

GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
Executive Office of Mayor Muriel Bowser



Performance Oversight Hearing on

The Office of Victim Services and Justice Grants

Testimony of
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Director

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

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Good morning, Chairwoman Pinto and members of the Committee on the Judiciary and Public Safety. I am Jennifer Porter, Director of the Office of Victim Services and Justice Grants known as OVSJG. I am proud to share today the outcomes and performance of our agency during Fiscal Year 2023 and Fiscal Year 2024, to date.

The mission of OVSJG is to develop, fund, and coordinate programs that improve public safety; enhance the administration of justice; and create systems of care for crime victims, youth, and their families in the District. We do this in several ways. OVSJG funds community-based organizations and District agencies that provide services for victims of crime, justice-involved individuals, truancy reduction, and juvenile delinquency prevention programs.

As the State Administering Agency (SAA) for 11 federal victim services and criminal and juvenile justice system funding programs, OVSJG engages in planning and coordination with, and provides training and technical assistance to, organizations and agencies receiving grant funding to provide these services.

In addition to the Victim Services, Justice Grants, and Truancy Reduction programs, OVSJG operates the District's Address Confidentiality Program, which provides a legal substitute address and mail forwarding for eligible DC residents to maintain the confidentiality of her or his actual address; and the Private Security Camera Incentive Program, which encourages residents, businesses, non-profits, and religious institutions to install security camera systems on their property.

OVSJG also provides policy making expertise, advice, and counsel to the Mayor on the role of victims and offenders in the criminal justice system, enhancing the District's responses to trauma; and evidence-based practices to respond to, intervene in, and prevent violence.

Today, I will highlight some of the agency's activities and accomplishments in these program areas during FY23, and thus far in FY24.

Agency Accomplishments

In May 2023, OVSJG's Hospital-Based Violence Intervention Program (HVIPs) was awarded the distinguished Justice Potter Stewart Award from the Council for Court Excellence.

The Justice Potter Stewart Award recognizes individuals and organizations whose work on behalf of the administration of justice has made a significant contribution to the law, the legal system, the courts, or the administrative process in the District. This accolade serves as recognition of the outstanding contributions made by HVIPs in partnership with OVSJG, underscoring the ongoing imperative for these services and their positive influence on the communities served by OVSJG.

In FY23, OVSJG launched our capacity-building grants, designed to break down barriers for smaller grassroots and historically underfunded community-based organizations. The overarching goal is to reduce barriers for organizations to secure and effectively manage larger sums of funding. The outcomes of this priority will be assessed through feedback from grantees and their ability to utilize the provided tools and training to secure funding, increase organizational capacity, and continue to meet the needs of the communities they serve. The opportunity is aimed at enhancing the capabilities of organizations that provide critical services to DC residents that are aligned with OVSJG's mission. This initiative is specifically designed to support community and faith-based organizations in strengthening their operational and programmatic effectiveness. Through this program, led by an independent training consultant, OVSJG provided targeted support that enables organizations to manage teams more effectively, administer impactful programs and services, and develop robust financial resources. Benefits to participants include financial support tailored to each organization's specific needs, training and resources for organizational development, and access to a strong network of service providers. Participants attended monthly capacity-building training events led by experts in the field and developed an individualized organizational and financial Capacity Action Plan.

Grant Funding

OVSJG administered 132 awards to community organizations and government agencies in FY23, funding healing services for primary and secondary victims of all crime categories, training and

technical assistance for community leaders and staff and critical supports for returning citizens and reentry serving community organizations. As the State Administrating Agent for 11 federal award programs, OVSJG received a total of eight federal awards in FY23 funded at \$7,334,116, five were for justice grants and three were for victim services. OVSJG received a total of seven federal awards in FY24 funded at \$7,519,832. Four were for justice grants and 3 were for victim services. All federal awards are multi-year awards.

Address Confidentiality Program

OVSJG operates the District's Address Confidentiality Program, which provides a legal substitute address and mail forwarding for eligible DC residents to maintain the confidentiality of their address. Critical to the success of this program are trainings and informational sessions for community-based application assistants and MPD officers. We are proud to have a total of 2,337 people being informed on the ACP in FY23. In FY23, 46 participants were accepted into the program. The program is proud to be a lifesaving resource for eligible survivors of domestic violence, sexual assault, stalking, and human trafficking, employees and volunteers of organizations that primarily serve eligible victims, and providers of reproductive healthcare.

Private Security Camera Incentive Program

The Private Security Camera Incentive Program encourages residents, businesses, non-profits, and religious institutions to install security camera systems on their property and register them with the Metropolitan Police Department (MPD). This program is intended to help deter crime and assist law enforcement with investigations. In FY23, 714 rebate and voucher applications were approved, and 1,726 cameras were funded. Since inception, 11,854 rebates and vouchers have been approved and 27,544 cameras have been funded. In FY23, there were six arrests made in which video footage was extracted from a program participant. There were arrests made in three murder cases, one in a sexual assault while armed case.

Juvenile Justice Advisory Group (JJAG)

The JJAG spearheads the development and adoption of the District's application for Title II federal formula funds, which includes developing a three-year plan for Delinquency Prevention. The JJAG also advises the Mayor and District Government agencies on compliance with the core

requirements of the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act (JJDA). JJAG facilitates authentic youth engagement and obtains input from youth with experience navigating the juvenile justice system. Finally, JJAG supports the monitoring of all juvenile holding, detention, and correction facilities, as well as grant-funded community programs to ensure compliance with the JJDA.

In FY23, OVSJG made eight awards advised by the JJAG. The JJAG's funded Compliance Monitor and Racial Ethnic Disparities Coordinator conducted site visits for 11 sites, including MPD police precincts and DYRS facilities. The Compliance Monitor also worked with agencies to streamline the data collection and data verification processes among system partners to enable effective reporting on the core requirements of the JJDA. The summary of compliance monitoring deemed that the District of Columbia provided an effective system of monitoring. This designation maintains the District's eligibility to receive 100% of its Title II funding for FY23 and FY24 due to these critical and coordinated efforts.

Support for Returning Citizens

OVSJG makes grant awards to community-based organizations and District agencies to remove barriers to reentry and break cycles of recidivism for returning citizens. In FY23, over \$5 million in ARPA flexible funding was awarded to support the individual needs of returning citizens, including housing, transportation, vital documents, education and job training, childcare, health care, and technology and connectivity.

In addition to the flexible funding, OVSJG was able to enhance supports and services for justice-involved individuals and returning citizens with other federal and local dollars. OVSJG awarded nearly \$5 million for housing, \$1 million for Incarceration Reduction Amendment Act (IRAA) recipients, and over \$10 million for services such as case management, trauma-informed mental health services, peer support, mentoring, job readiness, mediation, and returning citizen direct client assistance funding.

Domestic Violence Housing and Services

OVSJG makes grant awards to community-based organizations to meet the needs of victims of domestic violence and their families. In FY22, OVSJG awarded over \$10 million in ARPA funds to domestic violence service providers for housing and services. At the end of FY23 we were proud to celebrate the ribbon cutting of the DC SAFE, SAFE Space Crisis Shelter, the District's new 24/7 crisis shelter available for domestic violence survivors.

Trauma Response and Community Engagement Program

In FY23, the Trauma Response and Community Engagement Program (TRCEP) center continued serving the Stoddart Terrace/37th St. SE community providing healing services and community led and based resources and launched the second TRCEP site in Historic Anacostia. This project is designed to engage the Anacostia community in developing and implementing community-defined healing priorities and activities in partnership with knowledgeable providers they already know and trust.

Truancy Reduction Program

In FY23, OVSJG Truancy Reduction Initiatives which include Show UP Stand Out (SUSO) and our High School Truancy Reduction Program served 72 schools. Last school year, 3,710 students and families were offered SUSO services, and 1,206 direct services were provided. Common support services include tutoring, school uniforms, transportation support, and meeting basic needs.

The High School Truancy Reduction Program provides intensive, long-term, one-on-one mentoring and case management to students at risk of disconnection. They work to remove barriers and increase opportunities to facilitate a youth's re-engagement in school and improve attendance. For FY24, we anticipate serving approximately 1,290 students across 25 schools this school year. OVSJG was proud in 2023 to enhance our response and support performance improvement and effectiveness of our Truancy Reduction Initiatives. As such, we provided comprehensive oversight to ensure these initiatives are best meeting the needs of students and families through high quality program delivery and have made great strides in several significant areas including improving referrals, enhancing training, development of standard program procedures, and enhancing program monitoring and technical assistance. Based on current projections and grantee capacity

for FY24, we anticipate serving approximately 1,290 students across 25 schools this school year. As of November 27, 2023, there were 681 students engaged across our SUSO and High School program providers.

Sexual Assault Victims Rights Amendment Act Implementation

In FY23, three community-based organizations—the Network for Victim Recovery of DC (NVRDC), the DC Rape Crisis Center (DCRCC), and Safe Shores Child Advocacy Center—were awarded grant funding to provide the expanded advocacy services codified under the Sexual Assault Victims Rights Amendment Act of 2019 (SAVRAA 2.0). For the entirety of FY23, the program was up and running, providing 24/7 access to a sexual assault victim advocate in hospital and community settings, and at law enforcement and other District agency interviews. In FY24, SAVRAA grantees, in partnership with the Sexual Assault Response Team (SART), developed and fully approved the SAVRAA adult and youth working protocols to ensure a consistent quality of care, system coordination, and survivor-centered efficiency across all providers and services in the District.

Grantee Support and Engagement

In FY22 and FY23, to date, OVSJG staff has concentrated efforts to engage and support grantees. To this end, OVSJG staff hosted 23 training events on topics such as financial grants management and reporting, application preparation, or specialized training for sub-groups like housing providers or federal sub-grantees.

In closing I would like to thank you, Chairperson Pinto, for the opportunity to share our accomplishments. Thank OVJSG public servants who make this work possible and the dozens of community-based organizations that work to heal District residents every day. I look forward to working with you and the Committee. I am available to answer your questions.