



**Testimony on PR22-0144,
"Chief of the Metropolitan Police Department
Peter Newsham Confirmation Resolution of 2017"**

Before the Committee on Judiciary & Public Safety
March 24, 2017

Good morning, Chairman Allen and committee members. I am Rick Rosendall, immediate past president of the Gay and Lesbian Activists Alliance, which has fought for LGBTQ equality in D.C. since 1971. We will celebrate our 46th anniversary at Policy Restaurant on April 20.

We are pleased to endorse the confirmation of Peter Newsham as Chief of the Metropolitan Police Department. In our experience and that of others who have spoken to us, Chief Newsham has been accessible, responsive, and forthright in his dealings with members of the LGBTQ community.

We welcomed Chief Newsham's announcement last December that he had appointed our friend, the highly respected Sgt. Brett Parson, to serve as an acting lieutenant overseeing the police liaison units, including the LGBT Liaison Unit, which under Brett's previous leadership was an award-winning unit and the first of its kind in the nation. We agreed with the Chief's statement, "The realignment of the Special Liaison Division to the Executive Office of the Chief of Police will only strengthen police-community relations with those that have been historically underserved."¹

The LGBT Liaison Unit in recent years saw an attrition of its core officers and the ending of its midnight shift.² The officers who remained were often redeployed.³ We continue to support the unit's presence in all patrol districts, which does not eliminate the need for a robust core unit with seven officers and a full-time sergeant.

¹ "Brett Parson named manager of police liaison units," Lou Chibbaro Jr., *Washington Blade*, December 21, 2016, <http://tinyurl.com/go5qmb7>

² "Police LGBT liaison unit ends midnight shift," Lou Chibbaro Jr., *Washington Blade*, January 13, 2016, <http://tinyurl.com/z8m2wq9>

³ "Where are Gay and Lesbian Liaison Unit officers? Redeployed." Rick Rosendall, *GLAA Forum*, September 25, 2015, <http://tinyurl.com/jjvhv8ad>



We praise MPD's prompt arrest of a suspect in the recent attack and vandalism at Casa Ruby.⁴ That incident, like murders of transgender people, reminds us that the District's liberal policies do not exempt us from the intolerance that was exacerbated and given license by the hate-filled presidential campaign of Donald Trump.

To those who question intersectionality, we point out that Mr. Trump's choice of a notorious homophobe as his running mate was followed after the election by his choice of a voting rights opponent as his attorney general and a white supremacist as his chief strategist. We continue to defend all of the protected categories in the DC Human Rights Act. We agree with the affirmations by District officials that DC is a sanctuary city.⁵ LGBT refugees and asylum seekers face high risk if they are deported to the oppressive countries from which they fled. As Jackie Reyes of the Mayor's Office of Latino Affairs stated last year, "MPD officers are not ICE agents. They are here to serve and protect the safety of the public. We do not cooperate with ICE."⁶

We commend the recent statements by Mayor Bowser and Chief Newsham in response to the spike in reported hate crimes in 2016, reiterating their commitment to the safety of all in our city's diverse population.⁷

On February 27, the Office of Police Complaints stated: "OPC staff monitored MPD's response to the various inauguration protests held throughout the District of Columbia. OPC staff concluded that MPD's general interaction with the public was positive and professional. However, OPC monitors did observe police activity that raised concerns on how the protests were handled, including MPD officers using force at times on some of the protesters, dispersing OC spray and stingers into the crowd without an order or warning and arresting individuals who were not involved in any rioting or acts of vandalism."⁸

⁴ "Casa Ruby attacker arrested," Lou Chibbaro Jr., *Washington Blade*, March 13, 2017, <http://tinyurl.com/hny3ha8>

⁵ "D.C., other 'sanctuary cities' defiant in the face of Trump's threats," Aaron C. Davis, Peter Jamison and Fenit Nirappil, *The Washington Post*, January 25, 2017, <http://tinyurl.com/hqopwsn>

⁶ "ICE Raids Sow Fear Among Central Americans In The D.C. Area," Armando Trull, *WAMU*, January 8, 2016, <http://tinyurl.com/hq8sqy5>

⁷ "Anti-LGBT hate crimes in D.C. up 59% in 2016," Lou Chibbaro Jr., *Washington Blade*, March 11, 2017, <http://tinyurl.com/z5yfjlw>

⁸ "Police Complaints Board Releases Protest Monitoring Reports on the 2017 Inauguration and Women's March," Office of Police Complaints, February 27, 2017, <http://tinyurl.com/opcinaug17>



We urge the Department to follow the recommendations of the Police Complaints Board, specifically to appoint an independent consultant to investigate the events of January 20, and to review and update the "Standard Operating Procedure for Handling First Amendment Assemblies and Mass Demonstrations" as appropriate. There were echoes on Inauguration Day of the notorious Pershing Park mass arrests in September 2002.

To be sure, when violent anarchists mingle with nonviolent protesters, as appears to have occurred on January 20, police are faced with a volatile and dangerous situation. I remember former chief Charles Ramsey telling me years ago about the Oakland-based Ruckus Society, whose motto was, "Interpose your body in the machine." Needless to say, legitimate protest does not include setting fires, breaking shop windows, or cold-cocking an advocate you find offensive.

We also note that OPC conveyed its impression, during the Women's March on January 21, "that MPD performed in a professional manner and effectively balanced the interests of public safety with the right to free expression."

As I noted in May 2015, "When thousands held a vigil in Meridian Hill Park [on August 14, 2014] in solidarity with the people of Ferguson, Missouri, a few Metropolitan Police Department officers were on hand to ensure order. There was none of the belligerence we have seen in other cities. D.C. has come a long way since the 1991 riot by police against revelers at the High Heel Race on 17th Street Northwest."⁹

Policing is difficult and dangerous work. Respect and cooperation from the community are essential to its success. We were pleased at the nomination of the experienced and level-headed Peter Newsham as the new chief of MPD. He has shown his respect for the diversity and values of the District of Columbia. We look forward to working with him. Thank you.

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⁹ "Rosendall speaks at launch of Communities Against Law Enforcement Misconduct," Richard J. Rosendall, *GLAA Forum*, May 12, 2015, <http://tinyurl.com/rjrcalm15>