

Washington D.C. Democratic councilman calls for National Guard intervention amid spike in violent crime

Our reporters
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The Democratic Party in Washington D.C. has continued to escalate its demands for “law and order” in response to a spike in violent crime in the district which has killed 16 people in the first days of August, including nine people in a 48-hour period last Saturday.

Trayon White, Sr., a Democratic Party council member for Ward 8 and former mayoral candidate, has repeatedly demanded the federal government deploy National Guard soldiers to the district to address the violence. In his latest statement, White gave a press conference on Tuesday in response to the crime wave, held at the site of a multiple victim shooting a few days prior.

White declared the city had become “a war zone” and that “it may be time to call on the National Guard to protect the children and innocent people that are losing their lives to this senselessness.”

If acted upon, the D.C. councilman’s demand for military deployment would mark the third time in just over three years in which the federal government has deployed troops in Washington D.C.

According to the Metropolitan Police Department (MPD) website, 162 homicides have been reported so far this year as of August 9, rapidly approaching the 203 murders committed in Washington in all of 2022. The violence could potentially reach the highest levels since 2003, when 248 people were murdered.

The latest victims include two unidentified men and a woman last Saturday on the 1600 block of Good Hope Road in Southeast D.C. On Monday, city officials reported that Jesus Sanchez of Northwest D.C., 45, succumbed to his wounds in a city hospital from a shooting that occurred the prior Thursday.

Poverty, inequality and the policies that produce them and their attendant misery inevitably play a major part in crime. Wards 7 and 8, which have seen the bloodiest violence, historically have had the highest unemployment levels. After gradually hitting a relatively low rate of 11.6 per 100,000 in 2019, Ward 8’s rate shot back up to 17.1 per 100,000 in 2020 as the COVID-19 pandemic was starting to take serious effect around the world.

Furthermore, the cost of living has only increased as the pandemic greatly affects workers’ ability to survive. According to the home rental website Zumper, if an individual were to set aside 28 percent of his or her monthly income for rent, they would have to make at least \$102,171 per year in order to afford an apartment. Despite this, the median salary in Washington is \$65,000. Nearly 27.4 percent of all households in the city make an income of less than \$50,000.

Exacerbating this cost-of-living crisis is the ending of the limited measures put in place during the COVID-19 pandemic. The *World Socialist Web Site* noted in May that Washington D.C. homelessness increased by 18 percent in a one-year period, with the termination of those measures playing a heavy factor.

White’s demand highlights the shift to the right of the Democratic Party and the growing regularity with which the two American parties of big business resort to the use of military force to respond to a deepening social crisis. It comes a few weeks after the Democratic Party-dominated Washington D.C. legislature passed an emergency bill that allowed for longer detainment of suspected violent offenders before trial and other invasive measures.

More than three years have passed since worldwide protests against police violence took place in response to the police murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis, Minnesota on May 25, 2020. The response of the Trump administration was to threaten the peaceful protests with military violence. In the District of Columbia, this involved the deployment of National Guardsmen and other armed law enforcement to brutalize protesters.

Likewise, National Guardsmen were sent into the capital on January 6, 2021 in a delayed response to mobs of Trump supporters who had tried to stop the US electoral vote certification and overthrow the government.

The Democratic Party, having presided over the growth of social misery for decades in major cities, has nothing progressive to offer the working class. The Democrats since initially posturing as sympathetic to the George Floyd protests' demands, have increasingly sought to present themselves as a party of law and order.

Everywhere in the country, social programs have been slashed in favor of higher police budgets. In New York City, for example, it was announced last month that the New York Police Department would see a funding increase of \$320 million while \$397 million in rent and voucher assistance and \$222 million for homeless shelters were cut.

This has been directed from the White House, as the Democratic Biden administration has called for the government to give more funding to police, while also intervening against the Washington D.C. government directly to block minor criminal reforms this year.

The calls for bringing in the National Guard have exposed the role of the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) and other so-called "progressive" groups who have provided cover to the escalating attack on working people.

Last month, every member of the Council except one, Ward 4's DSA-backed Janeese Lewis George, lent their support to the emergency measure granting D.C. police expanded authority to detain and prosecute violent offenders.

This includes Zachary Parker, who was endorsed by the Democratic Socialists of America when he ran for office in 2022. Parker hosted two public safety meetings this week, one with D.C. Acting Police Chief

Pamela Smith and Attorney General Brian Schwalb.

Parker said he did not want to minimize the crime in DC but said there must be "a comprehensive vision, all hands on deck to turn things around." Lewis George and fellow "progressive" council member Matthew Frumin (Ward 3) appear to have said nothing about their colleague's calls for the National Guard to be sent in.

The District of Columbia Democratic Party's appeals to law and order have proceeded alongside efforts to reopen the city's downtown areas and return local revenue to pre-pandemic levels. The capitalist press and politicians have been urging that federal workers return to their jobs in-person.

An opinion piece in the *Washington Post* by billionaire former New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg led the pack, complaining last week that "Federal offices are mostly empty" and that taxpayers were "footing the bill for empty floor space and the costs of maintenance."

On August 4, Biden White House Chief of Staff Jeffrey Zients delivered an email to federal employees working remotely, stating that in-person work was "critical to the well-being of our teams and will enable us to deliver better results for the American people."

In the rush to restore the District's downtown to full profitability, the capitalist class is provoking a confrontation with the working class. In February, the Biden administration began the clearing homeless encampments in the city's downtown area.



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