



ACCESS TO JUSTICE INITIATIVE - NOTES FOR WITNESSES AND SOCIAL MEDIA TOOLS

Budget Oversight Hearing Context

Budget Oversight allows Council committees to review and make changes to the Mayor's proposed budget for District agencies within their jurisdiction. ATJ Initiative funding flows through the Office of Victim Services and Justice Grants (OVSJG) and by statute, the DC Bar Foundation (DCBF) administers the funds. The Committee on the Judiciary and Public Safety has oversight over OVSJG.

The [Judiciary & Public Safety Committee](#) is chaired by [CM Brooke Pinto \(Ward 2\)](#). Other committee members include the prior Chair, [CM Charles Allen \(Ward 6\)](#), [CM Anita Bonds \(At-Large\)](#), [CM Vince Gray \(Ward 7\)](#), and [CM Christina Henderson \(At-Large\)](#). The Committee Director is Evan Marolf.

The Mayor has proposed a 67% cut to the Initiative – a cut of \$21.211M. The proposed budget is \$10.457M, while our FY24 appropriation was \$31.668M. Our FY25 Initiative budget request is available [HERE](#) and was for \$31.7M (essentially level funding). Through budget oversight, the committee makes recommendations about adjustments (+/-) to the Mayor's proposed budget to the full Council that will then vote on the full, revised FY25 budget on May 29 (1st reading) and June 12 (2nd reading). The Judiciary Committee's 'mark up,' where those recommendations are made will be sometime on May 8 at 3:45 p.m. The Chairman will likely make additional changes after all committee mark ups and before 1st reading.

Goals for the Budget Oversight Hearing

The most important four things you can do during Budget Oversight are:

- 1. Tell the Council how critical its past support has been.** Initiative programs currently funded would simply not exist without the Council's strong support. Last year, the Council saved the Initiative from a 60% cut. Thank Chair Pinto, past Chair Allen, & colleagues for their leadership.
- 2. Describe the important and meaningful work being done through the Initiative and how critical it is to the Council's constituents.** The committee should leave the hearing with an understanding of the breadth and the impact of the services provided to District residents through the Initiative.
- 3. Detail the implications of the Mayor's budget proposal.** What are the practical implications of a 67% cut to your clients, services, and organization? Meeting the Commission's FY25 budget request for level funding is absolutely essential. Otherwise, clients will lose critical services and staffing will be reduced. Even level funding will be insufficient to meet the community need, which is profound and outpaces the capacity of legal services providers to

meet it. Every day, thousands of litigants navigate our local courts and struggle to manage legal issues without a lawyer.

4. Help convey how the Initiative advances the priorities of the Mayor, the Council, and the District community.

Key Messages

This cut will have catastrophic consequences.

- *Almost 40,000 District residents* receive life-changing civil legal services from District non-profits through the program each year
- *Over 200 District agencies and community organizations* like health clinics, schools, libraries, and social services agencies that rely on partnerships with Initiative-funded legal services organizations to help the people they serve

This proposed budget undermines critical community priorities like housing stability, public safety, and economic progress.

- *Housing instability among District residents will certainly grow.* Over 50% of Initiative funding supports eviction-prevention efforts that have been proven to be effective at a time when calls for help among tenants are at crisis level. Over 76% of tenants served through the program remain housed. *Those services cannot continue with this type of budget cut.*
- *District residents and communities will be less safe and less stable.* Reduced funding jeopardizes programs that promote public safety and community resilience, like helping victims of domestic- and gender-based violence, keeping students in school, and combatting recidivism by supporting returning citizens. *The dire consequences of District families not having access to critical legal help will ripple through our neighborhoods.*
- *The District's economic stability will worsen for individuals and across the community.* Services that combat individual's economic risk and inopportunity, address employment-related problems, and help District residents access vital benefit programs may be lost. Failing to invest in this important work will worsen the circumstances of those already in crisis and further burden government systems. *This short-sighted cut will only increase short-and long-term costs to our city.*
- *This cut will increase the vulnerability of thousands of District residents,* like children, elders, individuals with disabilities, the immigrant community, residents East of the Anacostia River, those at economic risk, our Black and brown neighbors, and other populations who will lose access to programs targeted at serving their unique needs. *Failing to invest in this program targets the most vulnerable among our District neighbors, will worsen the circumstances of those already in crisis and further burden government systems.*

High quality, effective programs that work like the Access to Justice Initiative should not be at risk every budget year. This destabilizing trend will cause the District to backslide in our efforts to ensure its residents have the access to civil justice that they deserve in our Nation's capital. *The District should be funding programs that work.*

- *The Access to Justice Initiative works.*
 - The Initiative offers concrete solutions to address community priorities.
 - It helps build stronger neighborhoods where District residents can live, thrive, and maintain a good life for themselves and their families.
 - Legal support leads to a fairer, more accessible justice experience, better individual outcomes, and promotes community equity.
- *The Access to Justice Initiative is a uniquely essential community resource.*
 - There is no other program that offers District residents the opportunity to address such a wide range of problems that often cannot be solved without legal help.
 - Staff at 30+ nonprofit organizations serve DC residents in areas like housing, domestic violence, consumer debt, education, estate planning, family issues, expungement, disability, immigration, public benefits, discrimination, employment and jobs.
- *The Initiative promotes housing stability.*
 - The Initiative helps maintain the District's unique character through a continuum of strategies that keep District neighbors safely and stably housed in their community.
 - These include efforts targeted at preserving intergenerational homes, preventing foreclosure and eviction, and legal help that keeps District residents housed in affordable, healthy, safe, and discrimination-free environments.
- *The Initiative promotes public safety and community resilience.*
 - Left unaddressed, civil legal needs make our community less safe and vulnerable to crisis. Through Initiative interventions, communities are stronger and more resilient.
 - Initiative programs nourish the District's safety net and promote community well-being by addressing family instability, supporting youth, giving voice to survivors of crime, serving returning citizens, and addressing core areas individuals need to thrive.
- *The Initiative promotes economic opportunity for individuals and the community*
 - Initiative programs lessen economic risk and inopportunity for District residents by protecting workers, addressing debt-related legal crises, and promoting financial literacy.
 - Investment in the Initiative not only promotes economic security and community well-being, but also lessens government burdens that would be experienced if these issues remained unaddressed, reduces community health costs, and leverages existing resources.
- *The Initiative helps keep highly qualified, experienced lawyers serving District residents.*
 - The Initiative supports loan repayment for full-time legal services attorneys who offer free legal services to District residents, a key recruitment and retention tool for legal employers.

Day of Testimony Tips

A list of witnesses should be available the day before the scheduled hearing. The Commission will circulate and it should also be posted on the Council Hearing Management System (<https://lms.dccouncil.gov/Hearings/hearings/396>). **We highly encourage witnesses to testify in person.** The meeting will be HYBRID, meaning that some witnesses will testify in person, and some will testify virtually. Typically, witnesses are called in panels throughout the hearing. I suggest starting to monitor the hearing fairly soon after it begins to estimate when you will be called. You may already be in the Council chamber. The witness list also has where the hearing can be viewed, including Chair Pinto's Youtube Page (www.youtube.com/@cmbrookepinto), the DC Council Website (dccouncil.us) (<https://dccouncil.gov/council-videos/>), Council Channel 13 (Cable Television Providers), and the Office of Cable Television Website (entertainment.dc.gov) (<https://entertainment.dc.gov/page/dcc-services-live>). If testifying virtually, I usually log into the Zoom near the end of the panel before the one I am speaking in just so I know that I'm in the meeting without any technical difficulties. You will join as an attendee.

The committee chair will call witnesses in groups. When your name is called, you will either come to the witness table to speak or, if participating virtually, you will be elevated as a panelist by the committee staff and will be visible. Each witness in the group will testify. Please keep an eye on the timer when testifying. If you're representing an organization, you will have 5 minutes to testify, and if you're a public witness, you will have 3 minutes. (Typically, only the first organizational witness has 5 minutes and subsequent witnesses at the same organization have 3 minutes.) TIP: Here is [sample 3 minute testimony](#) and [sample 5 minute testimony](#).

After all panelists have testified, there will be an opportunity for committee members to ask questions. The Chair will be present throughout and other committee members will come and go. Even if they are not present, they and their staff will likely be watching remotely or will watch later.

Once the Q&A is over, the committee chair will dismiss the witnesses. You are then free to leave the chamber or to log out of the Zoom or continue in attendee mode. If you leave but wish to continue to watch the hearing, you can do so via the links above. The committee staff are typically available in the chamber and in the Zoom, so you can chat them if you have questions or technical issues. Ms. Benjamin, the Committee Clerk, is 202-724-8058 or abenjamin@dccouncil.gov.

A reminder that the committee prefers to receive a copy of your written testimony in advance of the hearing. That can also be submitted through the hearing management portal, [HERE](#). Technically, the record closes 14 days after the hearing so if you wish to supplement or amend your testimony, you may do so within that time frame. Chair Pinto has set up a web page for the committee that has a link to log onto the hearing live and a folder with all written testimony submitted. That page is <https://www.brookepintodc.com/judiciary-and-public-safety>. Please share a copy of your written testimony with me at nancy.drane@dcaccesstojustice.org. We like to keep a library of relevant testimony.

Sample Tweets

We encourage you to post tweets on your social channels to raise public awareness about the importance of the Initiative. If using X, tag the D.C. Access to Justice Commission (@DCATJComm) and the DC Bar Foundation (@dcbarfoundation) and use the tagline #dcciviljustice. *Templates and*

contact information can be found below. You may also want to include other relevant hashtags (e.g., #LegalAidHelps, #InvestinJustice, #access2justice, #a2j, #CivilJusticeSolutions, #justice, #justrecovery, etc.) or ones related to a practice area you might want to reference (e.g., #foreclosure, #eviction, etc.) You can also tag OVSJG (@OVSJG_DC), the Mayor (@MayorBowser), the Council (@councilofdc) or individual Committee Members (@CMBrookePinto, @CMCharlesAllen, @AnitaBondsDC, @VinceGrayWard7, @CMCHenderson)

Example One: Proud to testify today @councilofdc about why investing in the Access to Justice Initiative is essential. This is a unique program that works and sets DC apart in its commitment to access to justice #dcciviljustice

Example Two: The Access to Justice Initiative gives District residents legal help to ensure they access the rights they are entitled to #dcciviljustice

Example Three: Good legal services are a right, not a privilege. More DC residents have access to legal help through the Access to Justice Initiative

Example Four: The Access to Justice Initiative promotes housing justice in our city and stops evictions #dcciviljustice

Example Five: The Access to Justice Initiative promotes public safety and community resilience in our city #dcciviljustice

Example Six: The Access to Justice Initiative promotes economic security for individuals and the community #dcciviljustice

Twitter Cards



<https://dcacesstojustice.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/ATJ-Funding-Twitter-5.png>

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THE ACCESS TO JUSTICE INITIATIVE WORKS.

NANCY DRANE
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
DC ACCESS TO JUSTICE COMMISSION




www.dcccesstojustice.org [@DCATJComm](https://twitter.com/DCATJComm)

<https://dcccesstojustice.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/ATJ-Funding-Twitter-6.png>

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THE INITIATIVE'S MULTI-FACETED APPROACH TO ADDRESSING HOUSING INSTABILITY, WHICH INCLUDE EVICTION DIVERSION, EVICTION DEFENSE, AND OTHER HOUSING INTERVENTIONS, **WORKS**.

NANCY DRANE
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
DC ACCESS TO JUSTICE COMMISSION



www.dcccesstojustice.org [@DCATJComm](https://twitter.com/DCATJComm)

<https://dcccesstojustice.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/ATJ-Initiative-Twitter-7.png>

THE ACCESS TO JUSTICE INITIATIVE IS AN ESSENTIAL PART OF THE DISTRICT'S SAFETY NET



www.dcccesstojustice.org [@DCATJComm](https://twitter.com/DCATJComm)

<https://dcccesstojustice.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/ATJ-Funding-Twitter-9.png>