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**CONGRESSWOMAN SHEILA JACKSON LEE OF TEXAS**

**RANKING MEMBER OF THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON CRIME AND FEDERAL  
GOVERNMENT SURVEILLANCE**

**STATEMENT FOR THE HEARING  
“VICTIMS OF VIOLENT CRIME IN THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA”**



**OCTOBER 12, 2023**

- Mr. Chairman, I am frustrated. We have been brought together once again to allow Republicans to shake their disapproving, Congressional fingers at another major city in America – supposedly to address surges in violent crime but undoubtedly to criticize Democratic officials.
- While the target today is the District of Columbia – yet another, so-called blue city – I wonder. When will we visit some of the “red” cities that have experienced these same surges in violent crime? When will we visit some of the cities in the red states where the per capita murder rate increased steadily between 2003 and 2020 far exceeding that of blue states?

- My colleagues would have us believe that they are concerned for the safety of the District's residents, visitors, and members of Congress. But where was this concern on January 6<sup>th</sup> of 2021, when rioters stormed the hallowed halls of the United States Capitol and committed countless acts of violence within? Where was the concern for safety in the District when just thirty-five Republicans broke ranks to support legislation that would establish an independent commission to investigate the insurrection?
- Despite my frustration today, I recognize that the District of Columbia has been facing a surge in violent crime, particularly, carjacking, robbery, homicide, and other gun-related offenses – first sparked by the destabilizing effect of the COVID-19 pandemic – like most major cities in America – red and blue.
- This uptick is concerning not only for the residents who call this city home, especially in the areas of the city that bear the brunt of most of the violence, but also for the millions of visitors who come to experience its rich history, culture, and important political institutions.
- That is why I hope we have a genuine discussion today that focuses on solutions and not finger-pointing.
- It is essential that Congress prioritizes the safety and security of those who live, work, and visit the District, by ensuring that the federal government does its part and provides sufficient support.
- The District of Columbia is unique in many ways, and one of them is the complex relationship it shares with the federal government.

- While its status as this nation's capital brings many benefits, it also presents challenges when it comes to governance, particularly within the criminal justice system.
- In combating violent crime, the District of Columbia has taken a multi-faceted approach, that includes passing emergency legislation – supported by the mayor – that filled in gaps in pretrial detention procedure for violent offenders; bolstering law enforcement efforts and recruitment; implementing community policing initiatives; instituting a juvenile curfew in certain hot spots; and enhancing the use of technology, such as CCTV cameras, to combat crime. Additionally, the District has focused on crime prevention strategies, such as increased investment in youth programs, education, and job opportunities for at-risk individuals.
- But the District's response to any type of crime – whether violent or not – can be complicated by overlapping jurisdictions and responsibilities between local and federal law enforcement agencies.
- We know that the federal government's presence in the District, while providing unique opportunities for collaboration, also creates challenges when it comes to coordinating efforts to combat crime effectively. For instance, despite the obvious need for agencies from both governments to work together and share information vital to public safety – like the identity of an individual suspected of committing multiple robberies – communication between the two can be stymied by legal red tape.
- That is why it is crucial for Congress to ensure coordination and communication among the multiple agencies that possess jurisdiction over different areas of the criminal justice system.

- I hope that our witnesses today will offer solutions to establish greater coordination and cooperation between the local and federal law enforcement agencies operating in the District.
- We must also consider the resources required to combat violent crime effectively. Both the local and federal governments must continue to allocate sufficient funding, investment, and resources for law enforcement agencies, crime prevention programs, and community initiatives.
- Helping to strengthen these vital institutions will support the District's ability to address the underlying causes of violent crime and provide the tools necessary to promote safety and security for all.
- I spoke with the U.S. Attorney for the District, Matthew Graves on yesterday in advance of this hearing. I am confident that he is using every tool that he has available to address violent crime, including carjacking and robbery, as well as the flow of illegal guns into the city from states such as Virginia and Georgia.
- He assured me that his office prosecutes 90% of those individuals arrested for the most serious violent offenses, which are homicide, carjacking, rape, and assault with intent to kill.
- He also noted a significant decrease in the number of cases that his office chooses not to prosecute after inheriting a declination rate of nearly 70% from his predecessor – that was driven largely by misdemeanors and drug offenses.
- By stitching federal resources together to account for the loss of the District's crime lab that the US Attorney's Office once relied heavily on, prosecutors were able to bring drug cases

again and move forward on cases that relied on DNA and gun evidence.

- Despite the best efforts of local and federal officials and law enforcement, there is nothing any of them can do about the number of judicial vacancies in the District that slows the overall administration of justice.
- As Democrats continue to offer solution after solution to make all American communities safer, to work together with local officials and law enforcement to prevent crime before it happens; to rid our streets of illegal firearms; to hold offenders accountable; and to address the root causes of violence such as poverty, housing instability, and addiction - Republicans have yet to work with us or offer viable alternatives.
- The surge in violent crime in the District is a problem that calls for a comprehensive, collaborative response. Local and federal officials have taken demonstrable steps to address this issue, but the challenges may necessitate closer coordination.
- By establishing stronger partnerships, sharing information, and investing in effective crime prevention initiatives, we can work towards ensuring that the District is safer and more secure for all residents, members of Congress, government employees, and visitors alike. Let us come together today with the goal of prioritizing the well-being and security of this community.