



COUNCIL OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
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Mary M. Cheh
Councilmember, Ward 3
Chair, Committee on Transportation and the Environment

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Peter Newsham
Chief of Police
Metropolitan Police Department
300 Indiana Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20001

Dear Interim Chief Newsham,

For years, the MPD's Special Liaison Branch has been the gold standard for how an urban police department can best support its local minority communities. The division has grown since its inception to respond to the needs of District residents, and now includes Special Units serving the Asian, Latino, LGBT, and deaf and hard of hearing communities. Importantly, the work done by the officers in these Special Units is proactive and collaborative, ranging from creating lasting connections between officers and community members before issues requiring police action arise, to training the greater police force on the unique needs and concerns facing members of DC's minority communities.

The need for close and trusting relationships between our police force and minority communities is as important today as ever. In 2016, anti-Muslim attacks in the U.S. were at their highest level since 2001. In fact, the most recent FBI National Hate Crime figures show a 67% surge in hate crimes perpetrated against Muslims. These statistics are shocking. The Council and MPD must work together to ensure the safety of the approximately 13,000 Muslims who live in the District, and make clear that attacks our Muslim community will not be tolerated.

I recently learned that MPD is in the process of establishing a new Special Unit to serve residents of the District who are natively African. I applaud the creation of this new unit, and look forward to learning more about its successful implementation. However, I encourage MPD leadership to take these efforts one step further, and take action to protect and serve our Muslim residents by creating a Muslim Liaison Unit.

The creation of a Muslim Liaison Unit will ensure that officers throughout the District are trained in best serving our Muslim population. This unit would also facilitate the creation of a strong relationship between MPD officers, our local mosques, and the Muslim community. Perhaps most importantly, the creation of this unit would make clear that MPD and our government officials stand against islamophobia, and on the side of our Muslim residents, workers, and visitors.

Thank you and all MPD police officers for the exemplary service you provide to residents of the District each and every day. I look forward to learning more from your office about the Special Liaison Branch, and the next steps we can take to protect our Muslim residents by creating this important new Special Unit.

Regards,



Mary M. Cheh

Cc: Mayor Muriel Bowser
Chairman Phil Mendelson
Councilmember Charles Allen
Deputy Mayor Kevin Donahue