



## DC Safe Surrender reached record numbers

By Reginald Johnson, DC Ex-Offender Re-Entry Examiner

"I got my outstanding warrant resolved, and they sent me on my way," said a returning citizen.

**Credits:** NBC Washington

Three Saturdays in Washington, D.C. netted the city with a record number of area residents who participated in a weekend program to aid them in resolving outstanding warrants and moving on with their lives.

In its final week, the District of Columbia Superior Court's Safe Surrender program survived an earthquake and Hurricane Irene.

Over the course of three Saturdays in August, 673 people managed to turn themselves in with hopes of clearing up outstanding warrants for nonviolent felonies and misdemeanors at the Moultrie Courthouse in Judiciary Square. Ninety-nine (99) percent of those who turned themselves in either had their warrants taken care of and/or were given court dates in the next few weeks. More importantly, they went home on the same day.

According to the program's Facebook page, on August 27th, the court received 268 surrenders, despite closing early before noon.

To date, 810 people have voluntarily surrendered since August 8th (this includes weekday surrenders, and 46 who turned themselves in on Monday). The first safe surrender, which was held at Bibleway Church in October 2007, netted 530 people who did a self surrender.

William Chaucer, a southwest D.C. resident said he brought three friends to resolve their outstanding warrants.

"I heard about the event on WTOP, and knew there were a few friends of mine that had warrants," he said. "After I talked to them, and explained that they would be better off, we made plans to come out here." He mentioned that one other friend was going to come, but decided not to because of the incoming hurricane.

Superior Court Chief Judge Lee Satterfield said that he was overwhelmed with the success of the program, and high level of public interest. He added the program staff and partnering agencies are still calculating the cost of running the program this month.

Chances of holding the program again soon are unlikely, due to its high expense.

Judge Satterfield said, "Our view is that people should turn themselves in immediately if they have a bench warrant outstanding." He went on to say, "It's an event that costs - although it's not unreasonable given the return, in my view - and people are responsible for turning themselves in and being held accountable."

Returning citizen, "Tracey" (real name not given) says she's glad the program took place.

"A program like this gives dignity to those who are looking to get these warrants resolved. They can come in and get their court stuff dealt with without having to be arrested at work, out amongst friends, or with your kids," she said.

During much of the 1990s Tracey had been arrested over ten times for misdemeanor offenses. She attributes her change to her last arrest in 1997. She said she pleaded guilty to drug possession and theft by receiving, and was sentenced to six (6) months at DC Jail. She said that experience was the lowest point of her life.

When she was released, she made a promise to her two daughters (then ages 5 and 7) that she was never going to leave them alone again.

She added, "I made a promise to my kids, and I've kept it. Things haven't been easy, but when they do get rough, I turn to family and we work something out."

With about 15,000 outstanding bench warrants remaining, it should be noted that the District's courts takes voluntary surrenders year-round.

If you're still interested in turning yourself in, please go to the DC Superior Court Building located at 500 Indiana Ave, NW, Room 4001 and let an attending staffer know you'd like to "safely surrender."

The program was a partnership between the Court Services and Offender Supervision Agency, Criminal Justice Coordinating Council, D.C. Public Defender Service, D.C. Superior Court, Metropolitan Police Department, Office of Attorney General, Pretrial Services Agency, U.S. Attorney's Office and the U.S. Marshals Service.