

2022-2023

**OFFICERS**

CHAIR OF THE BOARD

**Marianela Peralta**  
*Aerotek, Inc.*

PRESIDENT

**Patrick McGlone**  
*Ullico Inc.*

IMMEDIATE PAST PRESIDENT

**Irvin B. Nathan**  
*Arnold & Porter LLP (ret.)*

VICE PRESIDENT

**James H. Hulme**  
*ArentFox Schiff LLP*

SECRETARY

**John B. (Jay) Kennedy**  
*The Washington Post*

TREASURER &

FINANCE COMMITTEE CHAIR

**Julia A. Matthews**

**EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE**

**Debra R. Beloff**

*Jones Day*

**Joshua B. Bernstein**

*Bernstein Management  
Company*

**Abigail Blomstrom**

*Monumental Sports*

**Kevin A. Chambers**

*U.S. Department of Justice*

**Paulette E. Chapman**

*Koonz, McKenney, Johnson, &  
DePaolis LLP*

**Eric S. Glover**

**Paul S. Lee**

*Steptoe & Johnson LLP*

**Benjamin J. Razi**

*Covington & Burling LLP*

**Elizabeth A. Scully**

*BakerHostetler*

**Natalie S. Walker**

*Webster & Fredrickson, PLLC*

**Tyrone Walker**

**Tami Weerasingha-Cote**

*Children's Law Center*

**Cynthia G. Wright**

**Joanne L. Zimolzak**

*Dykema Gossett PLLC*

**Lisa B. Zycherman**

*Reporters Committee for  
Freedom of the Press*

NOMINATING COMMITTEE

CHAIR

**Karen E. Evans**

*The Cochran Firm*

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

**Misty C. Thomas**

*Judicial leaders not listed.*

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

**Budget Oversight Hearing for the  
Office of Victim Services and Justice Grants**

*April 13, 2023*

Good afternoon, Chairperson Pinto and members of the Committee. My name is Danielle Burs, and I'm testifying in my role as Senior Policy Counsel for the Council for Court Excellence (CCE). CCE is a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization with a mission to enhance justice for all in the District of Columbia. For over 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. (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.) Thank you for this opportunity to present our organization's views on the Office of Victim Services and Justice Grants (OVSJG) FY24 budget.

We want to begin by thanking Mayor Bowser and the Council for the needed infusion of funding to the Office of Victim Services and Justice Grants in the FY22 and FY23 budgets, including investments in the District's Access to Justice Initiative. Several witnesses today will go into depth about how those funding increases allowed their organizations to meet more of the need for legal services in our communities. Unfortunately, that need existed before the COVID-19 crisis and continues to exist now that federal COVID funding has

ended. Almost \$20 million in a difficult budget year is a big hole to fill. But in deciding where to invest for FY24, we must not undo the progress of the last two years.

The capable and determined leadership and staff of OVSJG have helped change the lives of thousands of D.C. residents for the better through funding direct services for victims in crisis, continuing to support community-based reentry service providers either through direct funding or through the Reentry Action Network (RAN), or funding resources to make District residents aware of the services and options available to them. Two critical and recent CCE projects supported by OVSJG – the D.C. Reentry Action Network (RAN) Support Services, Training, and Education and the D.C. Correctional Facility Stakeholder Engagement continue to help guide work in those areas well beyond when they were funded. And we know that our partners in direct legal services have worked hard to make the most of their OVSJG support as well.

According to the Access to Justice Commission, more than 80% of litigants in housing, domestic violence, family, and public benefits cases are not represented by counsel.<sup>1</sup> As many as 97% of D.C. residents engaged in probate matters, a particularly complicated area of the law, are unrepresented.<sup>2</sup> We know that outcomes in all of these areas are greatly improved when individuals have counsel. For example, legal assistance in 2022 eviction cases from Access to Justice Initiative grantees led to 82% of tenants retaining possession of their unit.<sup>3</sup> The last two years allowed for longstanding, trusted organizations to step up and assist more of our neighbors. In some areas, the need will now be greater. The D.C. Council unanimously passed a new debt-collection law which affords greater rights to consumers.<sup>4</sup> Legal services providers have already

---

<sup>1</sup> “Accessing Justice in D.C.: The Need.” The District of Columbia Access to Justice Commission. Accessed 4/13/2023. <<https://dcaccesstojustice.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/ATJ-Community-Need.pdf>>

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> “Accessing Justice in D.C.: The Initiative’s Impact.” The District of Columbia Access to Justice Commission. Accessed 4/13/2023. <<https://dcaccesstojustice.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/Initiatives-Impact.pdf>>

<sup>4</sup> D.C. Law 24-154

seen a 35% increase in requests for legal help in this area over the past year<sup>5</sup> – a measurable increase in their work that is necessary to support new legislation. Unfortunately, a 60% decrease in funding is heading in the wrong direction.

CCE appreciates its ongoing relationship with and support from OVSJG. Staying true to its mission of working to enhance the District’s justice system to serve the public equitably, CCE urges the Council to fill the gap in funding for FY24. Thank you for your attention today; we are happy to answer any questions you may have.

---

<sup>5</sup> “Accessing Justice in D.C.: The Need.” The District of Columbia Access to Justice Commission. Accessed 4/13/2023. <<https://dcaccesstojustice.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/ATJ-Community-Need.pdf>>