

Testimony of Amy DeYoung – Former DOC Employee

I want to start by thanking you for giving me the opportunity to testify this morning. My name is Amy DeYoung I am a Shaw resident and a licensed professional counselor in the District of Columbia. The reason my professional career is relevant is that I was previously employed by the Department of Corrections as a mental health specialist, providing counseling services to residents housed at the jail and at CTF.

Having worked at the department of corrections, I have serious concerns about DC's decision to move Central Cell Block into a neighborhood. I feel that DOC's primary focus is on logistics without considering the mental and physical health of detainees nor of the community who will undoubtedly be affected by the relocation to 501 NY Ave.

While working at the jail, I was exposed daily to unhealthy noise levels from inmates kicking doors, yelling, and screaming. At times, the noise was deafening and had a negative impact on everyone in the facility. Research shows that noise pollution can adversely affect mental health by increasing stress, anxiety, and irritability, as well as disrupting sleep and concentration. While some measures can be taken to add acoustic materials inside the facility, it's impossible to soundproof the windows or the surrounding property.

With regard to the surrounding property, during my employment at DOC I also witnessed numerous protests at the facility. While many were relatively low-key, some made me feel unsafe when I had to walk through or near them. The proposed plan to prevent protesters from loitering outside the facility will likely push protests to occur adjacent to residences and businesses. The louder the protests become and the more they disturb people, the more media attention they will attract. We saw the fallout after January 6th at the jail, with news crews, agitated protesters, lights, and cameras present 24/7. DOC staff and officers were fortunate to be able to return to the tranquility of their homes each day to seek refuge from the chaos. I can only imagine what it will be like for neighbors of the proposed Central Cell Block location to return home after a long day of work and be forced to face such turmoil. The DC Department of Buildings implemented noise regulations for this exact reason. The District's Noise Control Act declares, "It is the public policy of the District that every person is entitled to ambient noise levels that are not detrimental to life, health, and enjoyment of his or her property." And I have a very hard time believing that there will not be a significant increase in noise once this facility is fully operational.

Given that this facility will operate 24/7, it would be naive to ignore the potential impact of noise on the mental and physical well-being of those living nearby. For example, disruptions in sleep

can significantly harm physical and mental health, leading to impaired cognitive function, weakened immunity, increased stress, and a higher risk of chronic conditions. Research shows that anxiety and depression increase significantly when environmental noise increases. Even small changes in decibels have long-term effects on both mental and physical health.

Another concern I have is regarding parking. As you know, parking is difficult enough in DC. Removing parking can lead to increased frustration, reduced accessibility, and potential safety issues, as it limits convenient access to homes and can exacerbate congestion in the area. The plans I've seen for staff parking at the potential CCB relocation site are insufficient at best. The current plans may be able to accommodate enough parking for necessary staff, officers, contractors, case managers, healthcare workers, and attorneys. However, the reality for a correctional facility's parking needs would be double the intended allotment. Having adequate parking during shift changes at correctional facilities is essential to accommodate the high volume of people arriving and departing, ensuring timely transitions while maintaining security and operational efficiency.

That said, the Department of Corrections has a history of inadequate parking accommodations, reflecting a persistent lack of concern for employees and the surrounding community. During my time at DOC, it was common to witness physical and verbal altercations over parking spaces, both in the parking lot and on the once-quiet streets of Hill East. More than once I witnessed a weapon being drawn by correctional officers during these altercations.

Thankfully, I relied primarily on alternate means of transportation for my commute. Though that also came with unexpected struggles. Ride-share drivers would often cancel the fare when they realized they were picking up a customer at the jail. I often waited for 2-3 different rounds of ride-share drivers before one would finally pick me up. If time was a concern I would have to walk a few blocks into the surrounding neighborhood so ride share drivers felt safer picking me up. It will be a matter of time before ride share drivers learn of the presence of the new CCB and avoid picking up customers in the surrounding area, impacting both members of the community and local businesses.

Allowing the CCB to open at 501 NY Ave would also expose community members and local businesses to increased noise emanating from within and outside the facility, parking shortages, and traffic congestion. Shift changes occur at 7 AM, 3 PM, and 11 PM, with staff, officers, contractors, case managers, healthcare workers, attorneys, ambulances, and new intakes arriving at all hours of the day and night. Our quiet neighborhood streets will become filled with noise

pollution and traffic congestion, reducing DC residents' quality of life. This, combined with public opinion of correctional facilities, can also negatively impact property values in the surrounding community as found in a study conducted by the National Institute of Corrections.

I'd also like to take a moment to address my concerns for those that will be housed at the facility should it come to fruition. The cells are seemingly not slated to have hand washing capabilities which puts CCB residents as well as staff at a higher risk for spread of illness and infection. During my employment at DOC we had many outbreaks of severe illness and I lost coworkers to covid because of the lack of safety measures being put in place. It's disheartening to see DOC continuing to display such disregard for staff and detainee safety.

I'm also not seeing in the shared plans any space being dedicated for healthcare facilities. This is concerning for various reasons, including those experiencing withdrawal or other medical symptoms and those deemed high risk for suicide and/or self-harm. Research shows that approximately 12% of deaths by suicide in jails occur within the first 24 hours of incarceration and withdrawal symptoms typically begin within the first few hours of detainment. If DOC plans to make this a safer facility than the old CCB, I urge DC to require that they include precautionary measures like safe cells and mental and physical healthcare workers staffed 24/7 to prevent needless deaths.

Based on the submitted plans for the new CCB facility, I am urging you to deny the special exemption for 501 NY Ave. If the Board chooses to allow the special exemption they are simultaneously choosing to negatively impact the health and well-being of DC residents. As a mental health professional with years of training in trauma, anxiety, depression, and severe mental illness, I am adamantly opposed to any such facility being placed inside of a community. Any community.

Thank you for your time and for allowing me to submit my testimony this morning.