



*From the Office of the Chief*

June 1, 2026

North Carolina General Assembly  
16 West Jones Street  
Raleigh, NC 27601

Chairman, Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to submit this written testimony on behalf of the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Police Department (CMPD). It is an honor to represent the City of Charlotte and the men and women who serve this community honorably every day.

I appreciate the opportunity to return to Raleigh and appear before you again following our previous meeting in February. I am grateful for the continued dialogue and the seriousness with which this committee engages matters of public safety. That engagement matters and it strengthens our work.

Since our last discussion, CMPD has remained focused on reducing violent crime, enhancing community engagement and collaboration and improving employee wellness and morale – all of which are priorities I outlined upon being appointed as Chief of Police.

In April, we shared results from our first-quarter public safety briefing. The data reflects meaningful progress across our city. For Q1, overall crime was down 23 percent. Violent crime was down 18 percent. Property crime was down 23 percent. Currently, we are experiencing continued reductions in violent crime and property crime. These figures are a reflection of data-driven policing strategies carried out by officers working every day to reduce harm and prevent victimization.

I'd like to share a few of our recent successes:

Queen City Safe is a partnership-driven initiative focused on crime hot spots and persistent quality-of-life issues through high-visibility, data-informed enforcement. Through coordinated operations with local, state and federal partners, CMPD continues to disrupt criminal activity and strengthen public safety across the city. Since the start of these monthly operations in early

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**CHARLOTTE-MECKLENBURG POLICE DEPARTMENT**

2026, participating agencies have achieved measurable outcomes (January – May 2026):

- Traffic Stops: 830
- Citations: 238
- Arrests: 109
- Firearms Seized: 54
- U.S. Currency Seized: \$18,771
- Narcotics Seized: Approximately 3,930.19 grams

These results have been made possible through strong collaboration with the North Carolina Alcohol Law Enforcement Division, Mecklenburg County Alcohol Beverage Control, the Mecklenburg County Sheriff's Office, the North Carolina State Highway Patrol and the Federal Bureau of Investigation. Monthly Queen City Safe operations will continue to rotate across all patrol divisions as we remain committed to disrupting criminal activity, holding offenders accountable and reinforcing public safety standards for residents and visitors alike.

Building on that strategy, on May 15 we conducted CMPD's first Operation Queen City Safe...and Sound. This effort focused on the specific noise violation concerns tied to modified exhaust systems and amplified vehicle sound systems that have a real impact on neighborhoods. That operation resulted in:

- 66 traffic stops
- 61 citations, including 16 for loud muffler violations
- 4 arrests
- 4 firearms seized
- 226 grams of narcotics seized

These are targeted, data-driven enforcement actions addressing issues that erode neighborhood quality of life when left unchecked.

Last week, we also shared the results of the Garden Inn operation, the culmination of a six-month investigation involving CMPD and our federal partners, including the FBI Charlotte Field Office and the United States Attorney's Office for the Western District of North Carolina. Following sustained investigative work including surveillance, undercover operations and controlled purchases, law enforcement executed coordinated arrest and search warrants at the Garden Inn in the North Tryon Division.

In total, 11 individuals were arrested. Five individuals were charged federally with drug and firearms offenses. During the course of the investigation, significant quantities of fentanyl, cocaine base and other narcotics were seized, along with illegal firearms removed from circulation. This operation reflects what is possible when local, state and federal partners operate as one team.

At the same time, we are working aggressively to address staffing challenges and strengthen the department for the future. The City's proposed budget includes critical investments in public safety, including a proposed 10 percent pay increase for CMPD officers and expanded take-home vehicle opportunities.

We are also grateful for the continued support of the General Assembly. I want to specifically acknowledge the Back the Blue Pay Act. It is a meaningful recognition of the service and sacrifice of law enforcement officers across our state, and it will make a real difference in recruitment and retention efforts.

Our mission remains unchanged, and it is grounded in the oath we take: to protect and serve our community.

### **Acknowledging the Tragedy**

Our oath is not simply to enforce laws. Our oath is to protect people, especially those who cannot protect themselves.

The death of six-year-old Dominique Moody was a tragedy. No statistic, no policy and no explanation can diminish the reality that a child is gone. A child lost her life under horrific circumstances. A family was forever changed. A community was left asking difficult questions.

The men and women of CMPD, specifically our Crimes Against Children Unit and Homicide Unit, approached this investigation with urgency and a clear sense of responsibility. They worked tirelessly to uncover the facts and follow the evidence wherever it led. That work ultimately resulted in criminal charges, including felony child abuse and murder charges, against all three caretakers involved.

But accountability after a tragedy does not erase the tragedy itself. Justice is essential, but justice cannot restore a life that has been lost.

### **Presenting the Facts**

I understand the Committee's questions surrounding this case. I share the desire for transparency, accountability and a clear understanding of what occurred.

I wish I could provide more specific details to this Committee and to the public. However, because of an existing court order and the ongoing judicial process, there are legal limits on what I can discuss at this time. Those limitations are not about avoiding scrutiny; they are about preserving the integrity of the judicial process and ensuring justice can proceed without interference.

What I can tell you is this: Since 2020, CMPD responded to 59 calls for service associated with that location that were recorded in our Computer-Aided Dispatch (CAD) system. On none of those calls did our officers observe child abuse, child neglect or child welfare concerns. Many involved matters entirely unrelated to domestic or family issues.

What is also important to understand is that concern for Dominique's welfare did arise following an encounter in 2022 between one of the suspects and Dominique at a different location than the residence. Based on observations made during that interaction, officers developed concerns regarding the child's well-being and made a referral to the Department of Social Services, which is what our officers are trained to do.

When officers encounter circumstances that reasonably suggest a child may be at risk, they are trained to act. They document their observations. Supervisors review those reports. Referrals are made to the Department of Social Services. When warranted, specialized investigators become involved. The purpose of that process is straightforward: to identify children who may be in danger and connect them with the agencies empowered to intervene.

Serious incidents involving vulnerable children rarely result from one isolated event. They require us to examine the totality of circumstances, the interactions, the reports, the decisions made, the information available at the time and the opportunities that may have been missed across multiple systems.

I appreciate the opportunity to be part of these important conversations. Cases involving the death or serious harm of a child demand more than investigation after the fact, they require all of us to honestly examine whether there were missed opportunities, where systems may have fallen short and what can be done better moving forward.

No single agency can protect every child alone. The responsibility is shared among law enforcement, child welfare professionals, educators, healthcare providers, the courts and policymakers. That is why I welcome this Committee's review and the broader discussion it represents.

CMPD is committed to being an active partner in that effort. We stand ready to work with the General Assembly, the Department of Social Services, and all of our child welfare partners to ensure we are holding ourselves accountable, learning from every case, and making improvements wherever improvements are needed.

### **Partnerships are Essential**

Child protection requires coordination across multiple systems and disciplines.

CMPD works regularly with the Department of Social Services, local hospitals, the District Attorney's Office, Child Advocacy Center (formerly Pat's Place), Safe Alliance, educators, medical professionals and numerous community organizations.

Cases involving child abuse are multidisciplinary by necessity. Information sharing, coordination, and timely communication are critical to identifying risk and protecting children before tragedy occurs.

### **The Importance of the Umbrella Center**

The multi-agency coordination is critical, which is why the Umbrella Center is so important to the future of child protection in our community.

Scheduled to open next year, the Umbrella Center will serve as a comprehensive, victim centered resource for children, families and individuals affected by interpersonal violence. Its purpose is simple but powerful: to bring the services survivors need most, including law enforcement, medical care, advocacy, counseling, legal support, housing assistance and other critical resources, together in one location.

For a child or family experiencing trauma, navigating multiple agencies and systems can be overwhelming. The Umbrella Center is designed to remove those barriers by providing a safe, welcoming, and trauma informed environment where services are focused on the needs of the victim.

The Umbrella Center reflects a shared commitment to ensuring that vulnerable children receive the care, protection, and support they deserve during some of the most difficult moments of their lives.

I want to express my gratitude to all of our partners and to members of the General Assembly for their support of this effort. That partnership is helping transform an important vision into a reality for our community.

### **The Role of the Child Development Community Policing Program**

The Child Development Community Policing (CDCP) program has operated in Mecklenburg County for 30 years and is recognized as one of the nation's longest running police-clinician partnerships. CDCP pairs officers with mental health clinicians to respond to children exposed to violence, homicide scenes, weapon-related incidents, domestic violence and other traumatic events. This model ensures that children and families receive immediate, developmentally appropriate support from both law enforcement and clinical professionals.

In 2025, CDCP responded to more than 6,200 families and supported nearly 10,000 children across Mecklenburg County. The program provides free crisis response and follow-up services to families and remains accessible to children of all ages. Required CDCP training includes coursework on child development, the impact of trauma and best practices for officer–clinician collaboration and officers complete annual refresher training to maintain readiness. CMPD officers who identify children exposed to violence are required to refer families to CDCP so they can receive specialized clinical support. This longstanding partnership strengthens CMPD’s ability to protect children, reduce harm and pursue justice in cases involving child trauma.

### **Recruit Training and Continuing Education**

CMPD’s Police Academy lasts eight months and provides comprehensive instruction on responding to crimes involving children. A dedicated segment of Basic Law Enforcement Training (BLET) focuses on Juvenile Law and Procedures, where recruits learn how to recognize signs of child abuse and neglect, understand Department of Social Services (DSS) referral requirements, meet mandatory reporting obligations and work collaboratively with DSS.

In addition to academy training, CMPD participates in annual Child Development Community Policing (CDCP) training, which includes coursework on child development and trauma, guidance on officer–clinician teamwork in crisis response and an examination to ensure knowledge retention. Officers are also required to complete annual CDCP refresher training to reinforce best practices, maintain readiness and strengthen their ability to respond effectively to children exposed to traumatic events.

### **The Duty of an Officer**

CMPD officers are required to thoroughly investigate and document every report of child abuse or neglect. When officers identify neglect, they contact and work with Department of Social Services (DSS) to ensure the child is placed with a safe and responsible caregiver. While North Carolina law allows caregivers to use reasonable and moderate discipline, officers must document and refer any signs of possible abuse to the DSS. As part of this investigative and reporting process, officers routinely share relevant information with DSS to ensure that each case is fully assessed by all appropriate agencies.

Initial investigations in cases involving injured minors requires officers to obtain written statements from adults and witnesses, photograph injuries, collect available evidence, conduct open-ended, nonconfrontational interviews with child victims in misdemeanor cases and perform complete background checks on all involved parties. Based on the injuries, statements and evidence collected, officers must determine whether abuse occurred and take enforcement

action when appropriate. When a suspect is not present at the scene, officers make reasonable attempts to locate and interview the individual; if probable cause exists, with or without that interview, they are required to present the case to a magistrate before the end of their shift. CMPD follows these procedures consistently to ensure thorough investigations and timely action in every child-related case.

### **CMPD's Crimes Against Children Unit**

The Crimes Against Children Unit (CAC) is responsible for investigating felony child abuse and all sexual offenses involving children under the age of sixteen. Detectives in this unit utilize specialized training and trauma-informed approaches to conduct sensitive interviews and manage complex investigations involving both physical and sexual abuse. The unit frequently collaborates with the Children's Advocacy Center of Charlotte (formerly Pat's Place), the Department of Social Services, the District Attorney's Office and local, state, and federal law enforcement partners to ensure a coordinated and effective response. As a safeguard, every report involving a crime against a child under sixteen is automatically reviewed by the CAC Unit.

CAC detectives are tasked with investigating each case objectively and thoroughly and bringing it to an appropriate and justified closure. Their responsibilities include maintaining strong working relationships with child-focused agencies and advocacy organizations, contacting victims or caregivers within one working day of receiving a case and ensuring their investigative practices remain lawful, ethical and consistent with CMPD policy. Detectives conduct joint investigations with DSS when appropriate and participate in Multidisciplinary Team (MDT) reviews and District Attorney roundtable meetings. CMPD executives also attend quarterly MDT meetings hosted by the Child Advocacy Center to support collaboration, strengthen partnerships and refine investigative processes across agencies.

CAC detectives also research cases to identify repeat reports or concerning patterns that may indicate ongoing risks to a child. Once a referral is made to DSS, the agency takes over its portion of the investigation. CMPD receives follow-up information only when DSS requests officer presence during a home visit or safety check, and the CMPD does not have an internal process for tracking DSS's progress after a referral. This approach maintains clear investigative boundaries while still ensuring necessary collaboration.

Crimes against children are among the most difficult investigations in law enforcement. The officers and investigators assigned to these cases are exposed to trauma most people will never encounter in their lifetimes. Imagine reporting to work each day knowing your assignment may involve the abuse or neglect of a child. Then imagine doing that work for years.

This is a responsibility they carry with profound professionalism and pride, grounded in the understanding of what is at stake and the children they are sworn to protect.

### **Department of Social Services Referral Processes**

CMPD officers must make a referral to the Department of Social Services (DSS) whenever they suspect child abuse, neglect, dependency, or exposure to violence. This requirement applies even when officers cannot confirm maltreatment and only suspect that something may be wrong. Under North Carolina General Statute § 7B-301, all individuals, including law enforcement officers, are mandatory reporters who must notify DSS of suspected child maltreatment. Reports include child and caregiver information, descriptions of injuries or concerning conditions and any other details relevant to DSS's response. No professional privilege, except for a narrow attorney client exception, overrides this duty to report.

When maltreatment is suspected, officers must notify DSS immediately and provide written follow-up within 48 hours if evidence of abuse, neglect or dependency is found. DSS and CMPD conduct joint investigations when reports involve caregivers, ensuring that law enforcement responsibilities and child protective responsibilities align. Best practice investigative steps include providing necessary medical assistance, notifying DSS, contacting juvenile investigators when applicable, taking temporary custody when legally allowed, photographing injuries and documenting conditions, utilizing child advocacy centers for forensic interviews and conducting professional, objective interviews throughout the investigation.

Information sharing between DSS and law enforcement is authorized under N.C.G.S. § 7B-3100, which allows agencies to exchange confidential information to protect children and coordinate investigations. This statutory framework ensures collaborative, timely and effective responses to reports of child maltreatment.

### **Supervisory Oversight**

Supervisors at CMPD review and approve every report to ensure accuracy, completeness and adherence to investigative standards. They also confirm that DSS referrals are made whenever appropriate. Monthly body worn camera (BWC) audits provide an additional layer of oversight, enabling supervisors to identify potential concerns and address them promptly. As part of CMPD's safeguards, all reports involving crimes against children under the age of sixteen are automatically reviewed by the Crimes Against Children (CAC) Unit supervisors.

CAC sergeants hold key responsibilities, including assigning and reviewing cases, ensuring timely and thorough investigative work, approving supplements and case

documentation, monitoring unit performance and providing ongoing feedback to detectives. They lead administrative compliance efforts, participate in Multidisciplinary Team meetings and other interagency coordination processes, and oversee evidence handling and documentation. This supervisory structure ensures strong accountability across all child-related investigations.

### **Child Fatality Review Teams**

Every child death in North Carolina is reviewed by a Multidisciplinary Team designed to identify preventability factors and improve system responses. If the case resulted in criminal charges, the review is conducted at the conclusion of the criminal prosecution. These teams include law enforcement representatives (from CMPD); staff from the local Department of Social Services such as child protective services specialists; medical professionals; child fatality staff from the North Carolina Office of the Chief Medical Examiner; injury prevention specialists; members of the local Community Child Protection Team (CCPT); and an impartial chair or coordinator, often from a county or public health department.

These reviews focus on determining whether the child's death was preventable, identifying lessons learned and strengthening system responses across agencies countywide. Their purpose is to strengthen collaborative practices, improve child safety and better protect children moving forward.

### **Recognizing Success**

We must recognize two realities at the same time.

First, protecting children requires vigilance and a commitment to continuous improvement. Every tragic case deserves conversations and discussions to identify opportunities to strengthen the systems that exist to safeguard vulnerable children.

Second, there are thousands of instances each year where intervention occurs before tragedy strikes because dedicated professionals take action. Officers, social workers, advocates, prosecutors, medical professionals, educators and others work every day to identify risks, protect children and connect families with critical support and services.

Last year alone, CMPD investigated 525 incidents where child abuse was reported. In 2025, CMPD made more than 5,000 referrals to Child Protective Services. Those numbers represent thousands of opportunities to intervene, assess risk and help protect children who may be in vulnerable circumstances.

Because of those efforts, children were placed in safer environments, offenders were brought to justice, families received support and situations that could have escalated were addressed before greater harm occurred.

We must continue to discuss tragedies openly because every child matters and every loss demands our attention. But we should also recognize the extraordinary work performed every day by those who have dedicated their lives to protecting children. Much of that work never makes headlines. It is reflected in the children who remain safe, the abuse that is interrupted, the families that receive help and the lives that are changed because someone saw a child in need and chose to act.

### **Our Commitment to the Community**

The death of Dominique Moody is one of the most tragic and horrifying cases I can recall in my career. A six-year-old child lost her life under unimaginable circumstances. While no action can undo this tragedy, we have a responsibility to learn from it and to strengthen every system, partnership and process that exists to protect vulnerable children.

That work belongs to all of us. Protecting children is not the responsibility of one agency, one profession, or one level of government. It requires law enforcement, child welfare professionals, educators, healthcare providers, prosecutors, community organizations, policymakers and citizens working together with a shared sense of purpose.

CMPD remains committed to that mission. We will continue to examine our practices, strengthen our partnerships, invest in training, support our officers and investigators and work alongside our child welfare partners to ensure that every concern is taken seriously and every opportunity to protect a child is pursued.

Thank you for your commitment to the children and families of North Carolina. CMPD stands ready to continue working with this Committee, the General Assembly and our community partners to strengthen child protection efforts and build a safer future for every child we are entrusted to serve.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Estella D. Patterson".

Estella D. Patterson  
Chief of Police