

**GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
OFFICE OF THE DEPUTY MAYOR FOR PUBLIC SAFETY AND JUSTICE**



Budget Oversight Hearing on

The District of Columbia Department of Youth Rehabilitation Services

Testimony of
Sam Abed
Director

Before the
Committee on Recreation, Libraries and Youth Affairs
Council of the District of Columbia
The Honorable Trayon White, Sr., Chairperson

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9:00a
Virtual

Good afternoon, Chairperson Trayon White and members of the Committee on Recreation, Libraries and Youth Affairs. 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' Fiscal Year 2025 (FY25) budget. I am also joined today by members of my senior leadership team and the agency's financial team from the Office of the Chief Financial Officer (OCFO) who will be available to respond to specific questions that you may have as needed.

As I approach my first-year anniversary at DYRS, I continue to be grateful to be able to serve under the leadership of Mayor Bowser and Deputy Mayor Appiah. In the Mayor's FY25 Fair Shot Budget, Mayor Bowser has made it clear that even in the context of shared sacrifice, public safety and investing in the District's young people remain top priorities for continued investment.

Earlier this year during DYRS' Fiscal Year 2024 (FY24) Performance Oversight Hearing, I shared with you my vision for the agency as a vital part of the District's public safety ecosystem. Specifically, I outlined five strategies to strengthen DYRS' ability to provide services and interventions that address the unique needs of youth who are in our care and provide age-appropriate accountability. DYRS has already made progress on those priorities. As a team, DYRS has:

- **Procured new community placements and shelter homes** to continue to strengthen our continuum of care for District youth.
- **Re-established a treatment unit for female youth at New Beginnings Youth Development Center (NBYDC)** to ensure that female youth who are committed to DYRS have access to a full range of placement options that serve their individual needs.
- **Opened a new living unit at the Youth Services Center (YSC)** that increases our capacity and gives us more flexibility as we assign youth to housing units.
- **Transformed the Abscondence Unit into the Rapid Response GPS Team.** This team responds to GPS violations in the moment to ensure that youth maintain compliance with conditions for being on GPS supervision and are held accountable if they do not.
- **Hired several leaders whose roles are vital to the agency's core functions.** These senior leaders include:
 - Superintendents and Assistant Superintendents at both YSC and NBYDC;

- a Chief Physician and Nurse Practitioner Supervisor;
- a Chief of Staff;
- a Deputy Director of Secure Programs and a Deputy Director of Youth and Family Programs;
- a Chief Integrity Officer for the Office of Internal Integrity; and most recently,
- a Quality Assurance Specialist for the Office of Policy and Quality Assurance.

The Mayor's FY25 Fair Shot Budget continues to provide DYRS with the resources that we need to continue the progress that we have made in accomplishing our strategic priorities in alignment with Mayor Bowser's vision for public safety. I will connect the investments made in our FY25 budget to those five strategic priorities.

Ensuring Youth and Staff Safety.

The first strategic priority for DYRS that I shared during Performance Oversight is focused on ensuring the safety of both youth and staff. In DYRS' FY25 budget there is \$2,307,622 for additional direct care staff in our secure facilities. This additional investment will result in DYRS being able to hire 21 new direct care staff at YSC and NBYDC.

Security procedures continue to be improved including enhanced search procedures to detect and deter contraband as well as operational improvements aimed at developing practices that limit opportunities for incidents to occur or escalate. Additionally, we have implemented programming to address youth conflicts within the facilities and partnered with community organizations to work with our youth through their lens. This approach allows us to offer an array of options for youth to engage with that teach empathy, accountability and resolving conflicts. Additionally, the last two rounds of youth drug testing have yielded no positive cases. These positive outcomes are a testament to the great work of our facility staff and leadership.

Addressing Staffing Challenges and Filling Key Positions.

The second strategic priority that I have set for the agency is focused on staffing. As you are aware, DYRS has been facing staffing challenges caused by a high number of staff who are unavailable to work. Addressing this challenge not only requires us to hire new positions but also getting back

to work those who are now unavailable to work. In DYRS' FY25 budget, we have funding for a Return-to-Work Coordinator. Having this new position is vital, as they will be dedicated to ensuring that all staff who are on extended leave return as soon as possible and to detect and deter any abuse of those leave systems. We have already hired for this position and look forward to that person starting on May 6.

Building a Continuum of Care.

The third strategic priority that I have focused on is building a continuum of care for DYRS youth. As I shared during our Performance Oversight Hearing this year, creating and resourcing a continuum of care is vital. Doing so positions DYRS to be able to provide an age and developmentally appropriate system of accountability and treatment that achieves positive youth outcomes. DYRS has added capacity to our existing shelter home contracts, opened two new flexible group homes within the District and added a private out of state residential treatment center and two psychiatric residential treatment facilities. Additionally, we have partnered with CFSA to utilize one provider for which they have an existing contract.

In DYRS' FY25 budget, there are resources to continue to expand and strengthen the continuum of care for our committed youth. We are thankful to Mayor Bowser for making District youth in our care a top priority.

Strengthening Internal Monitoring and Accountability.

The fourth strategic priority is focused on data, protocols, and internal agency oversight. From my very first day, I emphasized we must have clear policies and procedures in place to guide our work. We must ensure that we are using data to inform decision making and that we are tracking the quality and impact of the work that we do. To accomplish that goal, I created the Office of Policy and Quality Assurance (OPQA). This office will be staffed by two policy officers and two quality assurance specialists. We have already brought on board the first quality assurance specialist for the office. In DYRS' FY25 budget, you will see that there is funding to not only fully staff the OPQA, but also to bring on additional staff to strengthen our data collection and analysis through the Office of Research and Evaluation (ORE).

Investing in Community-based Prevention and Intervention.

The fifth strategic priority for the agency that is reflected in our FY25 budget is focused on prevention and intervention. In DYRS' FY25 budget we are pleased to sustain funding for our community programs and services. This includes our prevention programming through Oasis, our programming at DYRS Achievement Centers and our programming with community partners and schools. In this budget as well, we have continued to support the agency's Credible Messengers programs. Finally, we are happy to continue to work in partnership with the Office of Gun Violence Prevention (OGVP) to direct funding to public safety initiatives. In this budget, the Mayor has provided \$1,809,000 for OGVP gun violence prevention initiatives to replace the federal ARPA funds previously allotted.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify. I am grateful to Mayor Bowser for her continued investments in DYRS and for making the District's youth and public safety a top FY25 budgetary priority. I welcome your questions and discussion.