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## **DC's Public Safety Agencies: High Overtime Costs, High Leave Use**

*New data brief outlines apparent need for more staff to reduce overtime costs*

**July 22, 2026 (WASHINGTON)** The District of Columbia's public safety agencies spent nearly \$220 million on overtime in the last fiscal year based on staffing numbers that are well under the number needed for the hours of work required, according to a new data brief by the Office of the D.C. Auditor.

The report also found public safety workers took an average of nine weeks of various types of leave last year, rendering them unavailable for duty, increasing the number of staff needed, and contributing to the high overtime costs.

Most acute is the situation at the District's Department of Corrections where there is a two and a half to one gap between the number of staff needed to fill all 24/7 operational posts (1,762) and the number now employed (704).

At the Office of Unified Communications in Fiscal Year 2025 dispatchers were unavailable for duty an average of 11 weeks while on a variety of leave statuses, including an average of one work week "away without leave." And while the drop in the number of Metropolitan Police Department (MPD) officers was debated in the recent election, officers last year took an average of eight weeks of leave while firefighters took leave on average between eight and 11 weeks, periods of time they were not available for duty.

"Our emergency call takers, police officers, firefighters, and corrections guards do critically important work for District residents," said D.C. Auditor Kathy Patterson. "We need a better understanding of what the staffing should actually be in these agencies as well as better management of leave use to bring down the high costs of overtime. That may well include more attention to worker healthcare needs – whatever is driving the numbers unavailable for duty."

Instead of filling positions, hiring the correct number of employees to work the hours required and better managing leave and deployment, District agencies appear to be paying exorbitant amounts of overtime to a smaller number of existing employees.

The data brief does not make formal recommendations but does suggest that the Office of the City Administrator and Department of Human Resources direct closer oversight and interagency collaboration on the best means of identifying and addressing the factors driving leave use to better align policy and practice with public need and shrinking budgets.

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