



**Testimony of Kenyattah A. Robinson, President & CEO  
Mount Vernon Triangle Community Improvement District  
Committee on Business & Economic Development Budget Hearing  
for the Deputy Mayor for Planning and Economic Development (DMPED)  
Monday, April 10, 2023 at 9:00 AM EDT**

Good morning Councilmember McDuffie and members of the committee. My name is Kenyattah Robinson and I'm the President & CEO of the Mount Vernon Triangle Community Improvement District ("MVT CID"), established in 2004 as one of DC's now-11 Business Improvement Districts. I come before you today on our community's behalf to testify in support of the RECOVERY Act in the Fiscal Year 2024 budget, and specifically the Safe Commercial Corridors Grants Program to provide flexible funds to organizations (like MVT CID) that maintain public spaces in commercial corridors, for the purpose of promoting public safety within our commercial district.

Much of Mount Vernon Triangle's success is owed to our perception as a clean, safe, and welcoming vibrant downtown neighborhood. Our stakeholders recognize the inseparable relationship between safety and other leading performance indicators, and consistently reinforce this relationship in their responses to our annual neighborhood perception survey. And as perceptions of safety have increased, so too have perceptions of cleanliness, civic engagement, and community pride—all virtuous benefits worth preserving.

Unfortunately, in recent years we've experienced precipitous drops in perceptions of safety the likes of which we have not experienced in quite some time. After achieving high marks for safety in 2018 and 2019, during which three out of every four – or 74% – perception survey respondents reported feeling "safe" or "very safe," we've seen that number drop to 65% at year-end 2020, 50% at year-end 2021, and 36% at mid-year 2022 before bouncing back to 52% at year-end 2022, reverting perceptions of safety to levels last experienced during the 2016 timeframe.

And while these numbers may seem insignificant, the sentiments underlying them pose considerable risk to our community's ability to attract and retain residents to our still-growing downtown community, with parallel impacts to the District's goal of more people choosing to live downtown. In our latest survey, nearly 30% – 29.9% to be exact – of those who say they will be moving out of the neighborhood in the next two years indicate doing so because they want to feel more physically safe. This is up from 9.6% in our 2019 survey (fielded just before the start of the pandemic), 25% in our 2020 survey (fielded nearly one year after the pandemic began), and 37% in our 2021 survey (fielded late 2020/early 2021). Desires for more space, housing affordability, and greenspace continue to rank as top reasons among those who say they will move from the neighborhood. But for comparison safety – which was the 10th-highest reason people cited in 2019 – skyrocketed to the third-highest reason in both the 2020 and 2022 surveys and the second-highest reason in the 2021 survey.

Increasing numbers of our business owners have reached out to MVT CID in recent months to express their concerns about safety, which we also understand to be a factor for many of our commercial office workers choosing to not return to the office. This is particularly true among those whose trip to and from work includes travel by foot for a portion (i.e., to and from Metrorail) or the entirety of their commute. Specific to Mount Vernon Triangle, nearly 80% of our more than 7,000 residents live within one mile of

their job, and nearly 50% walk to work—all statistics that portend great significance for commercial office space occupancy and retail demand not just in Mount Vernon Triangle, but also in adjacent BID areas such as DowntownDC, Capitol Hill, Golden Triangle, and NoMa.

If funded, MVT CID – in coordination with our public partners and private members – will leverage the Safe Commercial Corridors Grant Program to develop community-driven proposals that are responsive to the hyperlocal needs of our stakeholders, four out of five of whom list public safety as a top-four MVT CID programmatic priority most important to them, and 42% of whom name public safety as the number one programmatic area most in need of our prioritization.

We believe the proposal to be a well-timed acknowledgement of the link between public safety and economic development, and will be vital toward the continued positive transformation of our rapidly growing community. We are sufficiently optimistic that this prudent municipal investment will pay for itself while adding positive impacts to our city's tax base through the form of valuable short- and long-term economic development gains for years to come.

Thank you again for allowing me to testify on this very important budget issue that we deem to be a critical priority for our community and city. We appreciate your consideration of this request and are happy to answer any questions that you may have.