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Statement of the Council for Court Excellence Before the Committee on the Judiciary & Public Safety Performance Oversight Hearing on the D.C. Corrections Informational Council

February 4, 2026

Thank you, Chairperson Pinto and members of the Committee, for the opportunity to present this testimony. My name is Crystal Jones Nieves, and I am the Criminal Justice Open Horizon Fellow for the Council for Court Excellence (CCE). We appreciate the opportunity to testify at today's Performance Oversight Hearing on the Corrections Information Council (CIC). CCE is a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization with the mission to enhance justice in the District of Columbia. For more than 40 years, CCE has worked to make D.C.'s unique legal systems more just, equitable, and accountable to the community through research and policy analysis, convening diverse stakeholders, and creating educational resources for the public. Please note that in accordance with our policy, no judicial member of CCE participated in the formulation or approval of this testimony. This testimony does not reflect the specific views of, or endorsement by, any judicial member of CCE.

CIC provides a valuable service for residents of D.C., particularly those in local and federal correctional facilities. CIC conducts inspections of and informs the community about the conditions in D.C. Department of Corrections (DOC) and federal Bureau of Prisons (BOP) facilities where District residents are incarcerated. My testimony today will cover public outreach, information sharing, and the value that increased partnerships could have in the future that could improve oversight of correction facilities. This work is incredibly important and allows D.C. residents to stay informed on the conditions that their loved ones are living in, the D.C. Council to provide oversight, and for those in the District to advocate for needed changes.

D.C.'s DOC facilities include the jail, which is comprised of the Central Detention Facility (CDF) and Correctional Treatment Facility (CTF), and the Central Cell Block (CCB), where arrested people are held prior to their first court appearance. In the past fiscal year alone, CIC has released four DOC Inspection Reports and their FY2025 Annual Report on DOC.¹ The annual report provides summaries of and key findings for each DOC inspection, providing insight both on what has improved in the D.C. Jail like the installation of new toilet sinks and showers in the majority of CTF, to areas that still need improvement, like the termination of contact visits in CTF, mold problems, or the lack of expansion of programming for maximum custody residents. The inspection of CCB found numerous deficiencies, including a cell that had to be

forcibly opened as someone was trapped inside. One particularly important section of CIC's latest annual report shows the status of previous recommendations made by CIC to DOC and whether those recommendations have been adopted, providing a clear progress report on multiple issues.ⁱⁱ

CCE and many of our fellow organizations rely heavily on the information gathered by CIC. On behalf of the Office of the District of Columbia Auditor (ODCA), CCE conducted an audit of conditions at the jail. This report, entitled *Urgent Need for New D.C. Jail*, was published in May 2025, and covered conditions in CDF and CTF during the audit period of July 1, 2023 to June 30, 2024.ⁱⁱⁱ In addition to data from both DOC's official records and other sources, the audit also relied on CIC's inspection reports. These reports enabled CCE to have a clear and comprehensive view on the multiple ongoing conditions, administrative, and programming issues found within the D.C. Jail.

CIC has the power and the explicit oversight duties to inspect correctional facilities where District residents are held, which makes their work uniquely valuable. Their reports would be even more valuable if they could be released more quickly: they often take months to be published, leading to the information being potentially stale and issues being unaddressed longer than necessary. For example, DOC inspections for FY25 Q1 and Q2 were conducted in December 2024 and February 2025, but the reports on them were not released until May 2025.^{iv} Similarly, the DOC Inspection FY25Q4 was conducted in July but not released until mid-November 2025.^v These reports identified dangerous and unhealthy conditions such as moldy showers, flooding, maintenance issues, and other unsafe conditions affecting not only D.C. jail residents but also the staff members who work there. When delays in reporting occur, families are left in the dark regarding the conditions their family member is living in; organizations are unable to advocate for change; this Council cannot hold agencies accountable; and remediation may take longer.

While CIC's budget only allows a limited number of inspections, from those they were able to conduct, it is clear that the DC jail and CCB are both in need of greater oversight. We would recommend CIC conduct bimonthly unannounced inspections of all DOC facilities. An increase in inspections would be able to provide a clearer picture of ongoing issues and what has been done to correct them. Being unannounced would enable CIC inspectors to see the true state that the residents live in without any potential preemptive cleaning, changes, or repairs being completed hastily beforehand to receive a better inspection report. While CCE understands the tremendous amount of time, expertise, and effort these reports take, this information is incredibly time sensitive and important. We strongly urge an increase in the number of unannounced inspections conducted and that all CIC reports be released within one month of the inspection to provide more up to date and relevant data. We hope that Council will consider increasing the CIC budget in the coming year to enable CIC to have the resources necessary to do more frequent and unannounced inspections and to publish reports more quickly.

CIC also produces other resources like the CIC Radar and CIC Bulletin, which are intended to alert people to inspection reports and provide timely insights into CIC's oversight activities. The CIC Bulletin is an incredibly helpful monthly newsletter that includes a message from CIC's executive director, recent reports that have been released, statistics, and community events.^{vi} It is a way that community members can be kept up to date with the happenings of CIC without constantly checking their website. CIC's radar is another way that individuals get current news and information when it comes to important DOC and BOP activities, including important maintenance issues and deaths in DOC and BOP custody.^{vii} While the Bulletin continues to be

emailed to people on the CIC's email list, they have not been posted to the CIC website since February 2025.^{viii} This is particularly problematic since the link on the CIC website where people can sign up for with CIC news and information currently is not functional. And the CIC Radar has not been updated with any news regarding important activity at DOC or BOP since January 26, 2024.^{ix} Along with reporting on inspections in a timelier manner, CCE recommends that CIC ensure both the CIC Radar and CIC Bulletin are published regularly and posted promptly, and the link for concerned citizens to join the mailing list be fixed.

Finally, we would like to see CIC inspect more BOP facilities that house individuals from D.C., understanding that, in practice, access is largely controlled by the federal government, despite CIC's statutory authority. It may be that this Committee could help them secure better access, and certainly organizations like CCE would be willing to assist in stressing the importance of better oversight. CCE would also like to see CIC inspect Northern Neck Regional Jail in Virginia, where D.C. residents under the custody of the U.S. Marshals Service are held, if legally viable. We have heard from multiple sources that conditions and treatment there are poor, yet it is unclear whether CIC has, is planning to, or is permitted to inspect Northern Neck. We understand that currently CIC works under a Memorandum of Agreement with BOP, and we hope that perhaps a memorandum of agreement between CIC and Northern Neck Regional Jail could be created as well, thus leading to increased oversight. When it comes to oversight of the facilities under BOP purview, we are glad that CIC was able to conduct four inspections in CY2025, but we would like to see more BOP facilities inspected.^x CIC reports that in January 2026, over 2,600 people convicted of D.C. Code offenses in Superior Court were held in 15 BOP prisons, with over a third held in facilities over 500 miles away.^{xi} It is our understanding that BOP has gone through different leadership changes, and recent news reports indicating their staffing shortages are so severe they are using mental health providers as prison guards;^{xii} we would hope in their testimony CIC will share what issues they've encountered in getting information and conducting inspections.

As stated above, CCE understands what a large undertaking these inspections and reports are. In this last budget cycle for FY2026, the D.C. Council failed to appropriate the funds needed to fulfill all of CIC's statutory responsibilities by not funding the Agency's portion of the *Corrections Oversight Improvement Omnibus Amendment Act of 2022* (the Act). We hope in their testimony, CIC will share what financial constraints the agency may be under and how it currently limits their work. The passage of the Act was meant to give CIC additional resources and increased authority to carry out its mission effectively. We worry how CIC's mission may have been affected given the lack of appropriations. With such a large and vital mission, it is important to understand CIC's current limitations and what could be achieved with a budget that meets their needs.

In closing, we hope to see CIC well-supported with an expanded budget and authority that can adequately inspect the plethora of facilities where D.C. residents are currently being held. Thank you for your continued interest and concern, and please know we will be happy to assist you and the Council in any way to ensure that CIC is able to fulfill their mission of keeping District residents whom the government chooses to hold safe and well.

ⁱ District of Columbia Corrections Information Council, "Inspection Reports" <https://cic.dc.gov/node/560362>

ⁱⁱ Ibid.

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- iii “Urgent Need for New D.C. Jail,” Office of the D.C. Auditor (ODCA), May 28, 2025, https://cdn.prod.websitefiles.com/659c0df344c9c8325dd821ca/6837197775af1c53f8f34cf0_JailUpdate_Web_v5.pdf
- iv District of Columbia Corrections Information Council, “Department of Corrections, Central Detention Facility, Correctional Treatment Facility, and Central Cell Block Report on Findings and Recommendations.” May 19, 2025 https://cic.dc.gov/sites/default/files/dc/sites/cic/page_content/attachments/CDF%20%20CTF_5.19.25.pdf
- v District of Columbia Corrections Information Council, “Department of Corrections, Central Detention Facility, Correctional Treatment Facility, and Central Cell Block Report on Findings and Recommendations.” November 17, 2025 https://cic.dc.gov/sites/default/files/dc/sites/cic/page_content/attachments/DOC%20CDF%20CTF%20CCB%20FY25Q4.pdf
- vi CIC Bulletin, DC Corrections Informational Council, 2026. <https://cic.dc.gov/page/cic-bulletin>
- vii CIC Radar, DC Corrections Information Council, 2026. <https://cic.dc.gov/page/cic-radar>
- viii CIC Bulletin, DC Corrections Informational Council, 2026.
- ix Ibid.
- x District of Columbia Corrections Information Council, “Annual Report 2025,” <https://heyzine.com/flip-book/f73aa3315e.html#page/7>
- xi District of Columbia Corrections Information Council, “Individuals Incarcerated in the Bureau of Prisons Under the DC Code As of January 6, 2026,” https://cic.dc.gov/sites/default/files/dc/sites/cic/page_content/attachments/Info%20Sheet%201.6.2026.pdf
- xii Beth Schwartzapfel, “Amid ‘Catastrophic’ Shortage, Psychologists Flee Federal Prisons in Drove” The Marshall Project, January 26, 2026. <https://www.themarshallproject.org/2026/01/26/mental-health-federal-prisons-staffing-shortages>