

Executive Summary: D.C.'s Criminal Legal Systems Overview 2022

INTRODUCTION

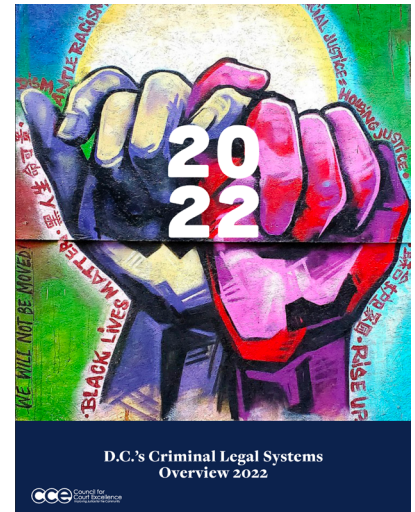
As D.C. began to emerge from the most devastating impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2022, community members and government leaders continued to navigate challenges caused and exacerbated by trauma, isolation, and disruptions over the past three years. The District continued to struggle with disparity in policing and corrections: In 2022, Black D.C. residents were met with police force 13 times the rate of white residents, and eight people died in D.C. Department of Corrections (DOC) custody. District youth also suffered from higher levels of fatal gun violence than in 2021, with 18 youth losing their lives in 2022.

Amid the challenges, D.C. also proved its resilience and resolve, working towards transformative solutions to violence and crime. Community leaders collaborated to provide violence intervention trainings and interruption programs, youth called for increased mental health support for themselves and their peers, and residents and activists voiced the qualities they want to see in a future jail facility.

In this report, the Council for Court Excellence (CCE), supported by Public Welfare Foundation (PWF), presents key updates and data in the following five areas: Violence & Policing; Adult Prosecution & the Courts; Adult Incarceration; Reentry; and Youth Justice. This year's report builds on prior reports [D.C.'s Justice Systems Overview 2021](#), [D.C.'s Justice Systems Overview 2020](#), and [D.C. Justice Systems: An Overview](#), published in 2019. We hope this report provides a glimpse into the District's criminal legal systems in 2022, and that readers finish with a feeling that, despite challenges, the District community exhibited great effort and progress to increase residents' agency over solutions to conflict and violence, address inequity, and center those people most directly impacted by the criminal legal system.

VIOLENCE & POLICING

Incidents of crime overall fell 4% in the District in 2022 compared to 2021, according to the Metropolitan Police Department's (MPD) year-end data, and incidents of violent crime fell 7%. Nevertheless, community concerns about perceived increases in crime continued to dominate public safety discourse — some experts would suggest that this is because of an uptick in crimes involving guns, which increased from 54.3% in 2021 to 58% in 2022. Notably, violence was also perpetrated by the MPD. In 2022, the D.C. Office of Police Complaints released its annual report on MPD's use of force in the District, covering calendar year 2021; it showed the continued trend of MPD officers disproportionately using force against Black residents — more than 90% of all reported use of force incidents were against Black community members.



Artist: Shani Shih, All Power to the People, 2020

The full report, [D.C.'s Criminal Legal Systems Overview 2022](#), is a part of our annual effort to offer data on the impacts of D.C.'s criminal and youth legal systems, as the data becomes available, and to highlight some of the significant developments of the prior year.

ADULT PROSECUTION & THE COURTS

In 2022, the D.C. Council undertook a comprehensive modernization of the District's criminal code, the culmination of a 16-year planning process, representing the first comprehensive revision since 1901. Meanwhile, D.C.'s local courts continued to face high levels of judicial vacancies in 2022, contributing to lengthy delays in court cases. These vacancies were partially addressed by a flurry of confirmations in the U.S. Senate in December. While those new judges reflect meaningful progress in filling the almost 25% vacancy rate in D.C. Superior Court, at least eight vacancies remained at the end of 2022.

ADULT INCARCERATION

Amid sustained criticism about its handling of COVID-19, 2022 ushered in several major policy and leadership changes at the DOC, including a new policy related to housing transgender people. Additionally, D.C. committed to funding a new annex to the current DOC facilities following sustained advocacy by community members and leaders sounding alarms about the need for a safe, humane D.C. correctional facility. Community members continued by weighing in on elements of the design of a new, non-traditional facility.

REENTRY

To enhance current services and establish new opportunities for returning residents, D.C. started long-awaited construction on a men's halfway house in the District, and started planning for a new READY (Resources to Empower and Develop You) Center facility. In December, the D.C. Council passed the "Second Chance Amendment Act of 2021," which updates the criminal record sealing and expungement process and standards in D.C.; it will remove some of the barriers residents with current criminal histories face when trying to secure housing, employment, and training opportunities.

YOUTH JUSTICE

D.C. faced a growing need for educational and mental health supports for children, as well as the rise in public attention to vehicle- and gun-related crimes by and against District youth in 2022. Some academic experts and advocates attributed the increase in youth involvement in gun-related incidents, both as victims — 18 D.C. children and 53 young adults were victims of homicide in 2022 — and as perpetrators, to pandemic-related crises, such as the loss of a caregiver or of a caregiver's job. District leaders, families and advocates continued to support youth education and empowerment by promoting a variety of truancy prevention and work force development programs. Additionally, the D.C. Superior Court recognized the right of youth to have an attorney throughout their incarceration, supervision, and reentry by appointing attorneys for this representation.

For over 75 years, Public Welfare Foundation has supported efforts to advance justice and opportunity. Today, the Foundation's efforts focus on catalyzing a transformative approach to justice that is community-led, restorative, and racially just through investments in criminal justice and youth justice reforms. Learn more at www.publicwelfare.org.

**Public Welfare
Foundation**

The Council for Court Excellence (CCE) is a nonprofit, nonpartisan civic organization. For over 40 years, CCE has worked to enhance the legal system in the District of Columbia to serve the public equitably. CCE identifies and proposes solutions by collaborating with diverse stakeholders to conduct research, advance policy, educate the public, and increase civic engagement. Learn more at www.courtexcellence.org.

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