



**Testimony of
Apartment and Office Building Association of Metropolitan Washington
On
B25-0291, the “Safer Stronger Amendment Act of 2023”
Council of the District of Columbia
The Committee of Judiciary & Public Safety Public Hearing
Tuesday, June 27, 2023**

Good afternoon, Chairwoman Pinto and the members of the Committee on the Judiciary & Public Safety, my name is Eric J. Jones, MSF and I am the VP of Government Affairs, DC – Commercial for the Apartment & Office Building Association of Metropolitan Washington also known as AOBA. Since 1974, AOBA has served as the leading membership organization representing commercial office buildings and multi-family residential real estate in the Washington, D.C. area. In the District, AOBA’s membership represents just shy of 108,000 apartment units and more than 76.6 million square feet of commercial space. I am here today as an advocate, a fourth-generation Washingtonian, and a Ward 4 resident to provide testimony on B25-0479, the “Addressing Crime through Targeted Interventions and Violence Enforcement (ACTIVE) Amendment Act of 2023”.

As I have previously stated, as an organization, AOBA is fully committed to the long-term growth and sustainability of a vibrant commercial and residential community within DC’s downtown core and throughout all 8 wards. This objective not only coincides with Mayor Bowser’s vision as laid out in her previously released Downtown Action Plan, but it also coincides with the many goals and objectives highlighted during last year’s FY2024 Budget process. To achieve these goals, we know that there are a few things that must happen:

1. The city must attract and retain businesses in high-rent areas to ensure that the District’s commercial real estate portfolio continues to provide the taxable income required to operate our city,
2. The District must regain its standing as a preferred location to invest in development (commercial, multifamily, institutional, and mixed-use),
3. The District must continue to expand the current housing stock and provide quality communities for residents throughout the income ladder,

4. Provide quality educational opportunities for District residents, which help to train them for the jobs of now and the future.

The Problem

Since the District started its official transition from the COVID-19 Public Health Emergency last year, the one major issue that has impacted our entire city has been an increase in crime. While MPD figures began to show small decreases in recent weeks, year-over-year crime figures have significantly increased.¹ Moreover, unlike previous years, almost every identifiable neighborhood in the District has seen increases in crime as opposed to previous year-over-year increases, which have typically been concentrated in certain communities.

While the conversations around crime usually focus on residents and how to make them feel safe, rarely does the conversation touch on the direct and indirect impacts of these increases in crime. This includes the loss of local businesses, a reduction in jobs, as well as a decrease in corporate, income, real estate, and sales tax revenue. Additionally, it puts greater downward pressure on the District to provide items such as Emergency Rental Assistance (ERAP), Health Insurance, Housing Vouchers, SNAP Benefits & Unemployment Insurance, etc. Unfortunately, since the beginning of 2022, businesses have left the city in alarming numbers and many of them have noted crime as a contributing factor.² At the same time, DC has seen historical increases in demands for programs such as Emergency Rental Assistance (ERAP), which closed its application process just 10 days into Fiscal Year 2024 because of increased request.³

Additionally, a spring 2022 study by the Urban Institute titled “Economic Costs of Gun Violence in Washington, DC” uses data based on the local market to highlight how our communities are impacted.⁴ Some of the key findings include decreased homeownership rates and property values in the year(s) following an increase in violent crime, with even higher percentages when you focus on gun-related crime, including homicides. Additionally, the study also shows that these crimes have a direct negative impact on retail and business services, including a reduction in the number of retail & business services and the loss of the jobs associated with it. This is doubly troubling when you consider that residents in underserved populations are usually the first to lose benefits when this happens and are also the same people employed in these

¹ Dil, Cuneyt. “Where violent crime has spiked in D.C.” Axios D.C., October 3, 2024.

<https://www.axios.com/local/washington-dc/2023/10/03/dc-crime-by-neighborhood-2023>

² Fox 5 DC Digital Team “Crime concerns in DC prompt restaurant departures” WTTG Washington, DC, January 27, 2023. <https://www.fox5dc.com/news/crime-concerns-in-dc-prompt-restaurant-departures>

³ Cuccia, Annemarie. “Overwhelmed by People Seeking Help, D.C. Cuts Off Rental Assistance After 10 Days.” DCist.com, October 18, 2023 <https://dcist.com/story/23/10/18/dc-rental-assistance-help-erap-housing-rent/>

⁴ Emily Tiry, Arielle Jackson & Paige S. Thompson. “Economic Costs of Gun Violence in Washington, DC” Urban Institute, 2022 <https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/2022-05/Economic%20Costs%20of%20Gun%20Violence%20in%20Washington%20DC.pdf>

industries. Considering that in September of this year, just days after this legislation was introduced, that the city reached 214 murders, which constitutes the first time that the city has reached this number before October in more than 25 years.⁵

The Legislation and Its Impact

As previously stated, this legislation alone is not a magic bullet, that will drastically change our crime stats, but it does help begin to turn the tide. Of particular interest to our members are a few key points within the legislation:

1. **Adjusting the maximum penalties for endangerment with a firearm, and**
2. **Increasing the maximum penalties for individuals firing a large number of bullets at a time** – *while these two items will not directly decrease crime, the knowledge that there are increased penalties may potentially (a) discourage more individuals from committing said crimes (b) make workers and tourist feel that the District is doing more to make the city safe, which could encourage more individuals to return to the city, especially our commercial corridors for both professional and entertainment purposes and (c) potentially help increase revenues and create jobs.*
3. **Create a Prearrest Diversion Task Force charged with developing recommendations for increasing the use of prearrest diversion and implementing those recommendations** – *this proposal, while not completely flushed out, is important because so much of our crime prevention conversation is now focused on violence interrupters or more policing. While we aren't against violence interrupters, we believe that this option allows us to also focus on the fact that so many of our serious and violent crimes are crimes of opportunity, such as robberies and carjackings, which aren't the targets of interpreters. They however are the crimes that have the most significant impact on those deciding to stay away from our great city, move out of the city, or restrict their movement throughout the city. These issues are what leads to companies not reopening their offices, workers staying in the suburbs, and business closures, which all will reduce tax revenues and have a negative impact on the city.*

While nothing outlined above will be possible without additional steps such as additional training and investments in our public safety infrastructure, we believe they are additional tools to consider. Further, we acknowledge that this legislation, like those previously addressed during the 25th legislative session are only part of the potential solution. Creating a clearer criminal code, while providing additional tools for prosecutors to use in gaining convictions, and enacting enhanced protections for the community will contribute to neighbors, both new and old feeling an increased level of safety. These actions in the long term will foster more comradery among neighbors and allow our city to flourish. As such, I thank you for allowing me the time to testify before you today and we at AOBA look forward to our continued partnership(s) as we

⁵ Fernández, Belén. "What's behind the Washington, DC Murder spike?" Al Jazeera, October 8, 2023 <https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2023/10/8/whats-behind-the-washington-dc-murder-spike>

continue to mold the District into a place that garners additional rounds of economic, emotional, and social investment.