

The Honorable Muriel Bowser, Mayor
Executive Office of the Mayor of District of Columbia
1350 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20004

The Honorable Phil Mendelson, Chairman
Council of the District of Columbia
1350 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20004

Dear Mayor Bowser and Chairman Mendelson:

We are proud of the progress that was made in 2020 to support the needs of the LGBTQ+ community, but we recognize that there is still more work to do. COVID-19 and the ensuing economic recession have exacerbated the structural and institutional obstacles that LGBTQ+ people, especially those who are Black, Brown, and living in poverty, already faced. As the LGBTQ+ community experiences higher rates of poverty and food insecurity than the general population, and LGBTQ+ households – especially those headed by Black and Latinx LGBTQ+ people – continue to be disproportionately harmed by the pandemic, additional relief is necessary to support basic necessities for LGBTQ+ people and their families.

2020 was filled with financial disruption, especially for the District's LGBTQ+ community. Individuals who identify as LGBTQ+ are more likely to experience homelessness and to face discrimination in the workplace and social environments. Many in our community, especially transgender women of color, continue to face extreme hardship because of discrimination, prejudice, and racism.

Although DC, in general, may identify as LGBTQ+ friendly, we all have a great deal of work to do in order to improve the lives of members of the LGBTQ+ community. The pandemic emergency has made life even more difficult in the District because of delays in human services, expectation of cuts to services, and failure of federal leadership during all of 2020.

The LGBTQ+ community has, unfortunately, grown used to death. According to the Human Rights Campaign, at least 44 transgender and gender non-conforming (T/GNC) people were violently killed nationwide in 2020. As we see the violence, the human rights violations, and the failures around COVID care, we are reminded of society's response and the subsequent deaths during all of those early years of the HIV/AIDS epidemic.

As we continue to work to reduce the disproportionate interaction between T/GNC and the criminal legal system, we must also actively address the specific needs of T/GNC returning citizens with culturally competent services.

DC must avoid cuts to human services, and should continue to support the essential missions of agencies such as the Department of Human Services, Department of Aging and Community Living, and Office of Human Rights. In fact, the District should increase funding for social services by increasing taxes on wealthy residents, reinvest funds from MPD, use the \$526 million surplus, and tap into the nearly \$2 billion in potential federal aid.

We look forward to working with you to integrate these requests into the budget and overseeing their implementation. As such, we have included performance metrics with our requests to improve not only outcomes through service but through data, accountability and efficiency to demonstrate that our programs work for the intended audience.

With an opportunity to do vital work to improve the lives of those who live in the District, the following are our budget requests for FY22.

Sincerely,
The DC LGBTQ+ Budget Coalition

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Housing

With the impacts of COVID-19, there is more need than ever for culturally competent housing for LGBTQ+ Washingtonians. Over 40 percent of homeless youth in DC identify as LGBTQ+ and current programs and organizations cannot meet demand. LGBTQ+ seniors on low, moderate, and fixed incomes are priced out of “affordable housing.” Many describe experiencing discrimination at existing housing residences from both staff and other residents. While there are some existing programs and organizations, more housing options specifically for LGBTQ+ folks are needed to meet the needs of the community.

LGBTQ+ Domestic Violence Housing

Enhancement of \$350,000 to Office of Victim Services

Members of the LGBTQ+ community are more likely than the general population to experience domestic/intimate partner violence and face additional barriers to seeking help. This has been documented in numerous nationwide studies,¹ but is also a daily reality for the DC community.

There is currently no dedicated emergency domestic violence safe space or shelter for LGBTQ+ survivors and their children to escape and feel safe. This situation is exacerbated by the existing barriers that organizations with LGBTQ+ competency face when attempting to apply for grants from the Office of Victims Services and Justice Grants (OVSJG). While OVSJG has existing programs that help this issue, they are not sufficient to meet the specific needs of the community.

We therefore request an additional \$350,000 for a safe house specifically for LGBTQ+ survivors and their children, to be managed by an organization that is LGBTQ+ led. This is important to ensure that the safe house staff has the necessary experience and competency to protect and support these families.

A new safe house is also necessary because the location of the existing emergency housing, often in hotels, is already well known in the community, thus making survivors fearful that their abusers will be able to easily locate them and continue the abuse. This modest investment would make a huge difference in the lives of many in the community and their families.

¹ [Intimate Partner Violence and Sexual Abuse Among LGBT People](#)

Low-Barrier Shelter For Transgender/GNC Adult Residents

Enhancement of \$750,000 to Department of Human Services

Decreasing the unhoused population in DC by moving folks into sustainable, permanent housing has been a goal of Mayor Bowser and the DC Council for years. While progress has been made, lack of housing remains a significant issue for the LGBTQ+ community. Specifically, transgender and gender non-conforming (T/GNC) folks face additional barriers to obtaining housing. There are existing programs and funding to support T/GNC youth, but as they age out of these programs, they are often unable to access the support they need. Many T/GNC folks use hormone replacement therapy (HRT) later in their development, which can extend their adolescence. These individuals are just coming into themselves in their mid-late 20s, after they have already aged out of existing programs. They need more support, especially culturally competent housing assistance, to really thrive.

We therefore request an enhancement of \$750,000 to the Department of Human Services to establish a housing program specifically for T/GNC adults who are no longer eligible for existing programs. We recommend these funds be used for grants to multiple organizations and locations across DC to be more accessible to the community. However, we strongly recommend these grants be awarded to LGBTQ+ (and preferably T/GNC) led organizations to ensure program management has the cultural competencies to adequately support the community.

Dedicated LGBTQ+ Older Adults/Senior Housing Vouchers

Enhancement of \$600,000 and delivery of 25 Housing Vouchers at \$2000 per voucher from the Department of Community and Housing Development

Homelessness and housing instability among LGBTQ/SGL (Same Gender Loving) Seniors is increasing in the District as the prospect of affordable housing looms out of the reach of residents with low, moderate, and fixed incomes. An AARP national survey found that respondents living in what they describe as very un-friendly communities were seven times more likely to report recent experiences with housing discrimination due to their LGBT identity (14 percent vs. 2 percent in LGBTQ+-friendly communities). When asked if they are worried about having to hide their LGBTQ+ identity in order to have access to suitable housing options as they age, 34 percent of all LGBTQ+ survey respondents reported being at least somewhat worried, as did half (54 percent) of transgender and gender expansive participants²[1].

LGBTQ+/SGL Elder housing and resource inequities are part of the systemic discrimination that continues to devalue seniors and their lived experiences on a regular basis. People seem to understand the problem of our youth LGBTQ+ homelessness and housing instability. There is a great disparity in research and resources allocated to address the issues of housing instability among LGBTQ+ seniors. There are currently no shelters or transitional housing spaces designed for LGBTQ+ seniors in particular.

In addition, we are cognizant of the rampant issues of abuse and neglect in nursing homes and other senior residences. This issue was illustrated during this pandemic as there has been a disproportionate response to addressing the needs of seniors. Specially, there was an existential and moral conversation around deploying life-saving measures for the aging community. Many LGBTQ+/SGL seniors of color are particularly marginalized and vulnerable within both the LGBTQ+ community and the broader society. Many go back into the closet because it is just too hard to handle growing old and being LGBTQ+ at the same time.

We are requesting a continuation of the vouchers through the Mayor's Office of LGBTQ Affairs. The continuation of vouchers (15) for LGBTQ+ seniors is a welcome respite. However, it is a short-sighted remedy for the many seniors 62 years of age or older who have been in a general shelter for six months, couch-surfing, and/or living in an untenable situation. The good news is that the DCHA voucher covers up to \$2,000 per month or \$24k per year.

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² [Maintaining Dignity: A Survey of LGBT Adults Age 45 and Older \(aarp.org\)](https://www.aarp.org/lgbtq/2019/06/11/maintaining-dignity-survey/)

LGBTQ+ Community Advocates & Coordinators

According to DC Code § 2-1383 b7, which states that the Director of the Office of LGBTQA shall meet with the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning services coordinators within each department and agency of the District government as a group, at least once a month to coordinate activities within the government involving the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning community. The DC Government has several existing permanent positions tasked with supporting the LGBTQ+ community. However, many of these critical roles remain unfilled, endangering members of the community and preventing access to important services. The requests in this section are for funding to realize the benefits of planned, but not yet implemented programs and unfilled positions.

Producing a Report on the Health of the District's LGBTQ+ Communities

Enhancement of \$50,000 to Department of Health

In 2018, the DC Council adopted the LGBTQ+ Health Data Collection Amendment Act “to amend the Department of Health Functions Clarification Act of 2001 to require the Department of Health to collect information on sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression of respondents to the Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System.” We request that the Mayor enhance the budget of DOH and OSSE to fully implement and administer the Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRYSS) and Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System (YRBSS). The data and ensuing report are essential to assessing and promoting the health of all of DC’s communities. It is our belief that DOH and OSSE are able to fulfill the data collection requirements of the LGBTQ+ Health Data Collection Amendment Act within existing programmatic budgets. This request is to ensure that the DOH is appropriately resourced to produce this essential report.

Budget breakdown:

Total: \$50,000

- \$50,000 for ½ FTE to produce a report on the health and wellbeing of DC’s LGBTQ+ community

Re-entry Transgender Advocate and Coordinator

Enhancement of \$150,000 to an appropriate DC agency

Transgender individuals experience higher rates of homelessness and vulnerability in society. Many of them turn to sex work. Although it is meaningful work, it should not be required to survive. People experiencing homelessness and engaging in sex work are more likely to interact with the criminal legal system.

To stop the vicious cycle of survival sex work and predatory policing and incarceration, we would like to work with the city to better intervene in transgender returning citizens' lives to connect them with culturally appropriate services like housing, mental health services, employment or employment resources and training, and healthcare.

The District should engage with the LGBTQ+ community to help reduce recidivism. This position would enable us to combat the established predatory relationship between law enforcement agencies and transgender sex workers, and instead help connect them to necessary resources to lead a full lives as members of the DC community. Our request is for \$150,000 to fund a community-based re-entry program for transgender residents through a transparent procurement process.

LGBTQ+ Veterans Advocate and Coordinator

Enhancement of \$75,000 each to MOVA and MOLGBTQ+ to share an FTE

The proposed position is intended to supplement the current structure of the Mayor's Office of Veterans Affairs (MOVA) with a dedicated LGBTQ+ Veterans Advocate and Coordinator. While the MOVA currently has a community outreach coordinator whose scope of work is supposed to cover women and LGBTQ people, we believe that an additional position is necessary.

The urgent need for services in the LGBTQ+ community and the veteran community highlight the need for a dedicated advocate on their behalf. Veterans are in urgent need of city services, and minority veterans in particular. According to the National Coalition of Homeless Veterans, about 11 percent of the adult homeless population are veterans. Roughly 45 percent of all homeless veterans are African American or Hispanic, despite the fact that they only account for 10.4 percent and 3.4 percent of the U.S. veteran population, respectively. A recent analysis of VA patients found that transgender VA patients have a much higher risk of dying by suicide than cisgender VA patients.

Homeless veterans, on average, are younger than the total veteran population. A disproportionate number of homeless women are veterans. Similarly, LGBTQ+ people are overrepresented in populations experiencing homelessness. The intersectional marginalization of these communities requires a dedicated advocate to address these issues. A coordinator and advocate could help facilitate the application for change in discharge status to help eligible veterans access benefits to which they are entitled, reducing the burden on city funds for these services.

This is the fifth year that this request is before this council. In the past two years the MOVA has failed to hold quarterly LGBTQ+ roundtable meetings, and has only held meetings annually. There is also a lack of data on this particularly vulnerable population of veterans, whose experience in their time of service subjected them to stresses and circumstances that call for special attention.

We recommend that the position be housed in the MOVA, and the new coordinator and advocate work for a portion of time with the Mayor's Office of LGBTQ Affairs. Some LGBTQ+ veterans may feel more welcome in LGBTQ+ spaces and may not be informed of the services available to them at the VA. Creating this position now would take advantage of the Biden Administration's inclusive stance toward LGBTQ+ people in the military by helping to build connections within our community and the Veterans Administration Hospital. President Biden's VA secretary, said, while speaking before the Senate Veterans Affairs Committee, that "he wants all Veterans, including women Veterans, Veterans of color, and LGBTQ Veterans, to feel welcome at VA."

LGBTQ+ Resource & Community Center

Authorization of \$1,000,000 line-item capital expense budget

DC has the highest per-capita LGBTQ+ population of any state, with 8.6 percent of the population identifying as LGBTQ+. The National Capital Region is also the sixth largest metro region in the country. Despite this, the District does not have a sufficient, dedicated LGBTQ+ community center. This problem is exacerbated by the potential sale of the Reeves Center, where The DC Center for the LGBT Community and the Capital Pride Alliance are currently located. Although there are over 10 years remaining on the Reeves Center lease with DC, the Department of General Services (DGS) has not contacted either organization about the potential impacts this sale will have. When the sale is completed, both organizations will need to relocate, and that will likely occur within the next two years. This situation has created an opportunity for multiple LGBTQ+ organizations to co-locate in a shared community center. At present, four organizations have committed to relocating their entire operations into a shared space: The DC Center for the LGBT Community, the Capital Pride Alliance, Casa Ruby, and Rainbow Families.

These organizations provide vital services to Washington's LGBTQ+ community, and a joint community space would offer a single location for the community to access these groups' services. Collectively, this new building would offer space for support groups, food delivery, counseling, events, emergency housing, and many other possibilities for some of the most vulnerable members of our community. Co-locating would also enable these organizations to share knowledge and administrative resources such as accounting, legal, human resources, and event planning thus reducing overhead costs.

Based on the needs of these organizations and the community, this coalition is currently searching for a building with at least 10,000 square feet that includes office space, event space, meeting space, and food preparation facilities. The space needs to be accessible by public transportation and include some parking. After researching spaces in similar cities and available mixed-use real estate in DC, the total cost of this project will be approximately \$5 million. For the 2022 budget, we are requesting a \$1 million earmark in the capital expense budget to assist with the costs of purchasing the land/building, which will be supplemented by grants and fundraising to complete the project.

Supporting LGBTQ+ Visibility & Connections

Authorization to waive an approximate \$400,000 annually of municipal fees to host annual LGBTQ+ Pride events

It is important that in the District of Columbia, the Nation's Capital, where per capita we have one of the largest number of citizens who identify as LGBTQ+ in the United States, that we have adequate funding for government offices and local service organizations. This is critical to provide the much-needed visibility, resources, and support to these citizens, many of whom are the most marginalized in the District of Columbia, especially Trans Women of Color. The Capital Pride Alliance, in partnership with many local non-profit organizations, is responsible for organizing two of the largest events produced annually in Washington, DC, the Capital Pride Parade and the Capital Pride Festival and Concert. These events bring together our intersectional community in one physical space and amplify the rich culture of Washington, DC. As a result, they provide international visibility and tourism for DC, generating an estimated \$50 million of tax revenue annually, in addition to the estimated \$400,000 in municipal fees currently charged annually to the Capital Pride Alliance, the organizing entity on behalf of the LGBTQ+ community of Washington, DC.

Due to the ongoing pandemic, there will not be a traditional Pride celebration this June. With Fall 2021 looking more promising, we have begun to work with the Office of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Questioning Affairs and other government agencies to identify the safest ways to celebrate and bring our community together this October. This celebration would become a new annual tradition that fosters community and builds connections and thus will generate new tax revenue for DC.

Following the pandemic, hopefully in 2022, our intersectional LGBTQ+ community will come together again to celebrate Pride and amplify the rich culture of Washington, DC. The ability to host future Pride celebrations is at risk due to the increasing fees required by government agencies, nearly \$300K annually, and likely a great deal more beginning in 2022. These funds would be better used to serve the most marginalized and underrepresented members of our community. We are requesting a waiver of these fees annually, beginning in 2022 and for each year thereafter. This would mirror actions and levels of support from similar jurisdictions around the country. Some of these municipalities actually go a step further by investing in their LGBTQ+ Pride celebrations, recognizing the positive economic impact that these events bring. It is important to note that these celebrations provide international visibility and tourism for DC, and generate an estimated \$50 million of tax revenue annually.

There is a current effort to have Washington, DC host World Pride in 2025, which would coincide with the 50th Anniversary Celebration of Pride in Washington, DC. This would generate additional tax revenue and visibility for Washington, DC. To have a successful bid, Washington, DC must be able to show that it adequately provides support and resources to the LGBTQ+ community. Waiving municipal fees for the LGBTQ+ Pride Celebration is a critical step to ensure that this major event can continue. The funds saved would help provide the much-needed visibility, resources, and support to organizations that provide direct services to members of the LGBTQ+ community, many of whom are the most marginalized in the District of Columbia, especially Trans Women of Color.

Commitment to Transgender/GNC Workforce

Enhancement of \$500,000 to Department of Human Services for Transgender/GNC Workforce Youth Grant and \$500,000 to expand to ages older than 24

We request an enhancement of \$500,000 to expand the T/GNC workforce grant program for individuals over the age of 24. Employment discrimination for T/GNC and queer people is rampant in the District, which leads to them being forced into sex work to survive.

The same-sex work that many transgender women use to survive while in-between employment keeps them from gaining meaningful legal employment due to prostitution-related misdemeanors and other charges. This creates a vicious cycle that many LGBTQ+ residents find themselves in, especially transgender women of color, where unemployment leads to sex work, which, in turn, only reinforces their unemployment status, and perpetuates a vicious cycle.

Additionally, after many years of surviving through sex work, the transition to legal employment can be challenging and often requires support. While current programs exist to address this need, those programs often have restrictive age limits, thereby leaving much of the community behind. Some of these grants have also been awarded to organizations without the cultural competency or experience with the T/GNC community, limiting their efficacy.

The current program funding has also been unnecessarily delayed and much of the planned expenditures have not occurred. We are therefore requesting funds for a yearly increase to the existing programs and adjustments to the grant criteria to ensure these grants are made in a timely manner to organizations with the necessary competencies (preferably T/GNC led) to be successful.