



**Testimony submitted on behalf of Miriam's Kitchen  
Before the Budget Oversight Hearing of Committee on Judiciary and Public Safety  
June 16, 2020  
Prepared by Jesse Rabinowitz**

Councilmember Allen and Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony to the Committee on Judiciary and Public Safety. This testimony is submitted on behalf of Miriam's Kitchen, where we have worked for the past 37 years to end homelessness in DC. We write to express our support of the visionary and liberatory work of Black organizers and to urge this Council to defund the Metropolitan Police Department. We know that we have much growing to do to live into our commitment to racial justice and deeply appreciate the many powerful Black led organizations who have made today possible, including but not limited to Black Lives Matter DC, the Stop Police Terror Project, BYP 100, The Fair Budget Coalition and the Black Swan Academy.

We know that it is not a coincidence that Black people disproportionately face harassment and violence from the police, disproportionately die from COVID-19 and disproportionately experience homelessness in DC. We are often quick to say this is the result of broken systems such as housing markets, the criminal legal system, and healthcare failures. In actuality, we know that, due to America's rootedness in racialized capitalism, these systems are actually working just as intended. If we understand America to be founded on the plunder and subjugation of Black and Brown bodies, we clearly see deep connections between chattel slavery, runaway slave patrols, the Jim Crow south and modern-day racialized policing and the prison industrial complex. As Audre Lorde says, "the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house." The movement for Black liberation pushes us to think bigger and to dream more bravely to imagine a new set of tools to keep our whole community safe. To get there, we must discard harmful legacies of White Supremacy that remain in our toolbox.

While policing is certainly not Miriam's Kitchen's area of expertise, DC's budget is well within our wheelhouse. Every year we ask the Mayor and Council to do more to end homelessness. This year, like in many years past (with the notable exception of last year) we are met with a resounding chorus of "DC simply cannot afford to meaningfully address the homelessness crisis." Still, there was a marked increase in both ongoing and capital funding for MPD. And, paradoxically, the Mayor's proposed FY 2021 budget increases funding to the Metropolitan Police Department while cutting urgent programs such as the violence interrupters, homeless street outreach and homeless prevention. If budgets are moral documents that reflect a city's values and priorities, the implication is that increased policing is valued more than funding housing and other basic human needs.

While COVID-19 certainly has impacted DC's budget and finances, it has also shown us that safe and healthy communities are those with access to healthcare, resources, and housing. At Miriam's Kitchen, we stand firmly with Representative Ayanna Pressley who reminds us that "the people closest to the pain should be closest to the power." As such, we write to express our unwavering support for what is now written on 16<sup>th</sup> Street, "Black Lives Matter = Defund the Police." Defunding MPD not only paves the way to a city free of state sanctioned violence, it also makes available much needed funding that can be used to actually keep communities safe, things like repairs to public housing, school based mental health support, fully funding the Office of Neighborhood Safety and Engagement and yes, ending homelessness. We support the platforms from the Fair Budget Coalition, Black Swan Academy, and Black Lives Matter DMV. Specifically, we ask the Council to:

- Divest from the Metropolitan Police Department and reject the proposed \$1.5 million in budget increases
- Invest in community safety and,
- Create police free schools.

Budgets are a major way that the rhetoric of racial equity meets the road of governance. As a white led organization, we aim to lift up the wants and desires of Black and Brown communities, and the demands before this Committee are clear: Defund MPD. Councilmember Allen, I hope you will join me in leveraging your privilege as a white person, as an elected official, and as a leader and take this request to heart and into action.