skills requirements and supporting residents desiring to study and obtain a GED, we've begun conducting academic diagnostic testing on intake units for 18–25-year-olds coming into our custody.

Also noteworthy is the tremendous support of the DC Public Library (DCPL) leadership and staff on site at both the CDF and CTF. During FY 23, in addition to tablet-based reading, there were 2,540 books distributed to residents by DCPL.

TABLET PROGRAM

DOC continues to offer robust virtual learning options through the Orijin, formerly known as APDS, tablet program. DOC utilizes the educational tablets to expand student access to special education services per legal mandates and to broaden innovative practices for secondary and post-secondary education.

During FY 23, residents spent a total of 309,303 hours participating in virtual programming. There were approximately 1,000 tablets deployed across our facilities with virtual program offerings in education, rehabilitation, workforce development, and reentry programming as well as over 800

courses specially designed for residents by DOC staff and our partner organizations. There were 202,137 legal researches conducted and 168,913 engaged in leisure hours study.

Additionally, during April of 2023, in keeping with trend across corrections, DOC successfully instituted the one-to-one distribution of entertainment tablets to residents--- which offer access to games, videos, movies, along with limited talk and texting.

READY CENTER

In September 2023, the READY Center officially opened its new standalone location on Martin Luther King, S.E. offering a pathway for formerly incarcerated residents released from DOC and FBOP facilities, to immediately access services and supports as they re-enter the community. The Center includes classrooms, offices, meeting areas, and multi-use space and is staffed by public sector agencies and community-based organizations offering case management services, streamlined access to identification and vital documents, housing assistance, education and training resources, mental health counseling and referral, substance use counseling and referral, professional development, job placement assistance, and financial literacy services.

The new location houses partner agencies, including the Departments of Human Services (DHS), Behavioral Health (DBH), Employment Services (DOES), and Motor Vehicles (DMV). Community-based organizations housed within the Center include the Hope Foundation, Captivate Perspectives, and Martha's Outfitters. Other partners providing on-site services include Voices for a Second Chance, Catholic Charities, Community Family Life Services (CLFS), House of Ruth, and the Mayor's Office on Returning Citizens Affairs (MORCA).

During FY 23, the READY Center served 2,273 participants including 1,728 former DOC residents and 545 former FBOP residents.

IN2WORK

In partnership with our food service provider Aramark, DOC has implemented the In2Work program, which is offered once per quarter, trains residents in culinary arts, and offers a ServSafe national certification upon completion. This national certification enhances job placement

opportunities in the community and offers sustainable career growth for successful completers. During FY 23, 59 DOC residents successfully completed the intensive six-week program. In FY 24 to date, 16 residents graduated from a cohort that began in October 2023; with a new class of 29 residents currently in class.

MEDICATION ASSISTED TREATMENT

DOC is one of the District's largest providers of Medication Assisted Treatment (MAT), averaging approximately 250 residents on MAT each month. Unlike most jails, DOC has had MAT for Opioid Use Disorder as an integral part of our patient care practice for over a decade. DOC is also an Opioid Treatment Program, accredited through the federal Substance Abuse and Mental Health Service Administration (SAMSHA) and the National Commission on Correctional Healthcare (NCCHC).

WELLNESS AND MENTAL HEALTH UNITS

DOC operates special therapeutic housing units for both men and women dealing with substance use disorders (SUD) and mental health issues. Unit staff is specialized and includes a board-certified addictions medicine physician and a team of addictions nursing and mental health experts providing daily support and guidance. These therapeutic housing units follow a specialized curriculum developed for incarcerated settings that is gender-responsive and focused on trauma informed care.

In addition to MAT with methadone---suboxone, sublocade, vivitrol, and a wide range of complementary behavioral health tools are offered to help residents cope with various triggers and stressors in both their pre and post release environments.

CONCLUSION

Each year the DOC workforce provides for the secure care and custody of thousands of pretrial detainees, sentenced misdemeanants, felons, and parole violators - and we strive to execute our

duties with pride, professionalism, and passion in carrying for human lives. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today and answer any questions you may have at this time.