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**Testimony of Breanne Palmer
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**Before the Committee on the Judiciary and Public Safety
Council of the District of Columbia**

Public Hearing Regarding Public Safety in the District of Columbia

December 4, 2025

Legal Aid DC¹ submits the following testimony regarding public safety in the District of Columbia – in particular, the ongoing collaboration between the Metropolitan Police Department (MPD) and federal immigration enforcement agencies housed within the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), specifically with Homeland Security Investigations (HSI), Enforcement and Removal Operations (ERO), Customs and Border Protection (CBP), and Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE).² What began as part of the federal government’s 30-day “crime emergency” in DC has become a continuing collaboration under the guise of assisting federal task forces operating without

¹ Legal Aid DC is the oldest and largest general civil legal services program in the District of Columbia. The largest part of our work is comprised of individual representation in housing, domestic violence/family, public benefits, and consumer law. We also work on immigration law matters and help individuals with the collateral consequences of their involvement with the criminal legal system. From the experiences of our clients, we identify opportunities for court and law reform, public policy advocacy, and systemic litigation. For more information, visit www.LegalAidDC.org.

² EO-25-005 Immigration Enforcement, *District of Columbia Metropolitan Police*, https://go.mpdconline.com/GO/EO_25_005.pdf; Bowser Pressed on DC police, immigration enforcement in tense meeting, *The Washington Post* (October 17, 2025) <https://www.washingtonpost.com/dc-md-va/2025/10/17/bowser-mpd-ice-immigration-enforcement/>.

accountability or transparency in the District and surrounding areas.³ Conflicting and contradictory statements from Mayor Bowser, MPD leadership, and DHS spokespeople about the nature, duration, and details of federal immigration collaboration with local law enforcement agencies demonstrate the urgent need for transparency and clarity.⁴

MPD's Collaboration with DHS Agencies Undermines Public Safety

Legal Aid represents and assists District of Columbia residents living in poverty and those living in low-income households, the majority of whom are people of color. Since the federal police takeover in June 2025, our clients not only worry about being unlawfully arrested or detained by DHS agencies like ICE and HSI, but they are also increasingly apprehensive to cooperate with or even call local police because they do not know the extent of MPD's involvement with federal immigration enforcement agencies.⁵

The Constitution and federal law prohibit federal immigration enforcement officers from arresting or detaining an individual without a warrant, absent probable cause and an individualized assessment that the person is a flight risk. In defiance of the law, and to

³ DC leaders oppose patrols with DHS. Are they powerless to stop them?, *The Washington Post* (November 17, 2025), <https://www.washingtonpost.com/dc-md-va/2025/11/17/dc-police-immigration-task-force/>.

⁴ DC leaders oppose patrols with DHS. Are they powerless to stop them?, *The Washington Post* (November 17, 2025), <https://www.washingtonpost.com/dc-md-va/2025/11/17/dc-police-immigration-task-force/>; Advocates raise concerns about immigration stops on DC-area parkways, *NBC Washington* (November 3, 2025) https://www.nbcwashington.com/investigations/advocates-raise-concerns-immigration-stops-dc-area-parkways/4010438/?_osource=SocialFlowTwt_DCBrand.

⁵ Legal Aid DC filed an *amici curiae* brief on behalf of fellow DC legal service organizations in support of the plaintiff's motion for a preliminary injunction in the case of *Jose Escobar Molina v. U.S. Department of Homeland Security*, Case No. 25-cv-3417-BAH (October 29, 2025), before the U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia. In our brief, we detailed the harms DHS has inflicted on both DC residents and the legal service providers who serve them. *Amici* to the case include Legal Aid DC, African Communities Together, Ayuda, Bread for the City, Children's Law Center, DC Affordable Law Firm, and Tzedek DC.

meet daily arrest quotas,⁶ officers from DHS agencies like ICE, ERO, and HSI have violently snatched District residents and visitors from their vehicles, homes, doctor's offices, and schools while collaborating with MPD on patrols.⁷ Community members report joint MPD and ICE patrols and stops, oftentimes where federal law enforcement agents are masked and riding in unmarked cars. Several sources also report that MPD continues to share information with DHS agencies about people who are not yet in MPD custody (e.g., during traffic stops), and to provide transportation for DHS officers and the people they arrest and detain.⁸ However, the Executive Office of the Mayor has refused to fully detail or consistently clarify MPD's ongoing collaboration with federal immigration agencies, which facilitates individual and community harm and destroys any semblance of public trust or actualized public safety in DC.

MPD's collaboration with DHS agencies is making DC less safe by suppressing the reporting of crimes.⁹ One of Legal Aid's core immigration practice areas is assisting survivors of human trafficking or certain other violent crimes with obtaining T- and U-visas. These nonimmigrant visas provide temporary lawful status if the survivor also cooperates with law enforcement. Congress created the T- and U-visa categories to strengthen the ability of law enforcement to detect, investigate, and prosecute human trafficking, domestic violence, sexual assault, and other crimes. However, MPD's collaboration with DHS agencies, which widens the scope and reach of federal immigration enforcement in DC, means immigrant survivors of or even witnesses to crimes are reluctant or entirely unwilling to cooperate with local police. For many, the risk of being exposed to immigration officers or facing dire immigration consequences is too great to seek justice and accountability for themselves or for their fellow community members.

⁶ Judges press Trump administration on deportation quotas, *POLITICO* (July 28, 2025) <https://www.politico.com/news/2025/07/28/judges-trump-administration-deportation-quotas-00480899>.

⁷ See Brief of *Amici Curiae* District of Columbia Legal Services Organizations in Support of Plaintiffs' Motion for a Preliminary Injunction, *Jose Escobar Molina v. U.S. Department of Homeland Security*, Case No. 25-cv-3417-BAH (October 29, 2025).

⁸ EO-25-005 Immigration Enforcement, *District of Columbia Metropolitan Police*, https://go.mpdconline.com/GO/EO_25_005.pdf.

⁹ As ICE increases presence in DC, immigrants say they're scared of calling local police, *The 51st News* (August 29, 2025) <https://51st.news/ice-presence-mpd-fears-dc-takeover/>.

As a stark example, one of our clients is a survivor who was sexually assaulted as a child and previously reported the incident to local police. Despite being able to identify their rapist, our client has stopped cooperating with the police out of fear of immigration enforcement. This harrowing trend undermines the public safety of entire communities, as vulnerable people become increasingly unwilling to report crimes or cooperate with investigations, even when they are survivors themselves. The consistent lack of clarity from the Executive about MPD's collaboration with DHS agencies – and whether MPD is sharing information with those agencies – is exacerbating this growing problem.

MPD's Collaboration with ICE Harms the Entire District

Notably, fear of federal immigration enforcement and, by extension, MPD, is broader than our noncitizen neighbors. Because officers from agencies like ICE and HSI detain and arrest people without making individualized determinations, U.S. citizens and those with lawful status who fit the “profile” of people targeted by immigration officers worry that they will be unlawfully detained on the way to work or to pick up their kids from school. At Legal Aid, we regularly meet clients and applicants for our services who are afraid to report to work, especially if they are in often-targeted industries like construction or hospitality.¹⁰ Several of our clients have reduced their working hours, missed shifts, or quit their employment entirely because they are terrified that they will encounter DHS on their way to work. This loss of income has ripple effects on entire families and communities relying on people who can no longer work at their full capacity, further destabilizing communities that contribute so much to the District's vibrancy.

Additionally, noncitizens, who make up about 16% of DC's workforce and 15% of our economic output, are a critical part of the District's economy. DHS's increased presence – and MPD's collaboration with their various officers – means that a significant portion of District residents are forced to weigh the risks and rewards of going to work, taking their children to school, attending doctor's appointments, or going to places of worship against the high likelihood that they will be stopped by MPD and subsequently arrested and detained by DHS officers. These warrantless arrests do not just scare undocumented immigrants; they create and fortify a culture of fear throughout entire communities, upending their financial, physical, and emotional health. In this way, the

¹⁰ MPD collaboration with ICE has turned traffic stops into a deportation pipeline, *The 51st News* (September 9, 2025) <https://51st.news/dc-police-work-with-ice-traffic-stop-deportation/>.

pattern and practice of warrantless arrests have a direct impact on all District residents' economic stability, which, in turn, directly impacts public safety – or a lack thereof.

Conclusion

MPD's cooperation with DHS agencies undermines public safety in the District, especially because District residents do not know how, and to what extent, MPD and DHS agencies are working together and sharing information. So long as MPD continues to facilitate federal immigration enforcement's unlawful operations in the District, MPD should be held accountable for the spiraling harms that DHS inflicts on some of DC's most vulnerable residents.

We call on the Council to 1) urge MPD to officially end any collaboration or joint operations with DHS and all its underlying agencies, and 2) demand an immediate and full accounting of all information sharing and related practices and activities which occurred during the collaboration. District residents, who make up our client community, deserve to understand exactly when and how MPD supported, facilitated, or cooperated with federal immigration enforcement agents targeting DC communities.