

**GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
DEPARTMENT OF ENERGY AND ENVIRONMENT**



**Fiscal Year 2025
Performance Oversight Public Hearing**

Testimony of
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Director

Department of Energy
and Environment

Before the Committee
on Transportation and
Environment
Council of the District of Columbia
The Honorable Charles Allen, Chairperson

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John A. Wilson Building



Good morning, Chairperson Allen and members of the Committee on Transportation and the Environment. I am Richard Jackson, Director of the Department of Energy and Environment (DOEE). I am pleased to appear before the Committee today to provide testimony on behalf of Mayor Muriel Bowser on the Department's activities and accomplishments in Fiscal Year 2025 and Fiscal Year 2026 to date.

The Department of Energy and Environment includes dedicated engineers, scientists, inspectors, environmental protection specialists, analysts, administrators, public outreach specialists, and support staff who are working to protect and restore the environment, conserve natural resources, mitigate pollution, promote resiliency, increase access to clean and renewable energy, and secure a sustainable future.

FISCAL YEAR 2025 MAJOR ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Throughout Fiscal Year 2025, and in early FY26, DOEE has advanced Mayor Bowser's vision to make the District of

Columbia the healthiest, greenest, most livable city for all District residents.

Our continued focus on **building a green economy and environmental education supports small and local businesses and provides pathways to the middle class for District residents**. Our Green Trades DC Technical Training Program enrolled and trained an additional 110 residents in FY25, to prepare them for careers as journey-level electricians. Last year DOEE also successfully hosted the first Environmental Education Expo for the Office of the State Superintendent (OSSE) and DC Public Schools (DCPS) faculty and staff. The event promoted DOEE's environmental education programs and fostered new partnerships with educators across the District. With strong attendance and positive feedback, the Expo is poised to become an annual event, with expanded outreach planned for 2026.

FY25 was also the inaugural year of our Energy Administration's Building Science Education Program at Phelps High School. The program served 70 students who were mentored and placed into different teams that contributed to the successful design and

construction of a net-zero energy shelter. The program received overwhelmingly positive reviews from the students, faculty, and staff that participated.

As we move forward in FY26, DOEE is developing programming partnerships with the Department of Youth Rehabilitation Services (DYRS) at their Oasis campus to provide supplemental environmental education to visiting youth, with the goal of expanding DOEE's school-based programming that builds a science workforce development program. We are continuing the strategic partnership with the University of the District of Columbia (UDC) through quarterly leadership meetings. These meetings serve as a platform to align on shared goals and explore collaboration across various topics. This partnership strengthens interagency coordination and supports advancing equitable, community-centered sustainability initiatives.

And sometimes, one of the best ways for us to support small and local businesses is to make sure that as regulators, we do what we can to make compliance with our regulations easier. As an example, in FY25 DOEE modernized the District Pesticide

Applicator Licensing Program by replacing outdated paper exams with a modern digital system to strengthen public health protections and improve efficiency by ensuring faster certification of qualified professionals. Recently, DOEE has also expanded language access to its licensing program by providing these exams in Spanish, so that these operators receive accurate and accessible safety training with fewer barriers.

In FY25 and 26, DOEE has also made important steps in advancing major environmental clean-up efforts. In 2025, DOEE completed the investigation phase of the Anacostia River Sediment Project. This milestone marks one of the most significant environmental achievements in the District’s history, laying the groundwork for long-awaited cleanup actions. By coordinating closely with federal partners, the District has positioned itself to restore one of its most important natural resources. Once cleanup begins, residents across all eight wards will benefit from a healthier river, expanded recreation opportunities, and long-term ecological recovery.

We have also made progress in monitoring and improving the

quality of the air we breathe. In FY25, DOEE continued our partnership with District residents to host small air quality sensors known as “Purple Air” that measure hyper-local particulate matter. Forty-four sensors are in the field and collecting data. Moving into FY26, DOEE will install four new solar-powered community-scale park bench air monitoring stations to monitor black carbon, fine particulates, and ozone in under-monitored neighborhoods in the District. The real-time air quality data will be displayed on a publicly available website. The station locations near a park, two rec centers, and a community center in wards 4, 5, 7, and 8, were chosen by the Air Quality Awareness Board – a group of residents primarily from Wards 4-8 – as well as several air quality experts. We are also moving forward with installing a “Clarity Node Network” to improve air quality data. Partnering with charter schools, local businesses, and DC Public Libraries, DOEE will install 52 multi-pollutant lower-cost sensors known as “Clarity Nodes.” Because these sensors collect data on multiple pollutants, as well as meteorological data, that Purple Air sensors do not collect, DOEE will be better able to use the Clarity Nodes to determine sources of pollution and perform other research. DOEE has partnered with the Harvard Kennedy School,

the African American Mayors Association, and the Environmental Defense Fund to develop a robust placement strategy throughout the District.

DOEE also continues our vital efforts to reduce exposure to other toxins, such as lead. A major focus in FY25 and 26 is implementing the recently adopted federal rules on lead dust. In late 2024, the U.S. EPA finalized more stringent regulations governing lead dust. The new rule reduces the level of lead in dust that is considered hazardous, when found in homes or childcare facilities, to any reportable level measured by an EPA-recognized laboratory. The rule also lowers the level of lead that can remain in dust on floors, windowsills and window troughs after a lead paint abatement occurs. These new levels must be implemented by January 12, 2027. DOEE's Environmental Services Administration is beginning outreach efforts (email, flyers, and webinars) to the regulated community this spring to ensure compliance by the deadline.

In FY25, DOEE also successfully transitioned our Healthy Housing Branch to the DC Health Department's new

Environmental Health Administration. This will enhance DC Health's capabilities and ensure that the epidemiologists and other public health professionals currently at DOEE can work most effectively. DOEE retains responsibility for inspections and enforcement of our District's regulations relating to lead-based paint and lead-safe work practices, issuing lead certification and abatement permits, conducting environmental investigation and lead assessments, working with childcare facilities to ensure lead-free drinking water by implementing a robust filter program, and conducting a lead reduction program to assist eligible households with lead hazard reduction activities.

In a time of rising energy costs, DOEE also supports District residents in **reducing household energy burdens and providing emergency assistance to vulnerable residents**. The Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) approved benefits for approximately 16,000 District residents in FY25, leveraging over \$12 million in Federal Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) block grant funding. Through our Utility Discount Programs, we also supported more than 19,000 income-qualified District residents by identifying them as eligible for

discounts on DC Water, Pepco, and Washington Gas bills.

While both emergency and long-term assistance for vulnerable residents is an essential part of what we do, our agency's work also continues the vital work of **tackling the structural issues that create such high energy costs in the first place.** In 2025 and 2026, DOEE has been working to make energy more affordable for District residents and businesses through our programs and through policy reforms. This includes advancing reforms for third-party energy suppliers to bring down costs for low-income residents. Our work with the Public Service Commission is also oriented toward reducing the cost of natural gas infrastructure by making smarter investments that ensure system safety, and we have been supporting the PJM Governors' Collaborative in effective advocacy for reforms to the management of our regional energy grid.

DOEE's efforts to reduce energy burdens also include our work to **make buildings and energy systems more efficient.** Our building performance programs experienced continued success, with continued improvement in the energy efficiency of the

District's commercial building stock. Over 70% of buildings are on track to reach their energy performance targets by the end of 2026, with more than half already hitting their targets ahead of schedule. Buildings subject to the Building Energy Performance Standards (BEPS) have reduced their energy use by 13% from 2019 to 2024, up from a 9% reduction the year before. Our team has supported these achievements through extensive compliance assistance (responding to over 10,000 inquiries a year and hosting weekly office hours) and conducting site visits to provide hands-on support to building owners and managers.

In 2025, we also worked with the Public Service Commission to begin making improvements to the solar interconnection process by helping reduce uncertainties around interconnection costs and helping people take advantage of federal tax credits before they expired at the end of 2025. That work continues this year, as we collaborate with the Department of Buildings and the Public Service Commission to streamline the permitting and interconnection process for solar, battery storage, and other distributed energy resource technologies to lower the cost of adoption.

DOEE also continues our efforts to **restore the health of our waterways and other natural habitats**. In FY25, DOEE developed an ecological restoration plan for Kingman and Heritage Islands and started implementing the plan by clearing over 35 acres of invasive plants from the islands and planting over 10,000 native trees and 25,000 native plants. Additionally, DOEE completed 60% designs for wetland restoration in Kingman Lake and produced a draft environmental assessment in partnership with the National Park Service. Also, in partnership with NPS and DMPED, we began restoration activities along the riparian forest buffer between RFK Stadium and Kingman Lake; DOEE hosted several trash and invasive plant removal days to prepare the area for restoration.

In FY25, DOEE also reached major milestones to reduce bacteria pollution from point sources. The Agency launched a large-scale “pollution source tracking” strategy to eliminate sources of E. coli from the Broad Branch watershed. DOEE completed Phase 1, including comprehensive monitoring at all outfalls, surface waters, and storm sewer confluences in the 1,100-acre watershed,

as well as targeted sampling, CCTV surveys, and dye testing in suspected areas. DOEE confirmed 7 sources that were subsequently eliminated by the responsible party, and we are still investigating 39 locations in Broad Branch. Next, DOEE will replicate these investigation methods in the Fort Dupont and Fort Chaplin watersheds.

In FY26, as part of a larger effort to improve water quality in the Anacostia River watershed, DOEE will complete the restoration of Stickfoot Branch in southeast DC to restore approximately 1,000 linear feet of this deeply eroded urban stream, in partnership with NPS and DC Water. We are also on track to finalize our State Wildlife Action Plan. The plan identifies current needs and priorities to protect the District's species of greatest conservation need and their habitats and will guide the work of District government as well as that of relevant partners and stakeholders. The updated plan considers plants, for the first time, as species of greatest conservation need.

While we have made great strides in improving water quality in the District, the health of our waterways is impacted by events

outside our borders, and aging infrastructure poses risks that have become all-too apparent in recent weeks. As you know, on January 19 a section of the Potomac Interceptor sewer line collapsed near the Clara Barton Parkway in Montgomery County, Maryland, some four miles from the District border. This incident resulted in a significant quantity of untreated sewage flowing into the Potomac River. DC Water, who operates and maintains the sewer pipe, responded quickly and has put in place measures to contain the spill and repair the pipeline.

DOEE is monitoring impacts from this spill in the District, and will also monitor the long-term impacts to fish, wildlife, and the river. DOEE has been testing water quality weekly; and separate testing is being done by DC Water, as well as the Potomac River Keeper Network in partnership with the University of Maryland. Thus far, while early testing showed elevated levels of bacteria at multiple test sites, and bacteria levels remain very high at the site of the spill, DOEE's testing has shown that E. coli levels have remained below the regulatory threshold for recreational use of the river at all sampling locations in the District since February 2, except for typical increases that occur after significant rainfall.

With support from the US EPA, DOEE is moving to a daily testing schedule so that we can gather more data and better observe any fluctuations in the levels of bacteria in the water. Due to the continued uncertain nature of the spill, and the fact that weather conditions may impact test results, DOEE and DC Health recommend continued precautions and avoiding contact with the Potomac River until these results can be confirmed by longer-term sampling. We want to ensure we are measuring consistently safe results before revising this guidance. As the DC Health Director stated at a press conference last week, if the testing results within the District's portion of the river keep trending downward, we anticipate lifting the health advisory on Monday, March 2.

In the meantime, I want to emphasize what Mayor Bowser, DC Water officials, and our Department of Health have repeatedly said: because the spill happened downstream of the Washington Aqueduct's intakes at Great Falls, the District's drinking water was never impacted by this spill. Our drinking water system is separate from the wastewater system, and DC's water remains safe to drink.

Dozens of local, state, and federal agencies are working collaboratively to monitor the progress of repairs and impacts on the river and downstream communities. As we move forward, DOEE will be at the table to ensure that DC Water’s remediation plan will restore health to the river, the shoreline, and the fish and wildlife habitats that make the Potomac River a treasure for our community and our nation.

We are planning for a healthier, more resilient future for the District in many other ways. In FY25, DOEE completed flood risk maps produced by our Integrated Flood Model to predict where flooding will occur in current and future scenarios for different rainfall amounts, due to interior, coastal, and riverine flooding. With these maps, we can identify DC’s flood risk areas, do more targeted outreach to flood-vulnerable residents, and propose infrastructure in places that we know will reduce flood risk in neighborhoods that need it the most. We plan to release the maps in FY26 and hold public information sessions.

This work—along with work completed in FY25 to update the

District’s heat map—will underpin an update to our climate resilience strategy, Climate Ready DC. The plan update will prepare for extreme weather and natural hazards, including extreme temperatures, flooding, severe storms, wildfires and other extreme weather events. This update will include the most recent data regarding risks and vulnerabilities by geography and will identify critical actions that can reduce risk to residents, infrastructure, and businesses.

In times of rapid change and uncertainty, an under-appreciated role that DOEE provides in our government is to **support innovation and community resilience**, in ways both large and small. In FY25, DOEE’s textile reuse initiative known as ReThread DC conducted four workshops, five swaps, and one informational event, while Fix-It DC held eight community repair events. These events—which build a culture of reuse in place of overconsumption—have become quite popular in the community, so much so that one of our ReThread events was the subject of a *Washington Post* feature.

We also now manage—after a successful program transfer from

UDC in FY25—the US Department of Agriculture’s Specialty Crop Block Grant. This is an annual award of approximately \$243,000 from USDA to the District government, with subgrants that are awarded for three years each to enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops in the District. In addition, in FY26, our small grants programs in urban agriculture and Donation & Reuse will reach community-based organizations to enable innovation and support operations to benefit our residents. In FY25, we also initiated an electric Bunsen burner lending library to allow science teachers and students the opportunity to test out new technologies in support of school electrification. Just as with our households and businesses who may be nervous or skeptical about transitioning away from familiar sources of heat, we’re finding that one of the most effective ways to overcome resistance is to meet people where they are so they can experience what a better future could look like for them.

CONCLUSION

Over the last year and continuing into this year, DOEE faces significant obstacles and challenges that we will have to be

resolute and creative in overcoming. The LIHEAP program was profoundly impacted by the federal government's shutdown at the start of the fiscal year, delaying our ability to assist those residents most in need. Our Train Green program, as well as our Solar for All efforts, were supported in FY25 by the EPA's Greenhouse Gas Reduction Fund until federal support was withdrawn. It's critical for the District, alongside other states and local jurisdictions, to make our case to our federal partners that our success is their success, and that their support is essential to help our economy grow and improve quality of life for us all.

Even with these challenges, DOEE expects to continue leading in innovative stormwater management, increasing our resiliency, conserving and restoring our fisheries and wildlife, cultivating the District's green workforce, and continuing outreach and education to District residents and businesses to create a more sustainable city. We are committed to serving our residents, and we hope to work with Council to best accomplish our mission.

I want to close by thanking and acknowledging again the hundreds of DOEE workers, who I'm privileged to work

alongside. We appreciate the opportunity to share our accomplishments and plans for continuous improvement and look forward to continuing to work with the Committee. I also want to acknowledge and thank the dozens of public witnesses who showed up to testify about our performance last week. I've discussed their concerns and questions with my team, and I'm prepared to address any questions you would like to raise with us, either now or after this hearing. This concludes my testimony. My team and I are happy to address your questions.