

DC Government 101

Updated October 2023
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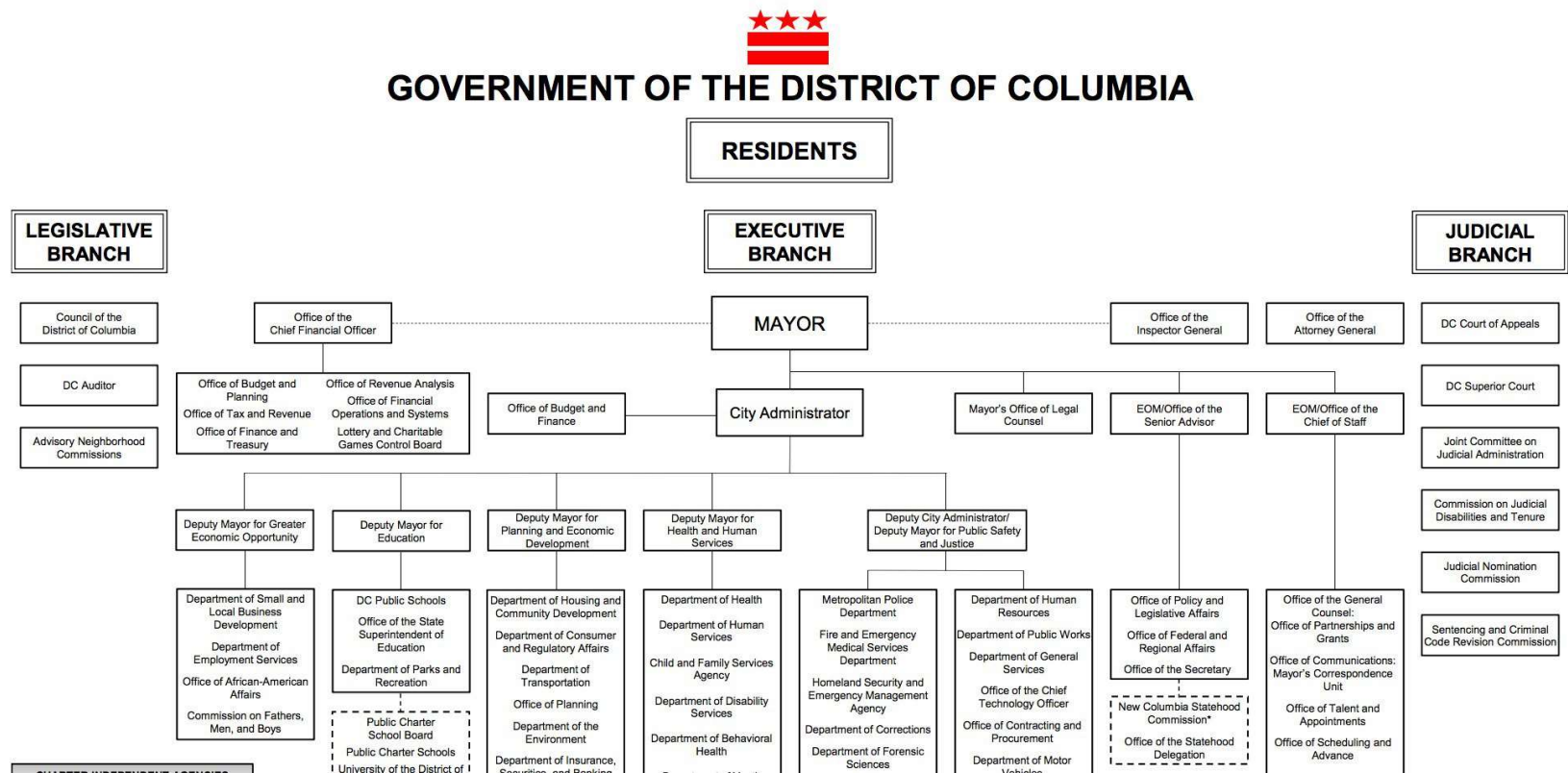
GOVERNMENT OF THE
DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
MURIEL BOWSER, MAYOR

The Home Rule Act & Other Federal Laws

- The Constitution grants the US Congress exclusive right over the District of Columbia, as it is considered a federal district, not a state.
- In 1973, the Home Rule Act delegated local responsibilities to a mayor and a council elected to 4-year terms. District residents elected their first mayor, Walter Washington, who started his term in 1975.
- In response to local budget deficits and poor bond ratings, a 1995 federal law established the DC Financial Control Board to oversee the finances of the District and override decisions of the Mayor and Council. (The Control Board was dissolved in 2001 after the District improved its bond rating and balanced its budget.) That same law also established a mayor-appointed Chief Financial Officer to manage the day-to-day finances of the District; this function continues to this day.

District Government

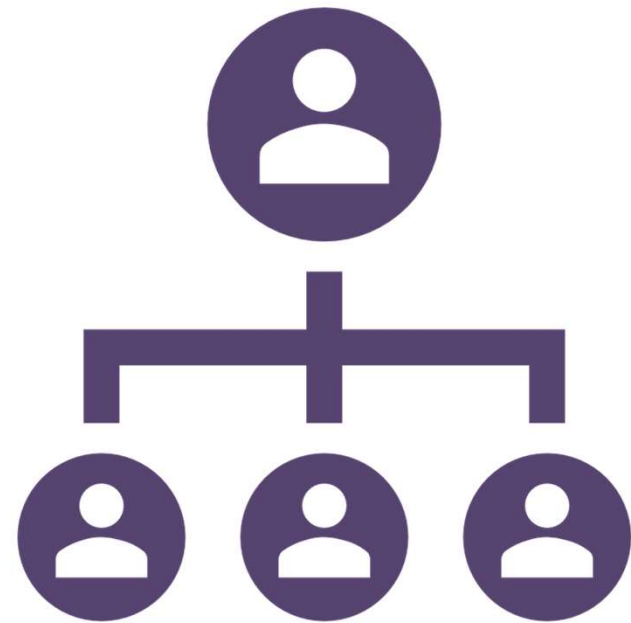
Like the federal government, District government has three branches – executive, legislative, and judicial.



Governance Considerations Unique to DC

- All laws passed by the Council and signed by the Mayor are subject to a 30-day review period by the US Congress. If Congress does not act during this review period, the law becomes officially enacted.
- Federal law establishes the Office of the Chief Financial Officer (OCFO) to manage District funds and execute the budget. OCFO is independent of the Mayor or Council.
- For federal grant purposes, the District may be considered a state, county, and/or a local government. The precise designation is often dependent on the law or federal program in question.
- Contracts at or exceeding \$1 million annually are required to undergo Council review and approval, per the Home Rule Act.

The District's Executive Branch



Executive Branch: Mayor

The Mayor is elected to a 4-year term.

- Executive Office of the Mayor (EOM): Directly supports the Mayor
- Office of the City Administrator (OCA): Handles the day-to-day administration of DC government, including oversight of agencies
 - Office of Budget and Performance Management (OBPM): Within OCA and oversees budget policy/priorities and performance of executive branch agencies
- Office of Policy and Legislative Affairs (OPLA): The mayor's legislative shop and liaison to DC Council
- Office of Federal and Regulatory Affairs (OFRA): The mayor's liaison to Congress and Rep. Holmes-Norton

Muriel Bowser



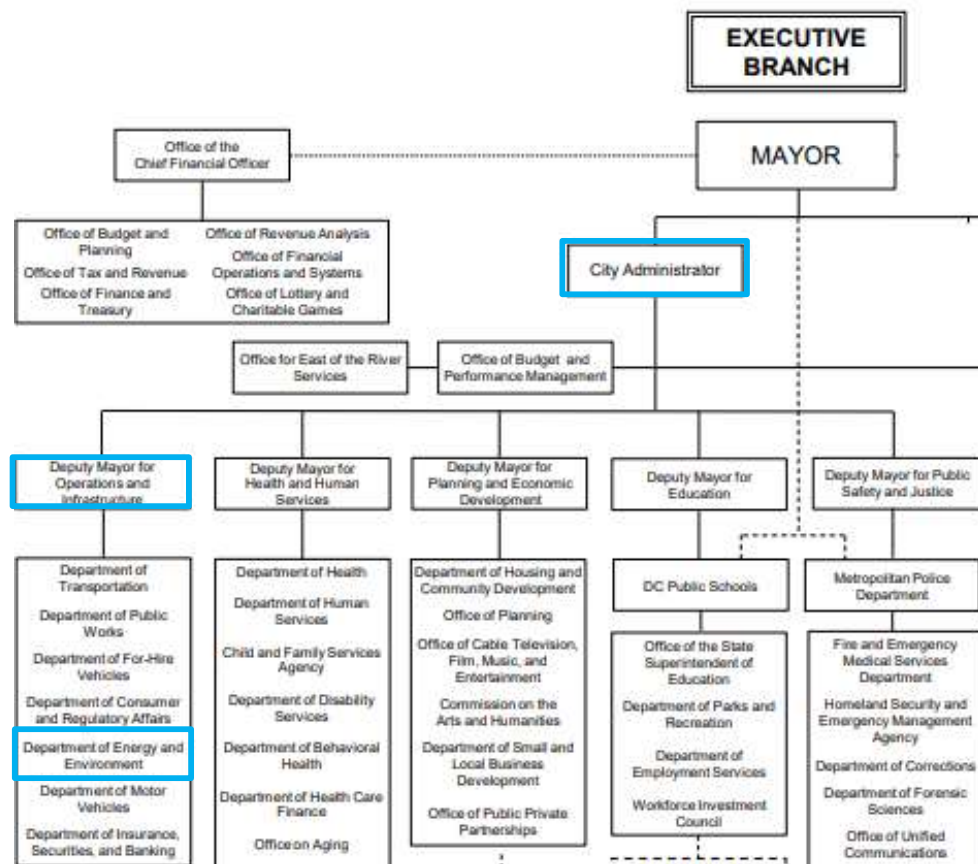
Mayor Muriel Bowser is the seventh elected mayor of Washington, DC and began her third term in 2023.

Executive Branch Agencies

Executive branch agencies are overseen by five Deputy Mayors, who report to the City Administrator. The Deputy Mayor for Operations and Infrastructure (DMOI) oversees DOEE.

Learn more about the organization of the executive branch here:
<https://mayor.dc.gov/page/mayor-executive-branch>

DC also has independent agencies and quasi-governmental authorities such as DC Public Schools (DCPS), the DC Housing Authority (DCHA), DC Water, and the University of the District of Columbia (UDC). While directors of these agencies are appointed by the Mayor and confirmed by Council, they are not under direct control of the Mayor's office.



Executive Branch: Legal and Audit

Office of the Attorney General (OAG)

- OAG enforces the laws of the District, defends and provides legal advice to District agencies, and protects the interests of DC residents.
- The OAG aims to protect citizens from fraud and protect worker and tenant rights, among other duties.

Office of the Inspector General (OIG)

- OIG general conducts audits, inspections, and investigations of government programs.
- The office detects fraud, waste, and government mismanagement.



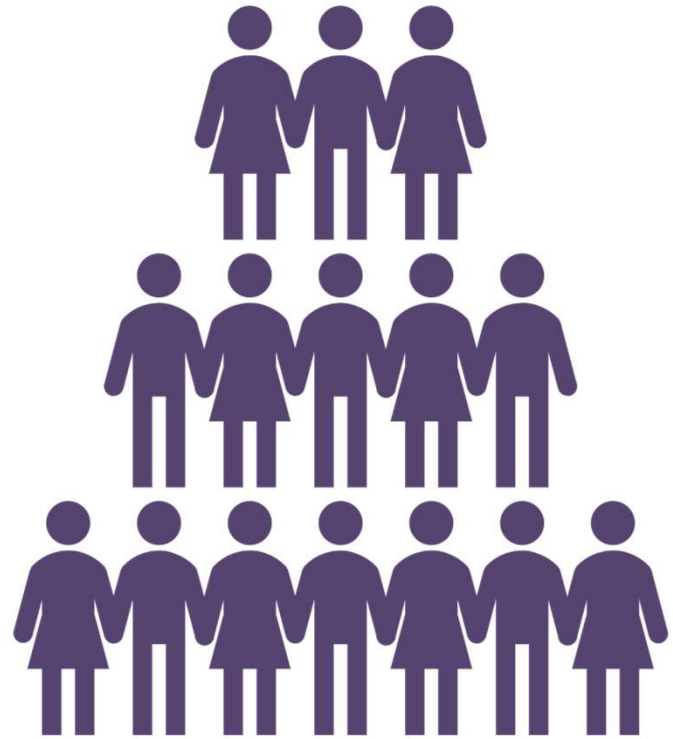
In 2016, the District was awarded roughly \$8 million in a civil enforcement case after Volkswagen manipulated their cars to pass emissions inspections, only to exceed the emission standards after the tests. Settlement funds, which are managed by DOEE, are being used to reduce harmful emissions from vehicles. The Office of the Attorney General (OAG) for the District of Columbia served on the Executive Committee that led the states' investigation into Volkswagen.

Executive Branch: Considerations for DOEE Employees

What should I expect in my capacity as a DOEE employee as it relates to the executive branch and independent agencies?

- Many DOEE teams engage with other agencies in their day-to-day work. Your manager or team will be able to share contacts and information on the nature of collaboration. Such forms of collaboration may occur through a memorandum of understanding (MOU), which is used to transfer funds from one agency to another, or a memorandum of agreement (MOA).
- On occasion, policy decisions or program changes – for example, changes to 311 requests – may need to be submitted to DMOI and OCA for approval.
- Contracts, proposed regulations, proposed legislation, and certain reports may also require DMOI and EOM review through a system called Intranet Quorum (IQ).
- On occasion, OCA or DMOI will pose budgetary or programmatic questions for DOEE. DOEE staff may be asked to provide information to assist.

The District's Legislative Branch

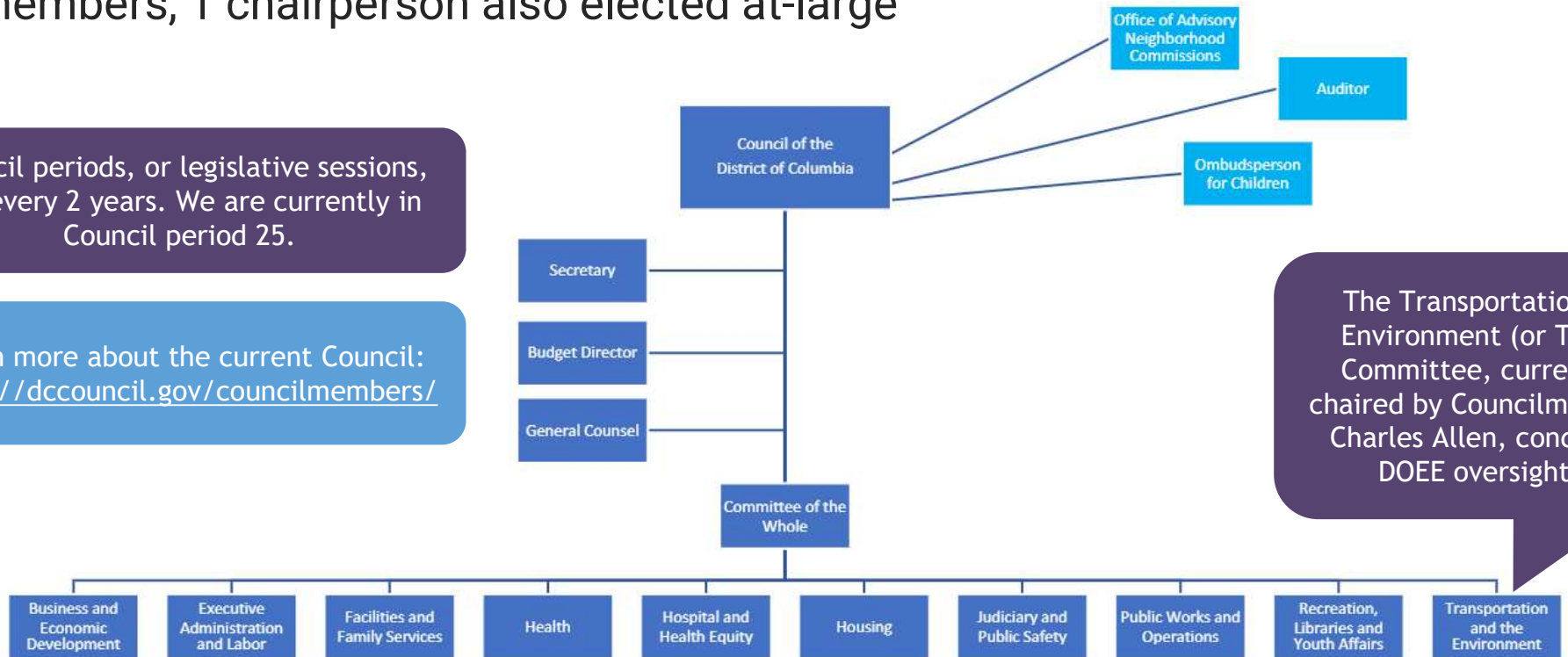


Legislative Branch: DC Council

Unicameral body of 13 members: 8 representing each ward, 4 at-large members, 1 chairperson also elected at-large

Council periods, or legislative sessions, run every 2 years. We are currently in Council period 25.

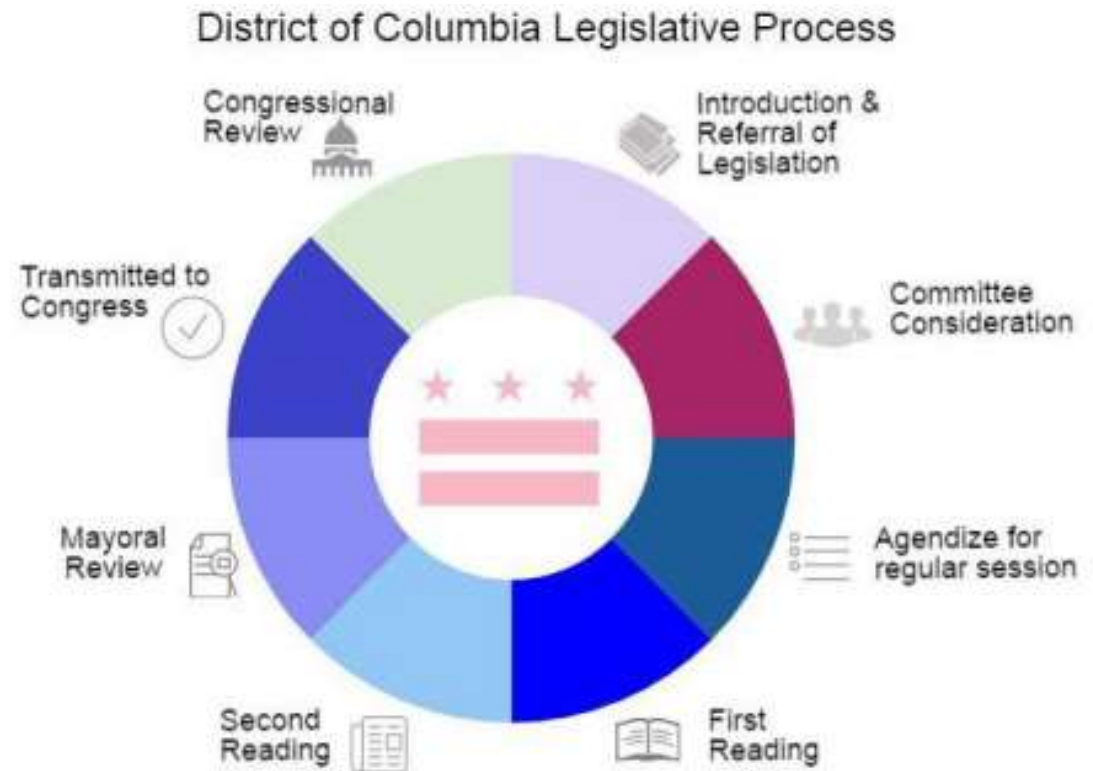
Learn more about the current Council:
<https://dccouncil.gov/councilmembers/>



All Councilmembers are part of the Committee of the Whole. The Council is comprised of 10 other committees that consider legislation related to specific policy matters and conduct oversight of District agencies.

Legislative Branch: How a Bill Becomes a Law

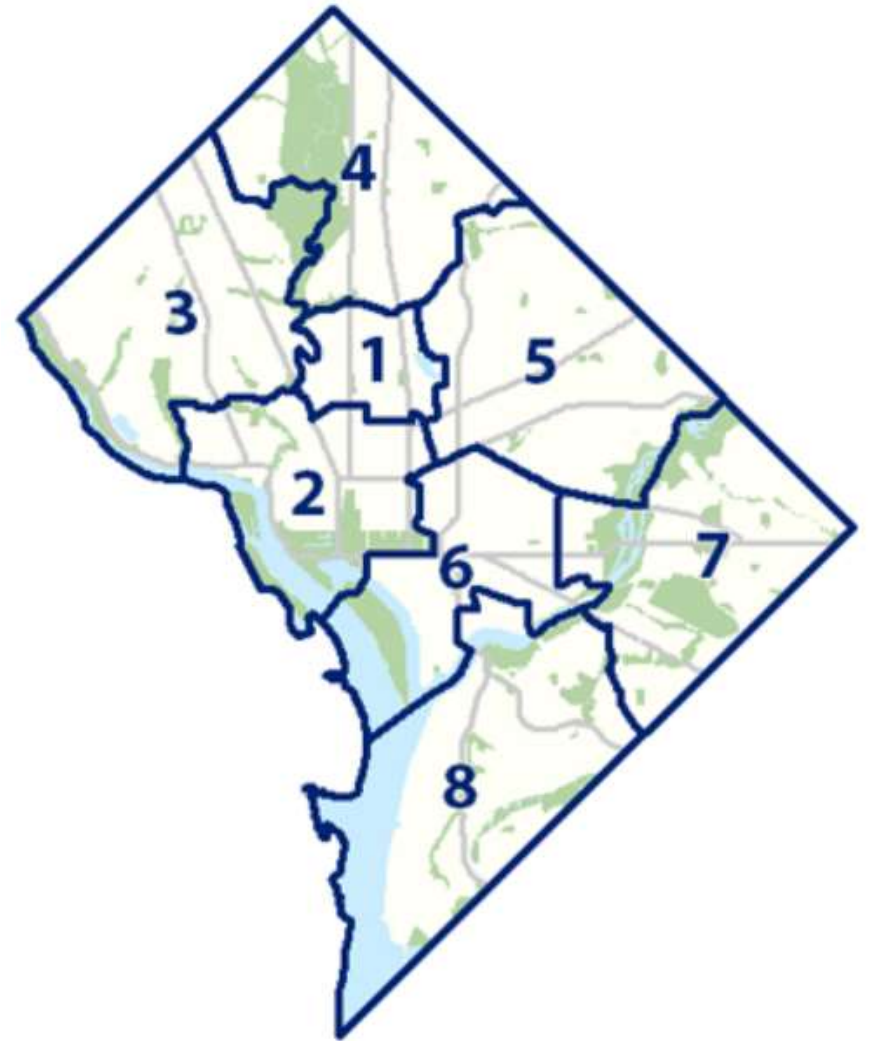
- An introduced bill is assigned to a Council committee. If a committee chooses not to review the bill during the 2-year Council period, it dies in that period and must be reintroduced in the next period.
- Once a bill is considered by or reported out of a committee, it is transmitted to the Committee of the Whole (COW).
- COW discusses the bill and votes on it twice; the first reading allows for consideration of amendments. The second reading requires that legislation not be substantially altered.
- Once passed by Council and signed by the Mayor, an approved Act is subject to a 30-day review period by the US Congress before becoming official law.



Learn more about the legislative process:
<https://dccouncil.gov/how-a-bill-becomes-a-law/>

Legislative Branch: Wards and ANC

- The District of Columbia is divided into 8 Wards. Each Ward is represented by a Council Member.
- Those 8 Wards are further divided into 46 Advisory Neighborhood Commissions (ANCs).
- Each ANC is represented by an ANC Commissioner, who serves a two-year term.
- The ANC Commissioners' main job is to be their neighborhood's official voice in advising the District government.



Use this tool to find your ANC and Commissioner:
<https://opendata.dc.gov/apps/locate-your-smd-and-anc/explore>

Legislative Branch: Considerations for DOEE Employees

What should I expect in my capacity as a DOEE employee as it relates to the Council and ANC?

- On occasion, your program area or work may be implicated by a proposed Council bill. DOEE's leadership team may ask for data, information, or feedback to develop testimony for a hearing or respond to a proposal.
- On occasion, staff may work with DOEE's Office of General Counsel (OGC) and DOEE's Legislative Director to proactively propose legislation to improve a program or correct a deficiency.
- DOEE's Director participates in annual performance oversight and budget hearings, which typically take place February through April. DOEE staff may be asked to provide information on their programs in preparation.
- If you need to contact an ANC Commissioner, please work through DOEE's Office of Communications.

DOEE's Legislative Director is the agency's primary liaison to Council, formulating the agency's legislative strategy, monitoring Council activity, and advising DOEE's Director on policy issues.

As an executive branch agency, we work closely with the Deputy Mayor for Operations and Infrastructure (DMOI) and the Office of Policy and Legislative Affairs (OPLA) on legislative issues.

The District's Judicial Branch



Judicial Branch: The Courts

The DC Court of Appeals and the DC Superior Court have jurisdiction over District laws, while the US District Court has jurisdiction over federal laws.

JUDICIAL BRANCH

DC Court of Appeals

DC Superior Court

Joint Committee on
Judicial Administration

Commission on Judicial
Disabilities and Tenure

Judicial Nomination
Commission

Sentencing and Criminal
Code Revision Commission

- The DC Court of Appeals is the highest court in DC. It reviews decisions from the DC Superior Court, has jurisdiction to review contested case decisions from administrative agencies, and clarifies questions about District law.
- The DC Superior Court is the trial court that has jurisdiction over tenant, family, criminal and other types of cases involving DC residents.
- The Joint Committee on Judicial Administration establishes personnel policies, manages procurement and IT systems, and submits the annual budget request for the DC Courts.
- The Commissions have different roles such as confirming the competency of judges, creating a list of names for judicial nomination, and suggesting improvements for sentencing

Additional Resources

The [Library of Congress](#) has a storyboard on the history of DC and major landmarks.

The Office of Planning's website has a [chapter](#) on the history of DC government.

Learn more about [Home Rule](#).

