



CIC | DC Corrections Information Council

Testimony of Michelle Bonner, Executive Director, DC Corrections Information Council, at the Committee on the Judiciary Budget Hearing Monday, April 24, 2017

Good day, Chairman Allen and other members of the Committee on the Judiciary.

I am Michelle Bonner, the Executive Director of the DC Corrections Information Council, commonly known as the "CIC." Board chair Charles Thornton and board members Katharine Huffman and Phylisa Carter join me in thanking you for your continued support.

As you know, the CIC is an independent monitoring body initially established under the 1997 Revitalization Act, with its mandate further expanded and detailed in the DC Jail Improvement Act of 2003. The CIC is mandated to inspect, monitor, and report on the conditions of confinement in the prisons, jails, and halfway houses where DC residents are incarcerated. This includes about 4,900 residents in 116 Federal Bureau of Prisons (BOP) facilities and contract facilities in 34 states and the District of Columbia, as well as over 1,700 residents in the custody of the DC Department of Corrections (DOC).

The CIC is in its second year as a newly independent agency. Thanks are due to the Council, the Mayor, and to the tireless work of many advocates who have never given up on the dream of a fully funded, supported and operational corrections oversight body. For fiscal year 2016, this Committee and Administration agreed to increasing the CIC's budget to \$482,292 to enable the CIC to hire an executive director, two additional program analysts (three total), increasing staff from three to six full-time employees.

In FY 2017, local funds to the CIC is \$497,297, an increase of \$15,005. This increase is attributed to the 3.1 percent cost-of-living increase in personnel funds (\$17,000) and a decrease in of \$2000 in non-personnel services funds.

The CIC is truly grateful for the FY2016 increased budget and the increased staffing capacity has come with it. However, after operating independently for the first time in FY2016 and into FY2017, the CIC realizes that there are still more enhancements that are necessary and essential for effective operations.

Office Space

In the CIC statute it clearly states that, "The Mayor shall provide the CIC with adequate office space that is separate and independent from the Department of Corrections." DC Code § 24-101a (i). The CIC is now in about 600 sq. ft. of space that OSSE is not currently using (and which used to be the storage area for the DC Commission on the Arts & Humanities). Since the move the CIC has increased from 2 FTEs to 6 FTEs, plus up to four student interns, in this very small space. The administrative staff and interns work in the

windowless half of this space, containing up to 5 persons in semesters when at full intern capacity. This space is no longer adequate for the CIC.

In FY2016, DGS identified adequate space that required \$123,200 per year. The CIC estimates that its budget would need to be enhanced by \$95,000 over current space allotment of \$55,000 in FY2018 to \$150,000 (to cover space, moving, build-out, furniture costs), then reduced to price of yearly lease after that (in range of \$123,200).

Note that in FY2018, the current Administration began to list funds for office space in each agency's separate budget, instead of listing this cost in DGS's budget in years' past. The \$55,000 for office space is not an increase to CIC's budget, but, rather, the current cost for office space reflected directly in CIC's budget.

Non-Personal Services (NPS) Budget

The CIC also advocates for an increase in non-personal services funding – not a decrease, as is contained in the proposed budget before you. In FY2016, the CIC's actual NPS expenditures amounted to \$52,000. For FY2017, NPS approved budget is \$46,000; but the CIC is expected to exceed this allocation by the end of the fiscal year. In the proposed FY2018 budget, NPS for the CIC is being reduced to \$43,000. Therefore, for FY2018, the CIC asks that the NPS budget be increased. With increased capacity and duties comes increased cost of doing business. The CIC asks that this be reflected in an increased NPS budget to \$55,000, not including rental of office space or internet/phone costs (\$13,500).

Staff Capacity

With an executive director and three program analysts in FY16 and FY17, the CIC has been very excited by the increased capacity to perform the agency's work. From January 2016 to present, the CIC has:

- Published 14 inspection reports;
- Renewed its MOU with BOP to continue to conduct prison inspections;
- Held two CIC "Pop-Up Think Tanks";
- Held a family engagement writing event;
- Sent over 4000 holiday postcards to DC residents incarcerated in BOP facilities across the country;
- Obtained full capacity on its volunteer board, along with approve to increase board size from 3 to 5, starting next month.

The program analysts are dedicated to inspections, report-writing, data collection and management, assessments of corrections programming and operations, and responding to inmates and their loved ones. Also, unofficially over the years, the CIC has relayed reports of issues of great concern to BOP and DOC in order for agency staff to investigate and take corrective action when necessary. Examples of some of these issues include:

- serious medical concerns (wheelchair access, chronic medical follow-up care);
- language access issues;
- sentence computation/sentencing orders/release date issues;
- visitation issues (experiences of inmates or loved ones visiting);

- facility issues (lack of running water, fumes, HVAC, pests).

Right now, as program analysts convey these issues to me, I may contact the corrections agency officials directly to see if they can follow-up immediately. Both the DOC and BOP have been incredibly responsive to our requests. The CIC has requested an additional FTE to focus more specifically on receiving and responding to individual reports of issues at federal and local correctional facilities, to include working directly with corrections agency officials to continue to address these concerns as they arise. The CIC requires this increased capacity so that it can also let the community know to come to CIC with concerns they have about correctional agencies, so that we can provide increased information to correctional agencies to improve conditions of confinement in real time, not just when the CIC issues a report.

Grants

The CIC has and will continue to apply for grant funding to support special initiatives. For FY2017, the CIC was awarded Byrne-JAG funding in the amount of \$75,000 to cover costs of a data management system (currently being developed by OCTO) and stipend funds for legal fellow/intern assistance throughout the year. The CIC has registered with Grants.gov to be ready to apply for additional federal grant opportunities as they arise. Also, the CIC intends to apply for FY 2018 Byrne JAG funding through the DC Justice Grants Administration next month, should there be available federal funding in the federal government's FY2018 budget. This year, the CIC also intends to apply to private foundations for unrestricted funds to support CIC events. However, grant funds are not guaranteed; therefore, the CIC cannot rely on grant funding for the above-mentioned office and staffing needs.

Again, the CIC is extremely grateful for continued support from this Administration and the Council. The CIC requests increased support so that it can better fulfill its mission to inspect and monitor correctional facilities to improve conditions of confinement and prepare DC incarcerated residents for safe, successful reintegration into the DC community.

Thank you.