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**Testimony of the Council for Court Excellence
Before the Committee on the Judiciary and Public Safety
of the Council of the District of Columbia**

**Performance Oversight Hearing for the
Department of Corrections**

February 4, 2026

Thank you, Chairperson Pinto, for the opportunity to testify at today's Performance Oversight Hearing on the Department of Corrections (DOC). My name is Katie McConville, and I am providing this testimony in my capacity as the Policy Counsel for the Council for Court Excellence (CCE). CCE is a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization with the mission to bring people together to conduct research, educate, and advocate to make D.C.'s unique legal systems more just, equitable, and accountable to the community. For nearly 40 years, CCE has worked to improve the administration of justice in the courts and related agencies in D.C. 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.

In the summer of 2024, on behalf of the Office of the D.C. Auditor (ODCA), CCE supported an audit of two Department of Corrections (DOC) facilities, the Central Detention Facility (CDF) and Correctional Treatment Facility (CTF), which collectively comprise the D.C. jail; the audit looked at conditions in the jail for a one-year period from July 1, 2023 through June 30, 2024. The May 2025 audit report, *Urgent Need for a New DC Jail*, analyzed official inspection reports and other sources to document unacceptable conditions in the jail and recommend necessary steps to remedy them. It also spoke to the District's plans to build a new facility so that people can be moved out of the dilapidated CDF as soon as possible.

In the seven months since that report was published, many of the issues highlighted remain to be addressed. My testimony today will focus on the physical conditions in the jail that are in urgent need of redress, as well as some of the unhealthy living and working conditions in the jail—both of which underscore the need for a new jail facility.

Poor Physical Conditions. The audit of the D.C. jail highlighted the poor physical conditions in the jail, especially at the 50-year-old CDF building, which is in constant need of repair in both common areas and resident cells. During the audit period there were almost 1,600 Priority One work orders filed on issues that posed immediate risks to health or safety; these included broken and malfunctioning plumbing, wiring, cell doors, locks, keys, and gates.ⁱ Inspection reports noted that multiple areas were often dirty, toilets were overflowing, and there were rodent droppings, standing water, peeling paint and cracked walls.

The most recent Corrections Information Council (CIC) inspection of the jail from July 2025 showed that many of these issues are ongoing. In CIC’s inspection report and DOC’s response, CIC noted:

- Recurring mold in cells;
- Ventilation and temperature issues in multiple units—including a complete lack of air conditioning in at least one unit during July, DC’s hottest month of the year;ⁱⁱ
- Multiple leaks and flooding; and
- Rodent droppings in cells, with at least one housing unit treated at least 15 times between July and October 2025.ⁱⁱⁱ

Since the federal and local law enforcement surge that began in D.C. this past August, the average daily population of the jail has grown by about 10%^{iv}, with an average daily population for the week ending January 23, 2026 of 2,112 residents.^v With the average length of stay for men in the jail being 271 days,^{vi} and a growing jail population, it is crucial that DOC quickly remediate the physical conditions issues that can be addressed—such as plumbing, broken locks, pests, and mold. Recognizing the advanced age and deteriorating condition of the CDF building, the Council should also provide targeted funding for both immediate repairs and long-term capital improvements, making sure to account for the increased jail population and extended length of stay—which exacerbate wear on an already fragile infrastructure.

Unhealthy Living and Working Conditions. The 2025 audit of the jail also revealed several issues creating an unhealthy and unsafe living and working environment at the D.C. jail, including: understaffing, deaths in custody, persistent violence, and poor quality food. Each of these issues will be addressed in turn below; while the audit largely covered FY2024, when available, we note what evidence we have that these issues remain unaddressed.

Understaffing. ODCA’s audit found DOC often experienced both chronic short staffing and significant use of overtime, with DOC reporting “about 15%, 125 funded positions, were vacant” as of June 2024.^{vii} Both understaffing and the subsequent use of overtime impact all aspects of operations in the D.C. jail, including the ability of staff to safely move residents about the facility or respond to safety or health issues. A survey of D.C. jail residents conducted by CGL, DOC’s jail planning contractor, in late 2023 reporting “45% of survey respondents reporting correctional officers are not always available on the unit.”^{viii} In addition, CIC’s most recent inspection of the jail documented issues related to understaffing, including reports that some residents missed recreation time for three months, while others went three or four days without showering.^{ix}

Vacancies and short staffing also are driving the need for DOC staff to work overtime, including double shifts—which “costs D.C. tens of millions of dollars above the baseline staffing costs.”^x Since the publication of the Audit, DOC has continued to face staffing shortages, with \$18 million budgeted for overtime in FY26.^{xi} In light of the increased jail population, we recommend that Council require DOC to provide and make publicly available quarterly reports on vacancy rates, overtime hours, overtime expenditures, and the operational impacts of staffing shortfalls to understand the cost of understaffing on DC’s taxpayers. The Council should direct DOC to assess and publicly report on how understaffing affects core jail operations, including resident movement, access to recreation, showering, programming, and timely responses to medical and safety incidents. We also recommend that resident grievances be incorporated into Council oversight reporting.

Deaths in Custody. Deaths in custody are also occurring due to unsafe conditions in the jail, such as the presence of drugs and contraband.^{xii} There were ten reported deaths of residents in the custody of DOC

during the audit period, during which the rate of overdose-related deaths in the jail was ten times that in U.S. jails overall. There have been six deaths since the beginning of FY2025; while this is fewer than during the audit period, the continued deaths in custody are concerning.^{xiii}

Persistent Violence and Use of Force. Persistent violence and use of force in the jail also creates unsafe conditions for residents and staff. On average there were more than two assaults reported in the jail per day during the audit period: 580 reported assaults involving residents and 211 incidents of assaults involving staff. Almost three-fourths of these occurred in CDF. Just a few days ago, seven jail residents were hurt in a jail stabbing incident, six of which needed to be transported for treatment.^{xiv} While there are many interconnected reasons for the high rate of violence, some that stood out were the design of the jail, with its linear units and poor visibility; understaffing; stress caused by poor conditions; and the ability of residents to weaponize deteriorating pieces of the jail itself.

Moreover, during the audit period there were also 400 documented incidents of staff use of force, most of which occurred in CDF; this averages to more than one reported use of force against a resident per day. Use of force by DOC staff frequently includes pepper spray/mace. Based on other records CCE reviewed, that reported number is likely an undercount. Updated numbers of use of force incidents are not available, and in their FY2025 Performance Accountability Report, DOC reported only the “inmate on inmate--” and “inmate on staff assault rates per 10,000 inmate days”—numbers nearly impossible to contextualize and essentially meaningless to inform effective oversight of violence in the jail.^{xv} Unfortunately, information on violence in the jail is not regularly reported by DOC. With an even larger jail population in recent months, we recommend Council require DOC to publicly report on the number of instances of use of force, as well as the number of instances of fighting/assaults between residents and between residents and staff on a quarterly basis. We also recommend that DOC continue or reestablish its “Violence Reduction Committee,” which was created in July 2020 to review use of force incidents “for root causes, action steps, training, accountability, and behavior/mental health contributors,” but appears to have been disbanded.

Poor Quality Food. In addition, the issue of DOC not providing adequate, healthy, and nutritional food to residents continues to be present. The recent audit revealed food in the jail to be regularly contaminated with rotten or inedible materials, including pests and rodent droppings. In a survey of jail residents conducted by CGL Companies in late 2023, “62% of residents entering the jail ranked food quality as their top concern, and 58% of CTF residents identified food as the greatest issue in their facility.” Residents also reported that DOC does not provide adequate portions, variety, or sufficient fresh fruits and vegetables in its resident meals, forcing residents to resort to commissary to meet their hunger—which is restrictive as residents have limited access based on housing classification and commissary carries high prices.^{xvi}

While the Secure DC legislation was adopted in June 2024, Section 32 of this Act did not take effect because it remains unfunded. This would have improved food services in the D.C. jail by providing nutritional standards for raw fruits, vegetables, and protein; With the contract to provide food services in the jail up for solicitation this year, we urge DOC and Council to hold potential bidders to a higher nutritional standards, such as those required by Section 32 of Secure DC, and to adequately fund it in the FY2027 budget. If the new contract does not incorporate the provisions of Secure DC’s Section 32, we ask that you do not approve the contract.^{xvii}

In closing, we would like to reiterate that, with residents likely to be in CDF for years, it is incumbent upon this Committee, the DOC, and Deputy Mayor of Public Safety to ensure that the current jail facilities are

managed, operated, and overseen in a manner that protects the health, safety, and wellbeing of both jail residents and staff. While planning for a new facility is critical, it does not diminish the District's responsibility to address the serious and ongoing conditions in the existing jail. We urge the Council to ensure that, should the city continue to pursue a private financing structure for a future jail, it does not result in private management or diminished public oversight. Given the tremendous ethical responsibility D.C. has to protect the well-being of those we choose to involuntarily detain, strong accountability and transparency must remain central to any path forward. Thank you.

ⁱ Kathleen Patterson, "Urgent Need for a New D.C. Jail," Office of the District of Columbia Auditor, May 28, 2025, <https://dcauditor.org/report/dc-jail-report-update-report-5-28-25/>.

ⁱⁱ District of Columbia Corrections Information Council, "Department of Corrections Central Detention Facility, Correctional Treatment Facility, and Central Cell Block Report on Findings and Recommendation," November 17, 2025, https://cic.dc.gov/sites/default/files/dc/sites/cic/page_content/attachments/DOC%20CDF%20CTF%20CCB%20FY25Q4.pdf.

ⁱⁱⁱ Thomas Faust, "Corrections Information Council Findings and Recommendations for the Central Detention Facility (CDF), Correctional Treatment Facility (CTF) and Central Cell Block (CCB)," District of Columbia Corrections Information Council, December 30th, 2025, https://cic.dc.gov/sites/default/files/dc/sites/cic/page_content/attachments/DOC%20FINAL%20Response%20to%20CIC%20Inspection%20of%20July23-Final.pdf.

^{iv} Council for Court Excellence, "Data Snapshot: D.C. Jail Population Since Federal Law Enforcement Surge," October 2, 2025, https://cdn.prod.website-files.com/659c0df344c9c8325dd821ca/68de90a38457c43f0f745448_Jail%20Population%20Data%20Snapshot%2010-2-25.pdf.

^v D.C. Department of Corrections, "DC Department of Corrections (DOC) Daily Population Report," January 23, 2025, DOC Official Population Counts by Facility, <https://doc.dc.gov/sites/default/files/dc/sites/doc/publication/attachments/The%20Daily%20Population%20Report%20from%20January%2017th%20through%20January%2023rd%202026.pdf>.

^{vi} D.C. Department of Corrections, "DC Department of Corrections Facts and Figures April 2025," April 2025, <https://doc.dc.gov/sites/default/files/dc/sites/doc/publication/attachments/DC%20Department%20of%20Corrections%20Facts%20and%20Figures%20April%202025.pdf>.

^{vii} Kathleen Patterson, "Urgent Need for a New D.C. Jail," Office of the District of Columbia Auditor, May 28, 2025, <https://dcauditor.org/report/dc-jail-report-update-report-5-28-25/>.

^{viii} Kathleen Patterson, "Urgent Need for a New D.C. Jail," Office of the District of Columbia Auditor, May 28, 2025, <https://dcauditor.org/report/dc-jail-report-update-report-5-28-25/>.

^{ix} Thomas Faust, "Corrections Information Council Findings and Recommendations for the Central Detention Facility (CDF), Correctional Treatment Facility (CTF) and Central Cell Block (CCB)," District of Columbia Corrections Information Council, December 30th, 2025, https://cic.dc.gov/sites/default/files/dc/sites/cic/page_content/attachments/DOC%20FINAL%20Response%20to%20CIC%20Inspection%20of%20July23-Final.pdf.

^x See Kathleen Patterson, "Urgent Need for a New D.C. Jail," Office of the District of Columbia Auditor, May 28, 2025, <https://dcauditor.org/report/dc-jail-report-update-report-5-28-25/>. (noting that "Although DOC made up 1.6% of the total D.C. FY 2024 budget, it comprised 16.5% of all the District's local overtime spending through the first 10 months.").

^{xi} Office of the Chief Financial Officer of the District of Columbia, "FLO, Department of Corrections," 2025, https://cfo.dc.gov/sites/default/files/dc/sites/ocfo/publication/attachments/fl_doc_chapter_2026o.pdf.

^{xii} See Kathleen Patterson, "Urgent Need for a New D.C. Jail," Office of the District of Columbia Auditor, May 28, 2025, <https://dcauditor.org/report/dc-jail-report-update-report-5-28-25/>. (noting that "Although DOC made up 1.6% of the total D.C. FY 2024 budget, it comprised 16.5% of all the District's local overtime spending through the first 10 months.").

^{xiv} Kaitlyn Dillon, "Seven hurt in DC Jail Stabbing: Police." DC News Now, January 25, 2025. <https://www.dcnnewsnow.com/news/local-news/washington-dc/several-hurt-in-dc-jail-stabbing-police/#/>

^{xv} DC Department of Corrections, "Department of Corrections FY 2025 Performance Accountability Report," January 15, 2026, <https://oca.dc.gov/sites/default/files/dc/sites/oca/FY25%20PAR%20-%20DOC.pdf>.

^{xvi} Kathleen Patterson, "Urgent Need for a New D.C. Jail," Office of the District of Columbia Auditor, May 28, 2025, <https://dcauditor.org/report/dc-jail-report-update-report-5-28-25/>.

^{xvii} See Secure DC Omnibus Amendment Act of 2024, DC Law 25-175, § 32, (2024)

<https://code.dccouncil.gov/us/dc/council/laws/25-175> (requiring “a. Two (2) servings of dark green vegetables per day, at least one of which is served raw;

b. Two (2) servings of additional colored vegetables per day, at least one of which is served raw;

c. Two (2) servings of raw fruit per day; and

d. Five (5) ounces of protein-rich foods, including meat, poultry, eggs, fish, nuts, seeds, or tofu, per day.”).