



**Testimony from the DC chapter of Families for Safe Streets
for the Committee on Public Works and Operations
budget hearing for the Department of Public Works
held on April 30, 2026**

To the Committee on Public Works and Operations:

In February, we testified before this committee about DPW's failure to use its STEER Act authority to remove dangerous vehicles from our streets. DPW's answer was straightforward: "Impound lot capacity is the main limitation."

We heard you. We are here today with a budget request to eliminate that excuse.

The Scale of the Problem

DC is owed over \$1 billion in unpaid traffic and parking fines. Since 2000, approximately 6.2 million tickets have gone unpaid. Seventy-five percent of that debt is owed by Maryland and Virginia drivers who face no consequences because those states refuse reciprocity.

The STEER Act was supposed to change that. Under the Act, a vehicle that accumulates 10 points in six months from automated speeding violations becomes eligible for booting and towing — regardless of whether fines are paid, regardless of where the vehicle is registered.

The OAG has used the Act to file 29 lawsuits and collect \$531,192. But consider the scale of what they are finding: one Maryland driver, Michael William Hall Jr., accumulated 910 violations across 21 different license plates, owing \$284,550. Another driver racked up 530 tickets. Another, 414.

These are not outliers. These are the vehicles DPW should be taking off the street every single day.

The Enforcement Gap

As of a 2021 Council hearing, DPW had four boot-enforcement staff in two crews with two vehicles, capable of booting 36 to 50 vehicles per day. The universe of boot-eligible vehicles — those with just two unpaid tickets over 60 days old — was 633,000. Councilmember Cheh calculated it would take over 25 years to boot them all.

DPW has made progress. They expanded to ten boot teams and opened a third impound lot at Reed Street in July 2024, adding roughly 190 spaces and increasing capacity by 30%. The high-dollar scofflaw pilot, targeting vehicles with \$3,000 or more in unpaid fines, has been a genuine success: between April 2024 and May 2025, DPW towed 797 vehicles and recouped over \$1 million from the 257 owners who paid to get them back.

But 797 vehicles in 13 months, against a universe of hundreds of thousands? The Georgetown Metropolitan put it plainly: at this pace, it would take “from now until the heat death of the universe” to address the problem.

And then the Mayor’s FY2026 budget proposed cutting 63 FTEs from Parking Enforcement — from 332 to 269 positions. We are grateful that Chairwoman Nadeau’s committee restored 52 of those positions, funded by reallocating \$4.77 million from DPW overtime. But restoration is not expansion. We are treading water.

People Are Dying

In March 2023, a Lexus SUV with 44 outstanding tickets and \$12,300 in unpaid fines fled a traffic stop and killed three people on Rock Creek Parkway: Mohamed Kamara, Jonathan Cabrera Mendez, and Olvin Torres Velasquez. Councilmember Pinto said that vehicle “should have been booted or towed.”

In September 2024, a driver with 80 speeding tickets struck a 12-year-old girl. DPW knew that car was dangerous. They had the authority to take it. They did not.

In April 2025, Kathy Turner, age 74, was killed in a crosswalk at 6th and M Streets SW. The vehicle that struck her had nearly \$4,000 in outstanding violations. Two people had been killed and 19 injured at that same intersection in the prior two years.

Earl Curtis of Maryland hit a pedestrian and fractured her foot. At the time, he owed \$19,000 in unpaid tickets. By February 2025, his fines had reached \$33,000 — including six speed camera tickets in January 2025 alone. His vehicle was still on the road.

After a promising 52% drop in fatalities in 2025, we are now heading in the wrong direction. As of March 25, 2026, DC has recorded 12 traffic fatalities — compared to 3 at the same point in 2025. We are on pace for the deadliest year since 2003.

What New York Got Wrong

New York City tried a version of this. Their Dangerous Vehicle Abatement Program was expected to address 5,000 vehicles. It notified 1,605 drivers. Of those, only 12 vehicles were actually seized — a 0.7% rate. The NYC Comptroller called it “a failure by all measures.” The

problems: six- to eight-month warrant processing delays, incompatible data systems across agencies, and drivers swapping plates to avoid detection.

DC's STEER Act is better designed — a simpler point system, OAG civil authority that works across state lines, and existing DPW towing infrastructure. But the lesson from New York is clear: even good laws fail without operational capacity. The capacity must be funded.

Our Five Budget Asks

1. More Tow Trucks

DPW's current Vehicle Immobilization/Relocation budget is \$7.7 million. That is not enough. DC statute already authorizes DPW to contract with private towing companies.

We ask:

- Expand DPW's tow fleet with at least four additional heavy-duty tow vehicles
- Fund a dedicated contract line for private tow companies to supplement DPW during enforcement surges
- Establish a 24-hour dispatch standard: when a STEER Act-eligible vehicle is identified, a tow truck responds within one day

2. More Tow Lots

DPW operates three impound lots — Blue Plains, Bryant Street, and Reed Street — and they are regularly at capacity. Vehicles are held for 28 days before disposition, meaning each space turns over roughly once a month. We ask:

- Fund the lease or acquisition of at least one additional impound lot, targeting a capacity increase of 200 vehicles
- Commission a feasibility study for a second new lot, prioritized in Wards with the highest concentration of STEER Act-eligible vehicles
- Staff and secure the expanded facilities

Every vehicle in an impound lot is a vehicle that is not on our streets. Lot space is not a cost. It is an investment in public safety.

3. More Boot Crews

Booting is the first line of enforcement. A booted vehicle is immediately neutralized. Even before a tow truck arrives, the threat is gone. DPW expanded from two to ten boot teams, but the Georgetown Metropolitan reported there is still no requirement for an officer to call in a tow for boot-eligible cars when they encounter one. We ask:

- Fund at least four additional boot crew teams
- Extend boot crew operating hours to include evenings and weekends, when dangerous drivers are most active

- Mandate that boot crews prioritize STEER Act-eligible vehicles over routine parking enforcement
- Require that any officer who encounters a boot-eligible vehicle calls in a boot or tow — no discretion, no exceptions

4. Enforcement Infrastructure and Transparency

DPW needs the systems to identify, locate, and act on dangerous vehicles in real time. We ask:

- Fund a dedicated STEER Act enforcement unit within DPW — staff whose sole job is tracking vehicles that exceed the point threshold, locating them, and coordinating boots and tows
- Fund integration between DPW's systems and DC's automated traffic camera data so STEER Act-eligible vehicles are flagged automatically
- Publish a weekly public report showing: how many vehicles currently exceed the STEER Act threshold, how many were booted or towed that week, and how many known dangerous vehicles remain on the street

This is the transparency ask we made in February. We are making it again. The public deserves to see the gap between what DPW could do and what DPW is doing.

5. Intelligent Speed Assistance on the DPW Fleet.

DPW is the agency that enforces the STEER Act. DPW takes vehicles from drivers who speed. DPW's own vehicles should not be speeding.

We ask the committee to fund installation of Intelligent Speed Assistance (ISA) technology on every DPW vehicle — tow trucks, garbage trucks, street sweepers, all non-emergency vehicles.

This is not hypothetical. DC's own Child and Family Services Agency has already implemented ISA on its fleet. CFSA's Chief Administrative Officer, Tina Roper, has presented on the implementation. DC government was featured in a national Vision Zero Network webinar on ISA. The technology works. The procurement pathway exists. CFSA's telematics data can demonstrate the before-and-after safety improvements.

The agency charged with getting dangerous vehicles off the road should lead by example. Every DPW vehicle should comply with the speed limits that DPW enforces.

Conclusion

The STEER Act gave DPW the legal authority to save lives. The high-dollar scofflaw pilot proved the operational model works. What remains is a question of resources and political will.

We are not asking DPW to do something unprecedented. We are asking you to fund what DPW has already said it needs. They told us capacity was the limitation. This budget is your chance to fix that.

Fund the tow trucks. Fund the lots. Fund the boot crews. Fund the enforcement staff. Fund the speed limiters. And fund the transparency so the public can hold DPW accountable.

Every car DPW does not take is a choice. Every injury from a known dangerous driver is preventable. The data is here. The cases are here. The dead are here. Fund the solution.

Thank you.

Dr. Karthik Balasubramanian

On behalf of the DC chapter of Families for Safe Streets

Sources Referenced:

- OAG Press Releases: STEER Act enforcement (\$531K collected, 29 lawsuits)
- DPW FY2024-2025 Performance Oversight Pre-Hearing Questions (Jan 2026)
- DPW FY2026 Budget Chapter (CFO)
- WJLA 7News: "\$1 billion in unpaid violations" (April 2025); "Third impound lot" (Sept 2024)
- Washington Post: "How 6 million D.C. traffic tickets went unpaid" (May 2023)
- Georgetown Metropolitan: "Slowly STEERING Towards Improvements" (Feb 2025)
- Fox 5 DC: Rock Creek Parkway crash (March 2023)
- HillRag: Kathy Turner fatality (April 2025)
- NYC Comptroller: "Danger Unabated" report on DVAP failure
- MPD Traffic Fatality Data (2026 YTD)
- DC Council committee reports (Nadeau, FY2026 markup)