

Testimony of
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Thank you for this opportunity to testify on an issue that affects everyone who lives, works, worships, pursues entertainment, or otherwise visits in the District.

My name is Virginia Spatz. For more than 30 years, my husband and I have lived in Ward 6, in what has become Hill East, where we raised two children, now adults and living away from DC. The four of us are white.

In addition to living in the First and Fifth Police Districts, I have worked, worshipped, and/or protested in every DC police district -- including the Second, around the White House, and the Seventh, east of the river. These details matter because my family's skin-color has had an enormous impact on our interactions with police over the decades. So has the Police District of our surroundings.

FIRST AND FIFTH

When I first moved to DC, in 1988, I lived briefly on the campus of Gallaudet University. My not-yet-husband and I then moved together to an apartment near Eastern High School and to two other apartments in the area before buying a house in 1994. We originally lived in the Fifth District and then the First -- for a time the same address was Fifth District and then the borders shifted.

At that time, gun violence was at a historic high for the city as a whole. Many people I knew who lived in the First District, Black and white, were active in PSA meetings -- before electronic communications were common, folks had to show up at the meetings or otherwise engage in person -- walked with Orange Hats, and tried other forms of community engagement and community-involved policing. These opportunities were either lacking entirely or hidden so well as to be effectively non-existent in the Fifth District.

I participated in 1D activities, like walking with the Orange Hats, while living in 5D: The 1D officer who walked the Orange Hats, and generally saw folks back to their homes at the end of the evening, would have to radio into 5D before crossing Massachusetts to walk me back to my apartment, so as not to interfere with any on-going operations. That was a simple and sensible precaution, of course, but it also underlined the difference in attitude toward the neighborhoods between the two districts:

Broadly summarizing my different experiences back when I first lived here:

- **First District folks** (where white people were far more common), at least the white people and Black people who were active in community policing, were treated as clients -- I think they used to say "patrons" -- to be satisfied;
- **Fifth District folks** (which was overwhelmingly Black) were treated as potential, likely inevitable, victims of crime and/or potential dangers in themselves.

SECOND AND SEVENTH

Much later, but back when Cathy Lanier was still Chief, during Black Lives Matter protests (probably 2015), it happened that I was in the Seventh District for a BLM march one night, while friends were protesting in Northwest:

- **7D, officers RODE MOTORCYCLES INTO** the crowd of marchers -- not hitting anyone, but definitely moving beyond declaring their visibility or throwing around their weight;
- **In NW, police protected protesters** -- this was Lafayette Park and environs, involving both Park Police and MPD), and all was copacetic, even cheerful, I later learned.

OTHER DISTRICTS AND DIFFERENCES

- In the neighborhood, in their 20 years or so in what was primarily 1D, our children were never stopped or even spoken to by police unless they were walking with Black friends.
- In three years (2006-2009) at the soon to be renamed Ward 3 high school, one child saw students of color inside the school subject to all kinds of suspicion and violent treatment, which was rarely visited upon white students; outside, officers worked very hard to ensure that Black students -- assumed to be from outside Ward 3 -- moved along home at dismissal, while white students were told not to block the sidewalk but expected to mill about and enjoy freedom.
- In high school, one spent two years at School Without Walls (2007-2009) housed temporarily near Union Station and two years (2009-2011) at Walls in the new building on the GW campus, reporting vastly different treatment in Northeast and Northwest.
- In both locations, Walls was then -- maybe still is -- the only DCPS high school without metal-detectors and searches at the entrance, making for a VASTLY different experience than friends (and a sibling) at other schools.

Then and Now: A DEADLY DIFFERENCE?

Many years ago, probably 1994, we had just moved into our new home, on the edge of 1D and 5D. Shortly after moving in, our home was broken into. I did call 911 when I came home to find mayhem. But there was some -- very temporary as it turned out -- fiasco with 911, so that it was taking over an hour for calls to even reach dispatch. When officers finally showed up, I was told there was nothing that could be done except filing a report for insurance purposes, laughed at for asking if there was any chance of retrieving any items that were precious to us, and generally treated as an idiot who got what was coming: What could you expect moving into a neighborhood where crime was so rife?

Flash forward 25 years: Same house; vastly changed neighborhood. I had Black-skinned guests who were going in and out of our front door for several reasons, and one visitor paused to sit on our stoop. Next thing I know there is pounding on the front door and shouts of "Police!"

It turned out that a neighbor -- someone who has known us for decades, a Black man, as it happens, who might have been disgruntled with my guests or perhaps honestly believed I was in trouble -- had called police upon seeing strangers in our yard and our door ajar. Given that my guests were only with me a short time before police showed up, officers must have been dispatched instantly....

...I remember being very grateful that the sight lines were such that the Black man in my dining room was not visible from the door. I suggested he stay at the table out of sight and went to meet the officers. If I'd been wearing body camera, you would definitely see footage of police officers visibly relaxing when I appeared; if we had a Star Trek tri-corder, you would have a record of blood pressure and other measures of adrenalin dropping....

I still have momentary panic-attacks envisioning what might have happened had officers, who must have been told this was a dire emergency, and were standing in bright sunlight, seen my guest at the end of our dim hallway.

My own experiences and much research suggest that effective police reform must address structural inequities across neighborhoods and demographics -- including age, skin color, gender, and other factors -- and reduce overall police encounters. Otherwise we are just tinkering with dimensions of a few bonfires, while the city burns; describing the fire, but not attempting to put it out.

I join with DC Justice Lab and others in calling for an end to jump outs -- by any name. I urge you to adopt DC Justice Lab proposals to limit search warrants, refine the Miranda doctrine especially as regards children, and eliminate consent searches, as well as reform of other systems that disproportionately impact some communities, bringing regular trauma and risk of physical injury, even death, to some while leaving others largely unscathed. I urge passage of these reforms, separate from this bill, if necessary to speed change.

Legislation must address accountability for officers and for those in command.

We must look beyond weaponry to prohibit para-military training and dismantle any unit or procedure -- including Gun Recovery and surveillance -- which disproportionately terrorizes some groups, without even reducing the homicide rate or otherwise improving District safety.

Demilitarizing weaponry and behavior is also key in protecting First Amendment rights and reducing trauma and injury, for locals and for visitors.

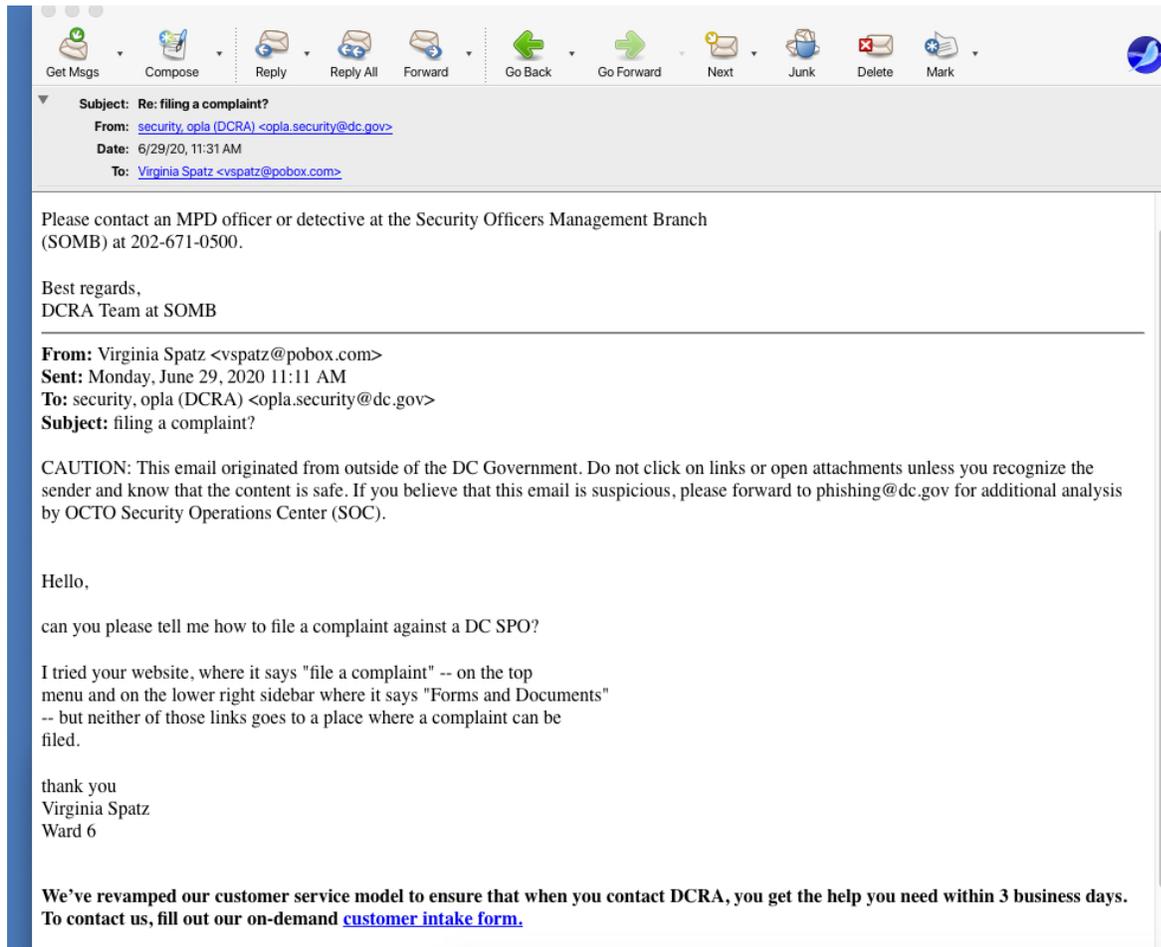
Finally, we need to disarm special police, and it is crucial to address the current dysfunction which makes filing a complaint against a special police officer nearly impossible.

What follows is an explanation of the current complaint-filing situation:

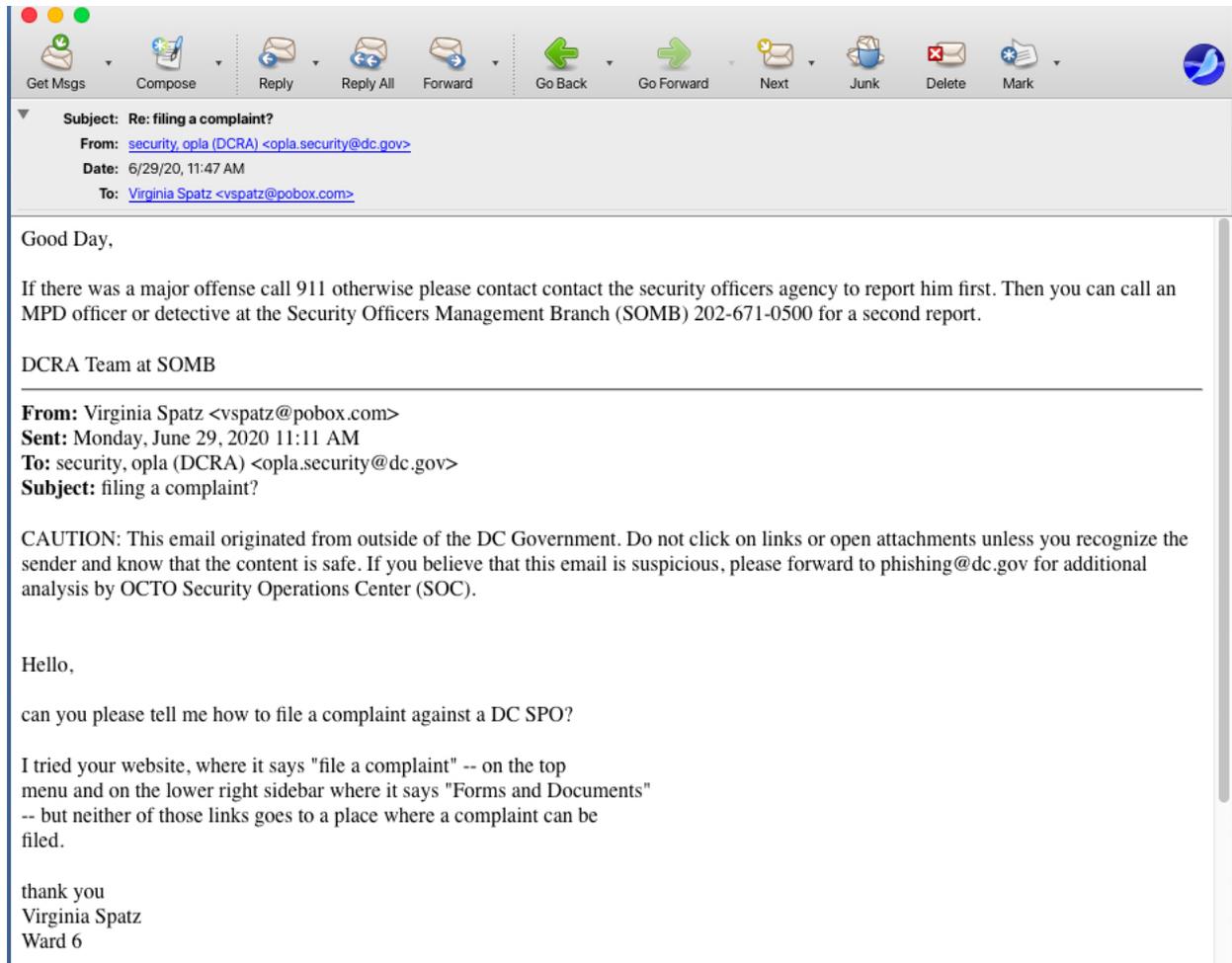
The video at this website shows how the buttons that claim one can "file a complaint" against a Special Police Officer lead to a page with no possibility of fulfilling that action. I made this little video just to show the situation -- <https://spodatadc.org/2020/06/29/special-police-and-complaints/> -- that was back in June. I recently checked in October and nothing had changed.

I also inquired of the agencies involved back in June and was given the following answers.

This was the first --



About fifteen minutes later, another arrived (next page) --



Neither response addresses the dysfunction of the website or the fact that the general public has no way to know what to do based on what information is provided.

Neither responses addresses what might have been the active trauma of someone who'd been abused by an SPO or witnessed such behavior. As it happens, I was just inquiring as part of a sort of research effort -- and maybe the writer could sense that this was not an emergency or a traumatic situation. But I doubt that. So much is in need of overhaul.

Beverly Smith, mother of Alonzo Smith, who was killed by Special Police Officers in the fall of 2015, and I worked together to try to make another portal for collecting information from those who cannot navigate this craziness and/or would not feel safe to report an SPO to MPD.

The fact that there is no way to file a complaint means there is also slim chance for any kind of accountability.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. I am happy to answer further questions. And I urge the Committee to produce much stronger legislation. Soon.