

**GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA  
DEPARTMENT OF YOUTH REHABILITATION SERVICES**



**Fiscal Year 2024 Performance Oversight Hearing**

Testimony of  
Sam Abed  
Director of the District of Columbia Department of Youth Rehabilitation Services

Before the  
Committee on Youth Affairs  
Zachary Parker, Chairperson  
Council of the District of Columbia

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9:30 AM

Good morning, Chairperson Parker, members of the Committee on Youth Affairs, and members of the public who are watching and are here today. I am Sam Abed, Director of the Department of Youth Rehabilitation Services (DYRS). Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today regarding DYRS' work in Fiscal Year 2024 (FY24).

I want to start by expressing my gratitude to Mayor Bowser and Deputy Mayor Appiah for their leadership. Mayor Bowser continues to make public safety a top priority and supports DYRS' mission to hold youth accountable while providing the rehabilitative services that they need to turn their lives around. I also want to thank the entire DYRS team. The work that we do is challenging. I am honored to lead an agency with staff who are dedicated to DYRS' mission and values. Team DYRS works tirelessly every day to ensure that every youth that comes into our care and custody receives services, support, and treatment that meet their individualized needs and provides age-appropriate accountability so that they can become more productive members of the community. The hard work of the entire DYRS team in FY24 resulted in important progress and key accomplishments that will have a positive impact on the lives of the youth and families that we serve and will lead to safer communities.

Today, I will highlight those key accomplishments and the positive impact that they have on the lives of the youth that we serve. These critical milestones for the agency represent my focus on ensuring that DYRS' core functions – keeping youth in our facilities safe and expanding the continuum of placements available for our youth – are met.

***Strengthened Safety and Security***

First, I will highlight progress made to strengthen facility safety and security. Operating facilities that keep our youth safe and our staff safe is core to our mission and is a top priority. In FY24, DYRS improved safety and security at the Youth Services Center (YSC) and at the New Beginnings Youth Development Center (NBYDC) as evidenced by a sustained reduction in the number of critical incidents. The Office of Independent Juvenile Justice Facility Oversight (OIJJFO) reported that from October 2023 to October 2024 the critical incidents rate at YSC decreased by 53% and incidents at NBYDC decreased by 16%. We accomplished this by improving secure program policies and procedures; through the great effort and commitment of our secure programs team and by partnering with community organizations like ParentWatch and the National Center for Juvenile Justice Reform, who have assisted tremendously with resolving conflicts between youth. We still have work to do, and as we continue to make much needed improvements, this will remain a top priority.

***Expanded the Continuum of Care***

Second, I will highlight the important progress we made to expand the continuum of care for our youth. Ensuring that there are placement options that meet the needs of every youth committed to DYRS is also a top priority that is reflected in where we focus our resources. We are utilizing the space available at YSC and NBYDC to maximize utilization of treatment beds at NBYDC and to create much needed flexibility in housing youth who are at YSC.

In FY24, DYRS invested more than \$9.6 million in community based residential programs. This critical investment allowed DYRS to expand the District's juvenile justice continuum of care by

increasing the number of placements and shelter bed options. These new placement and shelter bed options include:

- Increased capacity at three current local shelter/group homes for a total of six additional beds.
- Two new local homes for a total of 14 flexible local shelter/group home beds; and
- Four new out-of-state placements, for a combined total of seven beds in enhanced treatment settings.

In FY24, we also increased the bed capacity at YSC by opening a new 10-bed housing unit. Also, in response to the needs of our growing female population, we re-opened the girl's unit at NBYDC. These expansions both in our secure programs' capacity and our non-secure program placements are critical to managing an increasing population.

Additionally, through the work of our Credible Messengers Initiative (CMI), Oasis Leadership Program (Oasis), and our Achievement Centers (ACs), DYRS' continuum of care extends to youth in the community as well as committed youth. This vital work is a reflection of the Mayor's commitment to prevention as well as accountability for youth. Not only has she made investments in DYRS that allow us to serve committed youth, she also has made sure that we invest in programs that prevent youth from getting committed to us in the first place.

In FY24, the CMI served and supported 542 committed and post-committed youth. Also, in FY24, DYRS expanded Oasis programming to begin serving our committed youth and their families at NBYDC. In FY24, as this new work launched, 16 youth from NBYDC participated in the

Restorative Justice Program on the Oasis campus. This is an important milestone for the program, and it materialized because of cross-departmental partnerships within the agency that included not just Oasis but Secure Programs and Behavioral Health. In FY24, 107 youth completed the Oasis intensive mentoring program. Finally, in FY24, the ACs – across both locations – had 209 unique youth participate in a variety of community-based programs. The CMI, Oasis and the programming provided at our ACs are an example of how DYRS is making public safety through prevention and intervention a priority under the Mayor’s leadership.

While much work remains to be done, critical progress has been made. As we look back on FY24, I am proud of the DYRS team and thankful for the Mayor’s continued support. DYRS will continue to build on the progress we have made to support community safety and the success of the youth we serve. We will continue investing in facility upgrades to improve living conditions and safety for detained youth, increase recruitment and retention efforts to ensure a well-trained and engaged workforce capable of supporting our youth, and strengthen partnerships with community organizations to provide mentorship and supportive community services for our youth.

Thank you again for the opportunity to share with you the good work of team DYRS in FY24. I look forward to your questions and discussion.