

**Statement of
DC Peace Team
to the
Council of the District of Columbia, Committee on Judiciary and Public Safety
on the
Mayor's FY 2021 Budget Request for Public Safety Agencies
June 12, 2020**

DC Peace Team is pleased to submit this statement to the Council of the District of Columbia, Committee on Judiciary and Public Safety, on the Mayor's FY 2021 budget request for public safety agencies. Our statement addresses directly the budget requests for the Office of Neighborhood Safety and Engagement and the Office of the Attorney General for the District of Columbia and indirectly the budget request for the Metropolitan Police Department.

DC Peace Team, active since 2011, is a grassroots organization that cultivates the virtue of nonviolent peacemaking and key corresponding practices. DC Peace Team volunteers empower ordinary civilians in the District of Columbia and the metropolitan Washington region to serve their communities as nonviolent peacekeepers, and by extension as peacemakers and peacebuilders. Our activities include:

- Training and organizing community members to provide unaccompanied civilian protection and accompaniment to support transformative conflict while de-escalating destructive conflict and de-humanization between opposing parties at demonstrations on all manner of national and local issues.
- Training community members in peaceful practices such as active bystander intervention, nonviolent communication, empathy offering, and restorative justice processes.
- Facilitating circles for neighborhood organizations and other groups seeking restorative and transformative approaches for transforming conflicts among community members.

DC Peace Team is a proponent of the public health approach to violence prevention and just peace promotion that underlies the Neighborhood Engagement and Results (NEAR) Act and the resulting programs administered by the Office of Neighborhood Safety and Engagement (ONSE). We support particularly ONSE's violence intervention initiative, which brings the evidence-based violence interrupter model to neighborhoods with high incidences of interpersonal violence. Also, we support the similar Cure the Streets program within the Office of the Attorney General.

DC Peace Team urges the Council to continue funding in FY 2021 for all ONSE programs, minimally at their FY 2020 appropriations levels and ideally at increased levels so that they reach more District residents and neighborhoods experiencing violence. Also, we urge the Council to continue funding in FY 2021 at least at the current level for OAG's Cure the Streets program.

DC Peace Team observes that while the NEAR Act and ONSE programs make important additions to the continuum of publicly funded violence prevention services in the District, **the continuum of public health responses to violence remains incomplete. Noticeably lacking are public funds for primary peace promotion interventions and for aggression and violence**

interruption supports to residents without involvement or high risk of involvement in justice systems.

Two examples of this incomplete continuum follow. First, **the District lacks universal peace education of our children and youth.** Some, but not all, District of Columbia Public Schools neighborhood schools and public charter schools offer peace education to their students, either with their own staff or by inviting community-based organizations such as Little Friends of Peace and One Common Unity to deliver programming. Universally available peace education would ensure all District children receive foundational knowledge on peaceful, nonviolent conflict behaviors that they can apply as children and carry forward through adolescence and adulthood.

Second, **the continuum lacks significant peace promotion and violence early intervention supports for the District's general adult population.** There is no obvious source of public funds that community-based organizations like Community Mediation DC, DC Peace Team, and others can rely upon to build or expand their capacity to teach and support adults in peaceful practices such as bystander intervention, nonviolent communication, empathy offering, peer mediation, and restorative justice. Lacking this public resource, community- and faith-based organizations that aspire to promote peace in our city are unable to meet the services requests of grassroots groups and residents in the District's violence-challenged neighborhoods, much less citywide. It is particularly important at this moment in time to highlight that **it is these types of promotive and early interventive supports that enable community members to remedy aggression and violence, especially low-level, without any need for police involvement.**

DC Peace Team urges the Council to appropriate FY 2021 funds at the suggested amount of \$1 million for a new initiative to stimulate and sustain community- and faith-based peace promotion and constructive conflict efforts. We suggest ONSE would be an appropriate administrator of such program to ensure intersectionality with the District's violence prevention and crime reduction initiatives.

We are aware of the Mayor's projected reductions to District revenues in FY 2021 due to the coronavirus pandemic. To recommend a new initiative in that fiscal environment may appear to the Council to be unrealistic. However, we expect that the Council is examining its allocation of public safety funds between policing and other safety interventions considering the renewed calls to action to overcome systemic racism, including limiting police interaction with citizens. We support generally the recommendation that some of the funds currently appropriated to the Metropolitan Police Department be redirected to alternative safety-promoting purposes. We urge the Council to commence such repurposing, and when so doing to allocate a portion of those redirected funds into our proposed peace promotion and constructive conflict initiative.

DC Peace Team looks forward to collaborating with District residents, colleague organizations, the Mayor, and the Council of the District of Columbia to strengthen and expand the continuum of publicly funded peace promotion and violence prevention services so that together we achieve a city that is just and peaceful for *all* who call the District home.

For additional information about DC Peace Team or our position on the District of Columbia budget, please visit <https://dcpeaceteam.com> or contact peace team volunteer Bob Reeg at bob.reeg@bobreeg.com or 202-265-7271.