

**TO: Japer Bowles, Director of the Mayor's Office of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Questioning Affairs**

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**MPD Special Liaison Branch (LGBTQ Liaison Unit)**

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**Re: Treatment of Transgender and Nonbinary Individuals Detained Following Peaceful Demonstration on February 17th, 2026**

Dear Director Bowles,

On behalf of a coalition of **21 national and local organizations**, we write to express our deep concerns regarding the arrest and detention of twenty-five individuals who partook in a nonviolent, [peaceful demonstration](#) in front of the Hubert H. Humphrey Building on February 17, 2026. Although law enforcement maintains authority to manage public demonstrations and ensure the public's safety, neither the Metropolitan Police nor the Department of Homeland Security can discriminate against peaceful protesters based on their identity, viewpoint, or message. But credible reports regarding the mistreatment of the peaceful protesters who were detained for approximately twelve hours raises substantial concerns.

**Specifically, individuals report:**

- Discriminatory treatment of transgender, nonbinary, and gender-nonconforming individuals detained, including repeated misgendering and placement inconsistent with gender identity. This includes:
  - Improper gender classification and treatment, including officers assigning gender-specific cellblocks based on appearance and demanding individuals disclose their sex assigned at birth rather than recognizing their gender identity. This included individuals with an "X" gender marker on identification documents.
  - Placement in a single cell following disclosure of transgender identity, with some transgender individuals moved to single-cell housing after identifying themselves

as transgender. Assumptions about nonbinary individuals' gender, with officers treating them as women regardless of their stated gender identity.

- Denial of privacy for restroom use, with individuals reporting inadequate privacy where toilets located inside communal cells were visible to multiple other people in custody and lacked sufficient barriers for privacy, and where requests to access a more private restroom were denied.
- Evidence of disparate treatment toward Black individuals detained during the demonstration, including a Black man who was the only participant charged with resisting arrest, despite no such conduct occurring. Officers also required him to remove his shirt to photograph his tattoos. Additionally, a Black transgender woman was the only detained individual required to pay a fine.
- Physical injury resulting from prolonged or overly tight zip-tie restraints.
- Delayed access for several hours to appropriate food based on medical or dietary needs, and water.
- Lack of access to religiously compliant or dietary-appropriate food and water.
- Denial or delay for several hours of access to a phone call
- Demand for confidential personal information to be stated aloud, including Social Security numbers and legal names, in a manner that compromised privacy and confidentiality.
- Failure to follow standard booking or documentation procedures between DHS and MPD, including reports that some individuals were photographed on-site what seemed to be using personal cell phones rather than official department-issued equipment.

**The reported conduct raises serious concerns under the following District statutes and agency policies:**

- MPD General Order [GO-PCA-501.02](#) (Handling Interactions with Transgender Individuals): Requires that transgender arrestees be searched, transported, and housed consistent with their expressed gender identity, and mandates dignified, respectful treatment. Section C.3.b requires that transgender arrestees be housed separately in a cell located within the area designated for prisoners of the same gender identity. Reported misgendering and housing inconsistencies may violate this Order.
- [D.C. Human Rights Act](#) (D.C. Official Code § 2-1402.73): Prohibits discrimination based on gender identity or expression and race. Allegations of disparate treatment of transgender and Black detainees raise potential violations of this statute.
- [D.C. Code § 5-331.11](#) (Use of Restraints During Protests): Requires that restraints be necessary for safety and prohibits physically painful or restrictive positioning. Reports of excessively tight zip-tie restraints causing numbness or injury may implicate this provision.
- [DOC Policy PP 4070.1G](#) (Inmate Telephone Access): Guarantees reasonable and equitable access to telephones. Prolonged, unexplained delays in access to a phone call may be inconsistent with this standard.

- [MPD Policy on Professional and Respectful Conduct](#): Requires all interactions with LGBTQ+ individuals to be professional and free from profiling or discriminatory treatment.
- [DOC Policy on Food Service and Access to Potable Water](#) requires nutritionally adequate meals, access to drinking water, and accommodation of medical and religious dietary needs.

**Included in this letter are individual accounts from those directly impacted, shared to ensure their experiences are part of the official record.**

*“During processing, we were asked for our phone numbers. Some had the wherewithal to ask if it was required, and some of us just gave our numbers to DHS. I’m in the latter group, am a little concerned, and wish I had known better and asked whether it was a requirement.” — anonymous individual detained.*

*“I was arrested outside of the Health and Human Services building, by officers from the Department of Homeland Security, at 10:00 am on February 17, 2026. Two officers picked me off the ground. One officer asked if I had my ID, and then my hands were placed in plastic ties behind my back. I immediately told the officer that the left cuff was too tight, and he told me to stop moving my arm. I was then put into the right side of an MPD police wagon. Another woman was put into the wagon next to me. The DHS officers and an MPD officer kept arguing about how many people could be placed in the wagon. Five men were brought into the left side of the wagon. The woman next to me was taken out of the wagon and taken somewhere else. The doors of the wagon were closed, and we were taken to a DC Jail. We sat in the wagon for a long time before the doors were opened. A DHS officer and the MPD officer who drove the wagon were still arguing about numbers and kept counting the men. I realized they were completely ignoring me, so I asked to make sure I was also leaving the wagon. I was told I was staying there and would be moved to another jail. The MPD officer told me that the other women who were arrested at the protest were also taken away from this jail to another jail. I told the MPD officer a few more times that my cuffs were too tight and I could feel it cutting into my left wrist. She told me she could do nothing about the cuffs because she was not the arresting officer. I continued asking what was going to happen to me, where I was being taken, could she change my cuffs, could I stand up out of the wagon, could I have water, and I was told no, dismissed, or ignored. The MPD officer spent the whole time I was in the wagon complaining about the Department of Homeland Security. She was annoyed that she had to help them with their arrest; she was annoyed at how long it took them to do anything, waiting for me was wasting her time. There was a lot of animosity from the MPD officer towards DHS. I was arrested for sitting in front of an entrance to a building in protest, but I was treated from the beginning to the end like an animal. Like I was the scum of the earth. Like I was a waste of everyone’s time, dangerous, and mostly an annoyance. My human needs (water, space to stretch my legs, a bathroom, cuffs that didn’t cut my skin) were ruining their day. As I waited, more MPD cops exited the building, and each one would commiserate with my cop about the*

*incompetence of DHS. Everyone seemed annoyed and overwhelmed by the thought of having to do work. 25 people to be processed was too many, every single cop said. Eventually, a DHS officer came outside, and my MPD officer asked if he was going to take me away. He said no, confused to find out that there was someone sitting out there waiting. He rolled his eyes and said I wasn't his problem. My MPD officer begged him to take me so that she could move on with her day. He said he would take me and put me in his car to wait while they figured out what would happen with me, but that was it. I immediately told him that my cuffs were too tight and I was thirsty. I had been in the wagon for an hour, and I needed my cuffs off and water. He groaned and walked away. A few minutes later, he pulled up with his car, and I was taken out of the van. I asked about my cuffs two more times, and finally, they were removed. I didn't get to look at my wrists at all before the plastic cuffs were replaced with metal ones. This cop kept trying to convince me that he was going above and beyond for me. Like, he didn't have to be nice, but he was being nice, so I needed to cut him some slack. He kept bragging about how nice and comfortable his cop car was. My hands were still bound behind my back, and there was less leg room in the car than in the van. I asked for water again and was told he couldn't do anything for me. There was a case of water bottles in the police van. I stared at it for a long time; I know it was there. This officer drove me to the front of the police station. And there I sat in his car for another hour and a half. The whole time, he told me there was nothing he could do. He couldn't take me to a jail, he couldn't give me water, he couldn't tell me where I was going or where everyone else was or how long it was going to be. I listened to him call a few other cops and complain about having to do these arrests, complain about MPD, and generally confuse each other about where everyone was and where people were going. I kept hearing them say that all the women were at District 3, and I was supposed to join them. And then everyone was at District 3, but I was going to District 2, and then no, everyone was at District 2, but I was going to 3. No one knew what was going on. They had lost 25 people. They couldn't figure out where 25 people were going. They didn't have anywhere to put 25 people. They didn't know how to process 25 people. They had never done this before. I also watched them all text each other about the charges. They couldn't agree about this either. Some wanted to get us for two charges, some only 1. Someone was trying to argue that we should be charged for unlawful entry, no one entered a building. It was a mess. I asked again for water, and he said he only had his personal water bottle. I said he could go inside and he said he couldn't do that. Another DHS officer came by, and they complained together about the situation and MPD generally. He left. I said get me water. Second officer came back out, and my officer asked him to bring us a cup. Not a bottle of water or a cup of water, just a cup. Officer came back 20 minutes later and said there were no cups inside. He couldn't find a single cup in the whole precinct. My officer told me that if I wanted water, I would have to drink out of his personal water bottle. I did because I was desperate. Another long stretch of time waiting, two more officers say they can't come get me. I push my officer again, asking that he just drive me himself because this is holding up the whole process, and I want to get out of cuffs and his car. He says he can't because he is holding five bags of property for people at this jail. I ask if he can give those bags to his friend inside, who couldn't find a cup. He tells me he*

can't because that cop is already processing 6 bags,s and that could take him all day. I say he can take me to the other jail and then come back with the property. I guess he had never considered this possibility because he seemed interested in it. He thinks about it for a while and then calls his boss to ask if that's okay. His boss says yes, that would be great, but I am not doing to D3, I'm going to D2. I solved the biggest puzzle of DHS' day. After 3 hours, I am finally en route to the jail I will be held at. It's a 30-minute drive to this jail, and when we get there, MPD is not ready for us. Seemingly, no one told them that I was coming. We sat outside D2 for 15 minutes. My DHS officer complained about "city cops" the whole time. Finally, after approx. 3.5 hours, I was brought into a jail. After processing, they were about to put me in a cell by myself, but I asked to join the other women in the communal cell and the woman processing me allowed me to be with everyone else. Now that my cuffs were finally off, I could see that the plastic ties cut into my wrists. There was bruising and two cuts. It was then 8 more hours before we were all released from police custody. In that 8 hours, we were denied phone calls. I (a trans woman) was denied access to a private restroom. We had to fight to get water. Our officer told us we were bothering him asking for water." — **Birdie (she/her)**

"Birdie was originally taken to D1 in the first van. For some reason, she was separated from the group and put in a car alone to be taken to D3. Eventually, she was able to successfully advocate to be taken to D2 and held with the other women. The 3.5 hrs alone were in the back of a police car, handcuffed, no access to toilet or water until referenced above." — **an individual providing jail support**

"I didn't get my phone call, but was about to get one around 6-7 pm while getting fingerprinted, until a supervisor stepped in and said not to give me one until everyone was fingerprinted (which means I never got a call). The zip ties were so tight I had marks on my hand until the next day, and my thumbs are still numb today. I'm going to the doctor if it stays this way. We asked easily over a dozen times for our calls. They did not want to give us one and said we watched too much tv to think we get one." — **Eliel Cruz**

"I'm a trans man. When I was arrested, before being put in the paddy wagon, an officer asked my AO what my sex was, I began to answer myself, and he told me to be quiet, that he wasn't talking to me, and told my AO to check my license, which he reported had an M on it. I was then placed with other men, who were all cis. I was taken to a cell in D1, where I was with cis comrades, but also a rotating crew of 5+ other men. I did not feel safe using the bathroom in front of cis men, since I cannot pee standing up. I stopped drinking water because I knew I wouldn't be able to use the bathroom. I asked multiple times to be allowed to come out to use a different bathroom, but was denied. Another arrested man taunted me and told me to "be a man" and "shit in front of everyone"-- I did not feel safe telling an officer that I was trans while locked in this cell, because if they hadn't let me out, again, these other men would know, and I wasn't sure what could happen. I was not able to use the bathroom for over ten hours, and it was very painful. Finally, when I was taken for fingerprints, I told another officer that I was trans and begged to use the bathroom. They let me, and then put me in solitary. They

*said it was my responsibility to tell someone I was trans, and that I shouldn't have been in that cell. I never had a safe time to share that information, no one ever asked me a question about my gender identity. None of us ever got a phone call.” — Miller Oberman*

*“When I was being questioned by DHS police, I was asked my assigned at birth gender which I hesitantly told them that gender. When I arrived at MPD P1, I was sent to the male block and was put into a cell alone even though I made clear I identified as a woman.” — Kendall Martinez-Wright (she-her)*

*“As I was being processed and transfer from DHS to MPD, there was communication between the DHS officers and MPD. DHS was asking for my sex at birth, when I replied that my sex as designated by the state of New York is an X, the DHS officer replied, with something along the lines of “you’ve got to be kidding me” or “you’ve got to be fucking kidding me.” I honestly can’t remember if the f word was used. “ — anonymous individual detained.*

*“I was not permitted to make a phone call during my 11 hrs of detainment, despite personally asking on 2 separate occasions, including during my solo excursion to tahr photos and prints where there was clearly time for a 2 minute call.” — Michael Tikili*

*On February 17th, the DC Metropolitan Police Department and our arresting officers violated DC Code § 2-1402.73 and the MPD written directive GO-501.02 numerous times during my arrest. Arresting officers continuously pressured me to disclose “my biological sex at birth,” which is inconsistent with GO-501.02 and D.C. Official Code § 2-1402.73 When questioned aggressively about my “biological sex at birth,” I responded to the question by stating that I was a trans femme, and a DHS officer assisting my arresting officer replied with: “ You’ve got to be kidding me. I was then “processed and held” in a cell block in violation of GO-501.02, which states, “The cell shall be located in the cellblock area designated for prisoners with the same gender identity as the transgender prisoner.” I was put in a holding corridor/ cellblock with a sign that stated “male prisoners” and was held in a solitary cell for twelve hours.”—Mattie (she/her)*

*“Starting from arrest:*

*I was the second to be arrested and put in the back of the wagon. I’m not sure how long it took for them to fill up the wagon, but it took awhile. All of our hands were zip tied behind our backs, some of our ties were on far tighter than others. After they closed the doors, fps started driving us to D1. Once we got there, they started “processing” us. It started out as one officer. He was trying to be “friendly” while filling out our paperwork, but forced each of us to read our social security numbers out loud in front of the rest of the group. He also said he could only write our assigned sex at birth and that it didn’t matter what was on our ID or how we actually identified. Eventually another officer came to assist, but he was far more aggressive than the other. He was particularly aggressive towards Mattie. I was the last to have my paperwork filled out. Once completed, I was*

taken out of the wagon and brought partially into D1. There I was told I had to be taken to D3 because there was no room left in the "women's" cells (they refused to respect how identify/my pronouns). The officer asked "just this one? Not to D2?" to which they replied yes, D2 is full too. So I was under the impression that I was being completely separated from the whole group. They put me back in the wagon and drove around the parking lot while trying to communicate over the radio to figure out what was going on. About 45 min - 1 hour passed, the whole time my hands were still bound behind my back. Eventually another officer pulled up next to the wagon, and they pulled me out of the wagon to put me in the back of the cruiser to be transported to D3. I was put in the cruiser with my hands still behind my back. The officer (who I think was named walker) spoke over the radio with dispatch saying something along the lines of "starting route to D3, mileage is \*\*whatever his mileage was\*\* and the subject is alert and breathing". The drive was around 25-30 min, and during that time we talked some. He said he understood and respected what we were doing and that he was sorry things turned out this way (arresting us). He was the first officer to treat me like a person and respect how i identified. Eventually we reach D3 and are waiting about 10-15 min before metro pd came out and said that they weren't taking any protesters and they had to take me to D2. Walker got back in the cruiser and we drove around the block for awhile while he radioed to try and figure out what was going on, and all he heard back was a bunch of other officers clueless about what they were doing. One officer said that one of the people in our group was "in a bad way" (eventually I found out that was birdie). It was probably another 30 min of that before he was told to take me to D2. As we drove, walker brought up again that he understood what we were doing. His friend that he served with in the coast guard is trans and she was kicked out last year because she was trans and she's been having a really hard time. He talked about how upset that made him. The drive was around 20 min. When we reach D2, we have to wait in a line of cruisers for another 20-30 min before I'm brought inside. When inside, they search me and look at my paper work. It was then one of the officers asked me how I identified and I said what was on my license, M. She said "oh they filled this out wrong I'm so sorry" and corrected my paperwork to match that. Then they put me in a solitary cell with one window on the door and no bathroom. This cell was away from the other people in my group, who were all in the "women's" group cell (using quotes because that's what they referred to it as and not everyone in there identifies as women). There was a private bathroom outside of this room but I had to be let out to use it. It was probably around 2 hours before anyone came by to check on me and let me use the bathroom. They wouldn't answer my questions about what was happening/where they were in the process (later found that they didn't know because DHS was holding on to the paperwork). After the bathroom, they put me back in solitary for an unknown amount of time. It felt like hours. Eventually they take me out and put me in a small single cell across from the group cell and put a makeshift block screen in front of it for privacy. i could barely see anything but was able to partially see my group. We were there for hours before they finally started to process us. After about 12 hours, we were released with paperwork saying to show up to court. Weeks later, it turned out they messed up my paperwork and couldn't find me in the system. So when I showed up to court, they

*couldn't find my information for this case and released me (or no papered). However, they found that my post and forfeit from the Supreme Court action was labeled as never being resolved. They also had my name wrong, put my middle name as my first name and first name as my middle name. So now I have to work with a lawyer to get that fixed, which can take a long time. Otherwise this could complicate things for me in the future.” — Connor (they/he)*

**In light of the concerns outlined above, we respectfully request the following:**

1. A meeting within fourteen (14) days between representatives of the Mayor's Office of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Questioning Affairs, impacted activists, including transgender and nonbinary individuals, and coalition members, to hear directly about their experiences and discuss further action.
2. A formal review and revision of MPD policies governing the treatment of transgender, nonbinary, and gender-nonconforming individuals, with particular attention to gender classification practices, recognition of nonbinary identities (including "X" gender markers), and housing determinations consistent with expressed gender identity.
3. Mandatory retraining for all MPD officers on lawful and respectful treatment of transgender and nonbinary individuals, including:
  - a. Proper recognition of nonbinary and gender nonconforming identities
  - b. Prohibition on assigning gender based on appearance
  - c. Respect for stated gender identity rather than sex assigned at birth
  - d. Privacy protections during searches and menstrual care
4. A public statement from the Mayor's Office of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Questioning Affairs, through Director Japer Bowles, reaffirms the District's commitment to the dignity, safety, and equal treatment of transgender and nonbinary individuals in detention settings.

We look forward to your prompt response and the opportunity to discuss these urgent matters. We expect this matter to be addressed with the seriousness it deserves, ensuring that all individuals detained are treated respectfully and with dignity, consistent with the laws and values of the District of Columbia.

Signed,

**State and Local Organizations:**

Oasis Legal Services- California

Trans Voices- Houston, Texas

Katy Pride- Katy, Texas

GLAA- Washington, DC

ACLU-D.C.- Washington, DC

Godfrey-Smith Counseling & Gender Care- Washington, DC

Louisiana Trans Advocates- New Orleans, Louisiana

Trans Income Project- New Orleans, Louisiana  
DC LGBTQ+ Budget Coalition- Washington, DC

**National LGBTQ+ Organizations:**

Advocates for Transgender Equality

Gender Liberation Movement

NBJC

National LGBTQ Task Force Action Fund

Princess Janae Place

Thriving Transmen of Color

Trans Empowerment Project

Lawyers for Good Government

The LGBTQIA+ Cancer Network

Reframe Health and Justice

Democratic Messaging Project

Human Rights Campaign