



**Statement of Karl A. Racine  
Attorney General for the District of Columbia**

**Before Councilmember Charles Allen, Chairperson  
Committee on the Judiciary and Public Safety  
and  
Councilmember Anita Bonds, Chairperson of the Committee on Housing and  
Executive Administration**

**Public Oversight Roundtable  
on  
Gun Violence Prevention and Reduction Initiatives in the District  
Thursday, July 29, 2021  
9:30 a.m.**

Good afternoon. My name is Karl A. Racine. I am the Attorney General for the District of Columbia. Thank you, Chairperson Allen, Chairperson Bonds, and Councilmembers, for the invitation to speak with you regarding Gun Violence Prevention and Reduction Initiatives in the District.

Our city is struggling with appalling and gut-wrenching instances of violent crime. In the span of just over a year, we lost 11-year-old Davon McNeal, 15-month-old Carmelo Duncan, and now six-year-old Nyiah Courtney. We saw two shootings on 14th street in its bustling restaurant district and one just outside Nationals Park, with images of diners and baseballs fans running for cover. These images focused the nation's attention on Washington, DC, but we know that violence has long plagued parts of our city that are too often overlooked. We did not hear much about the two young Black men who were killed on Sunday night off North Capitol Street, or about Lou Musgrove, a beloved husband and father who worked as a barber for 15 years at a shop on Georgia Avenue—gunned down on Friday night. My heart goes out to families torn apart by murder, to victims who struggle to heal from bullet injuries, and to those who everyday struggle with the trauma that gun violence brings to our city.

Gun violence is hurting our whole community. No one wants to fear for their children's lives as they go to school or walk down the street or fear a shooting when they break bread at a restaurant with family or friends. As elected leaders, we must do everything we can to stop gun violence, prevent more senseless deaths, and make every part of the District safer. At the Office of the Attorney General, we have been aggressive and innovative in our efforts to combat violent crime. With the support of the Council, we have worked to stop the flow of guns into our city, address the root causes of crime, rehabilitate young people so they do not reoffend, and treat gun violence like the public health crisis that it is. But we must work together to develop a comprehensive and proactive plan to address gun violence and violent crime both right now and in the long-term. Our city needs a clear, consistent, and all-hands-on-deck approach.

Of course, we must hold people accountable when they commit crimes and work to change their behaviors so they are less likely to reoffend. As the prosecutor for most crime committed by young people in the District, I have worked hard to ensure that our response to violent crime holds young people accountable, protects public safety, and addresses the underlying causes of the conduct so the young person does not commit more crime. When we have sufficient evidence that a youth has committed a serious crime, we prosecute that case. Let me tell you a little bit about what that has looked like during the pandemic:

We have continued to prosecute cases at the same rate—even a bit higher—during the pandemic as before it. And focusing on prosecution of violent crime for a moment:

- Of the cases presented to OAG in the first half of this year (January - June 2021), in which the youth was accused of gun possession<sup>1</sup> or a crime of violence, we papered 76% of those cases.

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<sup>1</sup> Gun possession charges include: Carrying a Pistol without a License, Unregistered Possession of a Firearm, Unregistered Possession of Ammunition, Possession of a Large Capacity Feeder, or Illegal Discharge of a Weapon

- Focusing specifically on carjackings: OAG has papered or sought pre-petition custody orders in 79% of the carjacking cases presented to us during in the first half of 2021.

By any measure, what these numbers demonstrate is that OAG papers—formally charges—serious juvenile matters. Where we do not paper them, it is usually because we lack sufficient evidence. And, Chief Contee will tell you that getting sufficient evidence in these cases is not always easy. MPD should be commended for bringing us solid cases at such a high rate. And for all the cases on which we proceed, we work to achieve a resolution that holds the youth accountable while addressing the youth’s rehabilitative needs so he or she does not re-offend, making our community safer.

I also want to note that juvenile delinquency cases are proceeding in the Family Division of DC Superior Court. Juvenile cases are different from adult cases because they do not involve grand juries or trials with juries. A judge is the factfinder in juvenile trials. For that reason, and due to the excellent stewardship of the Court, juvenile cases have been proceeding. The only cases that have been delayed are those in which the youth has exercised his or her right to an in-person trial. And beginning this month, the Court is conducting in-person trials. In fact, two trials have already concluded, a third is going forward, now and a fourth is scheduled to begin next month. Because the Court implemented virtual hearings and now is offering in-person trials, there is not a backlog of pending cases in the juvenile court.

We also must stop shootings and homicides before they happen rather than simply responding to violent crime with prosecution after the fact. We need to be proactive, not reactive. To do this, we must fully invest in community-driven, evidence-based violence interruption programs. We know, based on research and data, that empowering communities to interrupt violence, intervening with those most likely to commit or be victims of violence, and changing norms around violence can have a long-lasting impact. That’s why we launched Cure the Streets in several neighborhoods that have historically experienced some of the highest rates of gun violence. Early data indicates this public health approach to treating violence is working in these neighborhoods.

For example, Cure the Streets began working in Marshall Heights in early 2020, a neighborhood in Ward 7 that has had high rates of gun violence for many years. We have since seen a dramatic reduction in violent gun crimes in that neighborhood: a 39% reduction in the first half of 2021, as compared to the same period last year. MPD has recognized the success of this program and has expressed gratitude to the men and women for the difficult work they are doing to bring about this reduction. We are grateful that the Council took the first step in expanding the program by adding funding for one additional site in its budget vote earlier this month, and I hope we can expand the program further.

Of course, we also need fewer guns on the street. We need federal legislation that closes loopholes, mandates background checks, and helps stop the flow of guns into our city. In the meantime, my office will continue to do what it can, including by addressing the prevalence of illegal ghost guns in the District. We are suing Polymer80, a leading manufacturer of ghost guns in the United States and the company that manufactured most of the ghost guns recovered in DC, for illegally advertising and selling these guns in the District. We have also pushed the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives to use its authority to clamp down on the spread of ghost guns.

Finally, we need to address the root causes of crime in our communities, including poverty, hopelessness, and trauma, to break the cycle of violence. This is a public health crisis as much as it is a public safety crisis. We know there are two Washington, DCs, and our communities east of the river, where most of the gun violence is happening, need investment and support. But too often they are not even part of the conversation. Only when we address the challenges these communities face can we make real progress. We must ensure every District resident has access to housing, a quality education, and affordable health care. We must invest in workforce development programs; create more trauma reduction services; expand programs like those my office already operates to help get kids in school; fund more activities and programs for kids after school and on the weekends; and support vulnerable families so they can help their kids grow into mature, independent adults. Residents of the District deserve to feel safe in their homes, in their neighborhoods, and when they are walking down the street or eating at a restaurant with their families.

Our city is at its best when we work together—across agencies, across communities—without concerns for politics or accolades. We know we can accomplish great things together because we already have. When the global pandemic hit Washington, DC, we came together to stop the spread of the deadly Covid-19 virus, to make our city as safe as possible—to save lives. We worked towards solutions for slowing the spread of the virus and getting our city up and running again. Like our collective response to Covid-19, we must unify in our fight to stop the spread of gun violence.

All of us have a role to play to stop this violence and I will continue to work with the Mayor, Chief Contee, our law enforcement partners, the Council, advocates, and others to marshal resources, ingenuity, and bold ideas to bring about change. I stand ready to help.