

D.C. Safe Surrender Program Provides a Second Chance

by: Linda Poulson Special to the AFRO

(Photos by D.C. Courts Media and Public Relations Department via Facebook)

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District residents with outstanding warrants now have an opportunity to surrender to resolve their problem.

The DC Safe Surrender program encourages all who are wanted for non-violent felonies or misdemeanors in the city to confront their indiscretions on one of three Saturdays in September at the D.C. Superior Court, 500 Indiana Avenue NW. The program has held similar events in 2007 and 2011.



Chief Judge Lee Satterfield giving opening remarks at news conference.

“DC Safe Surrender is an initiative focused on increasing public safety, and we hope to build on the success of the 2007 and 2011 programs,” said Chief Judge Lee Satterfield. “By taking responsibility for their actions, participants of Safe Surrender will demonstrate they are taking the appropriate steps towards becoming responsible members of the community. They will end the risk of being arrested at a traffic stop or on the job or in front of colleagues or family members.”

According to Satterfield, Safe Surrender helps the city by reducing outstanding bench and parole warrants, and treating those who surrender with dignity and professionalism. “The Safe Surrender is an extremely important initiative that is designed to help individuals who may have outstanding criminal justice matters to take care of those matters so that they won’t further complicate their daily lives,” said Tamar Meekins, deputy D.C. attorney general.

Satterfield; Meekins; U.S. Attorney Channing Phillips; Avis Buchanan, director of D.C. Public Defender Service; Michael Hughes, U.S. Marshal; Metropolitan Police Department Assistant Chief Kimberly Missouri; Nancy Ware, director of Court Services and Offender Supervision Agency; Cliff Keenan, Pretrial Services director; Councilmember Kenyan R. McDuffie (D-Ward 5); and Willie Jones, a 2007 Safe Surrender participant, were at the Sept. 7 press conference to announce the initiative for 2016.



Satterfield giving kudos to Willie Jones, 2007 Safe Surrender participant.

"In 2007 I had a drug case and I failed to go back to court which was a bench warrant," Jones told the *AFRO*. "I stayed on the run for a while and my brother called me about the program." Jones was facing a distribution of heroin charge.

The Safe Surrender program Jones joined in 2007 was at the Bible Way Baptist Church in Northwest D.C. He spent five hours there in which he spoke to an attorney and judge. After he answered questions, the judge set another court date for him. Jones received two years' probation. "Ninety-eight percent of the people who come in go home the same day," said Jones. "You get the warrant taken care of and you're a free man."

Non-violent offenses and misdemeanors of the program may include parole and drug violations, people not paying tickets, or not appearing in court. According to Phillips, there are more than 12,000 bench warrants out that are more than 10 years old.



U.S. Marshal Michael Hughes speaks to media at conference.

Persons not eligible to participate in Safe Surrender include those having warrants for a violent felony offense, juvenile matter, child neglect, or child support. People who are wanted on a warrant from Maryland, Virginia, other state jurisdictions, or from a court other than the D.C. Superior Court are not eligible.

The Safe Surrender program is scheduled for Sept. 17 and 24 between the hours of 9 a.m. and 4 p.m.

"I will be there for all the Saturdays to support those like I did in 2007 and 2011," Jones said. "Safe Surrender is a great program, it's a first step for a new beginning, the first step for a second chance . . . I ain't where I want to be, but I sure ain't where I used to be."