



**GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
METROPOLITAN POLICE DEPARTMENT**

April 21, 2020

Tristin Brown
Dennis A. Corkery
Marques Banks
Washington Lawyers Committee
700 14th Street, NW, Suite 400
Washington, DC 20005

Dear Ms. Brown, Mr. Corkery, and Mr. Banks:

Thank you for your letter concerning the public health emergency, the resulting stay at home orders, and related enforcement. From the beginning, the goal of Mayor Bowser's declaration of a public health emergency and each subsequent Mayor's Order has been to take measured and appropriate steps to protect the health and safety of everyone in the District.

In support of her goal, the Metropolitan Police Department (MPD) has been focused on obtaining voluntary compliance with the Mayor's Orders. Through a succession of directives to the members,¹ as well as my personal messages to the force, we have emphasized that officers should focus on two issues: social distancing and businesses violating the Orders.

- For individuals, officers are to promote education about the dangers of COVID-19 and the requirements of the Mayor's Orders, in order to get voluntary compliance. When appropriate, officers use the PA systems in their cars to communicate this.
- For businesses, depending on the nature and seriousness of the violation, officers can address immediately by talking to the manager on site, and contact the relevant regulatory agency for follow up.

I invite you to review my April 1st video to MPD members. Around the 2:18 mark, please note where I discuss the need for our officers to use their powers of persuasion to encourage social distancing for the safety of our residents; arrest is only to be used as a very last resort. (MPD Video to the Force: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JPJC4SYLj14&feature=youtu.be>) This has been a successful strategy. MPD has made no arrests – either custodial or non-custodial – for violations of the Mayor's Orders.

I recognize that these are unusual times that have added to the challenges experienced by many in already stressed communities. As always, the men and women of MPD have been working tirelessly on the frontlines to support our communities. We have deployed members of our Special Liaison Branch to communicate with immigrant communities in their native languages about COVID-19, how to improve safety and wellness, and the requirements of the Orders. They have recorded videos in multiple languages, including American Sign Language, to educate the community about the risks and responsibilities related to COVID-19, and what they can do to protect themselves. Three Mandarin speaking officers were detailed to the SLB for four weeks to

¹ https://go.mpdconline.com/GO/EO_20_025.pdf

do immediate outreach in support of our Chinese community to ensure that they feel safe contacting MPD if they are targeted in any hate crimes. Our School Safety Division has been instrumental in serving meals to children out of school. Numerous MPD units have spent time and resources to get food to families in need.

MPD has worked with our criminal justice partners to limit the number of people interacting with the criminal justice system during the emergency. For example, working with the Superior Court and prosecutors, MPD has expanded the use of citation release, which allows eligible people charged with certain crimes to be released after booking and return to court on a later date. This reduces contact with others because they do not have to go to the Central Cell Block, the US Marshals Cell Block, or the DC Superior Court. In addition, the Court, prosecutors, and MPD agreed to suspend service of many misdemeanor bench warrants until after the public health emergency. All of this has contributed to a reduction in daily population at the DC Jail.

Nevertheless, I must also point out that MPD still has a clear duty to protect and serve residents of and visitors to District. Despite the public health warning and stay at home orders, over the past 30 days, homicides are still up when compared to either the prior 30 days, or the same period last year. Over the 4-week period between March 18 and April 14, 2020, there were 30 non-fatal shootings and nine homicides in the District. When people pose a danger to others, they still must be arrested and detained in order to protect the community.

All MPD employees, sworn and civilian, are proud to be working alongside our colleagues in the District government and our communities to keep everyone in the District safe and healthy, and we will continue to do so. We appreciate the efforts of community organizations to support our residents. If you have any further questions, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Peter Newsham", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Peter Newsham
Chief of Police

cc: Muriel Bowser, Mayor
Kevin Donahue, Deputy City Administrator and Deputy Mayor for Public Safety and Justice