GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
Office of the Chief Technology Officer

Fiscal Year 2022 Budget Oversight Hearing

Testimony of
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Before the
Committee on Government Operations
Robert White, Chairman
Council of the District of Columbia

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John A. Wilson Building
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Good afternoon, Chairman White, members of the Committee on Government Operations, staff and members of the public. I am Lindsey Parker, Chief Technology Officer for the DC Government.

I am joined today by the Office of the Chief Technology Officer (OCTO) Chief of Staff Carol Harrison, Deputy Chief of Staff Tehsin Faruk and Agency Fiscal Officer Phil Peng, assigned by the Chief Financial Officer to OCTO, to testify on behalf of Mayor Muriel Bowser's proposed Fiscal Year 2022 Fair Shot Budget and Financial Plan for the agency.

Mayor Bowser has prepared a budget that prioritizes Washington, DC's **recovery**, **equity** and **growth** – an investment that will bring about a true **fair shot** for Washingtonians to build back better from the last unprecedented fifteen months. As Mayor Bowser said, "this budget honors the sacrifices of our residents during Covid-19 by setting our community up for a strong recovery." The Mayor's investments in technology recognize the lessons learned over the past year and the need for the team at OCTO to work alongside our partners – agencies' IT teams, agencies' operations staff and industry – to make the changes necessary to better collaborate internally to better connect to constituents and provide effective service delivery.

Lessons Learned

Interestingly, most of the following lessons learned relate to the changing relationship between IT teams and agency operations teams:

1. **Strategic sourcing works:** Centrally procuring some tech tools, whether those are services or devices, allows for better pricing and gives our industry partners better assurances as they work to rebuild supply chains. Working with CIOs and agency operations teams to better understand device needs early during the pandemic led to over $5 million in savings. The Mayor's budget invests in two additional staff members to help double down on our strategic sourcing successes alongside the IT Investment Review Board, whose recommendations are reflected throughout the budget.

2. **Managing our cyber risk takes all of us working together:** The misconception that only OCTO's 22-member cyber security team is responsible for managing cyber risk for our 100,000+ user enterprise is slowly shrinking. We are all in this together – agency directors are learning more about the fact that they cannot simply say they "aren't technical" and shirk responsibility for using or buying a technology solution that increases our risk of a cyber-attack. As soon as we hop on our computers in the morning, DC Government network users all make decisions that impact how data is used, stored and, therefore, protected. The Mayor's budget makes an $8 million investment in mitigating our cyber risk.

3. **Amazonization expectations of gov tech is real:** Recognizing constituents expect the Amazonization of online government services overnight, despite the security, reliability and accessibility hurdles involved in government tech, is a challenge. There used to be at least a 5-10 year grace period between when consumer technology solutions (which are oftentimes not accessible, secure or reliable) were expected to be picked up by the

government. That lag was sometimes due to resource challenges, outdated regulations and audit practices, and staff training needs – but also because of the additional cycles, including testing, needed to make sure a tool is accessible, secure and reliable so as not to derail trust in government. The Mayor's $4 million investment in our new Digital Services team will help shorten these cycles and build user focused solutions.

4. **Government business processes can use a refresh:** We do a lot of things in life and at work because "we've always done it that way." It's time to review why we do the things we do, in the way we do them. And figure out if we can not only simplify those processes, but as a result simplify things for our constituents, too. This preparation helps get to a great end product faster when an agency is interested in automating a process. And it helps minimize the information we need to collect and save – and, therefore, prioritize what needs to be kept secure. The Mayor's $4 million investment in our new Digital Services team will help agencies re-engineer more effective business processes.

5. **Even the most successful tech companies don't have complete govt tech solutions:** We spoke about this a bit at our hearing on the vaccination app. People and some tech companies assume that it's easy to spin up a custom-developed government application for the public. In truth, there are nuances about the way DC constituents expect government to work – and understanding those nuances and integrating with existing tools to build better solutions is paramount. And this can't be accomplished without a strong partnership with an internal IT team.

The takeaway from these lessons learned? **Government IT shops are needed as best practice brokers.** While it's easy to suggest that an off the shelf solution be procured to automate a straightforward process at the last minute, the truth is government IT teams play a critical role in helping off the shelf, externally developed solutions and even internally built solutions meet and exceed expectations. Agencies that were able to understand this during the pandemic thrived. Other agencies that made some missteps are beginning to understand how they need to work differently – bringing IT to the table early on, not as an afterthought. In fact, we know this because OCTO is seeing a growing number of new project requests and more agencies asking us for guidance.

This growing interest in tech solutions while we recover from the pandemic, has pushed our team at OCTO to think about the way we work – to find ways to do more with less. The strategic plan we built two years ago remains relevant, we will continue to work to meet our mission "to empower DC government through technology by providing valued services, advising agencies, and collaboratively governing IT."

- **Valued services:** The Process Improvement Team that has helped DC Net in the past is now dedicated to driving process improvements and performance metrics for all of OCTO.

- **Advising agencies:** We have realigned OCTO in a way our customers expect us to be organized: (1) a traditional **IT operations** shop, (2) a place to go to find new solutions within our **digital services** arm, and (3) a continued focus on cyber risk mitigation by our **security** team.

- **Governing IT:** We recently published new central IT policies for the first time in more than a decade to provide more thoughtful governance, based on continued discussions with agency CIOs and IT leads.

LOCAL BUDGET

We've essentially had to rethink our budget at least three times over the past year, which is why our local FY22 budget is approximately 2% less than FY21. While there are a number of increases and decreases in our local budget lines – these moves can primarily be attributed to working to transparently align our budget with the reality of operations. The greatest increases in our intra-district funding lines are a result of this quest to make the budget easier to understand – with our annual DCPS and DHCF MOUs reflected in the budget. The greatest decreases are to our contracting lines, as this is truly the only discretionary part of our budget. Other lines are required to pay for the rising costs of the tech solutions we purchase for the city that would require more than a year to unwind and/or find a replacement solution. The new projects we work on in FY22, paid for by agencies or new capital projects, will help ensure that the contractors we rely on can continue helping produce the high-quality solutions and outcomes agencies have come to expect.

FEDERAL INVESTMENTS

The major investments in the OCTO budget are due to the American Rescue Plan Act federal funds. President Biden recently said: "We must find the courage to change the things we know we can change." We know that we have a massive opportunity in front of us to show that these one-time injections of cash can have major returns – as we work to change government service

delivery for the better going forward. These investments align with Mayor's focus on recovery, equity and growth.

Recovery

When it comes to recovery, our focus will be on the resiliency of our critical network services and cyber risk mitigation. This focus builds DC's resilience to both catastrophic shocks and chronic stresses in order to ensure that DC thrives in the face of change. This includes the ability to withstand any natural or man-made challenges, including ransomware, that threaten the globe and our city.

An **$8 million** investment in our cyber security capital project will allow for the replacement of critical network appliances that are end of life and end of support, including three (3) service aggregation routers and 21 provider edge routers that make up the core of our network infrastructure.

Equity

We recognize that decades of structural and institutional racial bias has created persistent racial inequalities across a wide range of indicators of opportunity. Race should no longer be an accurate predictor of wealth, achievement, or health in DC. The Mayor's Fair Shot budget accelerates and makes explicit efforts to eliminate racial disparities. We will continue to build a more inclusive and responsive government that establishes a robust feedback loop between engagement and decision-making to deliver more equitable outcomes for all DC residents.

The COVID-19 pandemic served to further amplify the need to address the digital divide in Washington, DC – for students learning from home, seniors navigating social isolation, residents training and applying for new jobs, families accessing resources and others seeking medical attention remotely.

During the pandemic, Mayor Bowser launched the Tech Together DC initiative, bringing public, private, and nonprofit sectors together to use the momentum of the moment to address the digital divide in the District through increasing access to internet service, increasing access to internet-enabled devices and IT support, demystifying technology through awareness, training and access to opportunities, and increasing technology savviness within DC Government. (More information at techtogether.dc.gov.)

The Mayor's FY22 budget will build on this work, investing **$26.5 million** by expanding device access through providing laptops and tablets to over 38,000 DC households, including seniors, returning citizens, families in TANF and SNAP programs, adults in workforce training programs, and residents experiencing housing insecurity or living in temporary shelters; and providing free support and training for residents to help navigate these new devices.

An additional federal funding pool for infrastructure, including for broadband solutions, is expected in the coming weeks. We will look to that funding pool to invest in an innovative approach to solve for internet access.

Closing the digital divide means an equitable fair shot to opening up access for all residents to previously inaccessible opportunities online including career and education pathways, telehealth options and connections to friends and family. Availability, affordability, and relevance are the top reasons unconnected residents do not have in-home internet or computer devices. For undocumented residents, identification requirements, fears of immigration enforcement and reluctance pose additional barriers. This investment will directly benefit these households by removing those barriers.

Growth

Mayor Bowser launched the DC Digital Services initiative to focus on making government services easier for people to access going forward. In her budget, the Mayor is investing **$5.2 million** in this user-focused approach, bringing subject matter experts, project managers, data scientists, developers and user experience designers together to improve business processes, supporting systems and staff capabilities to lessen the burden on residents and businesses in accessing government services – not just adding more technology. The DC Digital Services team will utilize user centric design methodologies to create easy to use systems and will actively solicit feedback from all stakeholders.

Making government services easier to access and more secure, starting with a business portal, will serve to help our economic engines build back better and grow, including our minority-owned small businesses. This initiative supports the Bowser Administration's long term equitable and good government goals - continuously improving the way DC Government functions and delivers services to residents, businesses and visitors.

Covid-19 is radically accelerating our digital future and I am proud to say that OCTO remains ready to ***unleash what's possible*** for DC Government as we move forward. I'm happy to take any questions at this time.