

Kensington Marshall Plan

July 18, 2023

My name is Keisha Hudson and I am proud to serve as the Chief Defender of the Defender Association of Philadelphia. I want to thank Chairman Jones, Vice Chair Johnson, and the rest of City Council for the opportunity to share our agency’s efforts and insights on how we can improve the quality of life for our clients and their families who reside in Kensington and what we could use from Council to accomplish our goals.

As you are aware, my office represents 70% of all adults arrested in Philadelphia. Our testimony today is focused on our clients who reside in Councilmanic District 7, which includes Kensington.

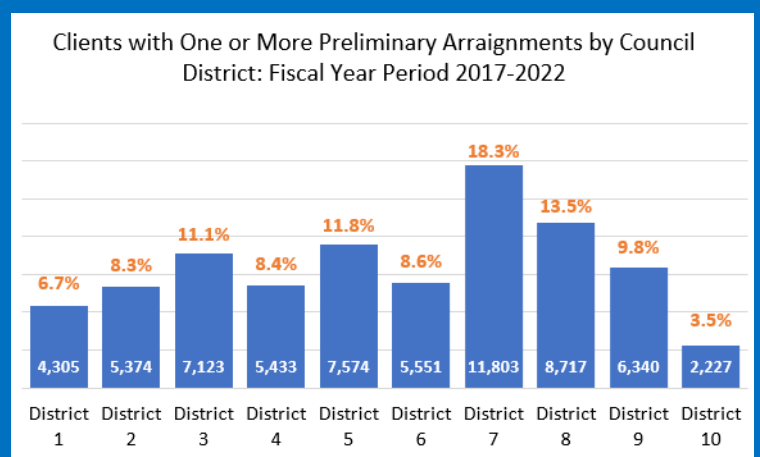
- **Approximately 18% of our clients each lived in District 7, primarily in Kensington.**
- **Between 2017 and 2022, our office represented 11,803 adults who lived in the neighborhood.**
- **The majority—53%—of our Kensington clients are White-Hispanic; 36% are Black Non-Hispanic; and only 11% of our clients in the district were White non-Hispanic.**

Because we are responsible for legal representation and mitigation on behalf of these community members, we have been able to gain unique insight into their needs. For example, we know that:

- **They are more likely to have been involved in the child welfare system and more likely to be arrested multiple times in the five-year period than peers who reside in other districts;**
- **18% of District 7 cases involve an arrestee with a child welfare history; and**
- **Slightly over half** of all arrests made in District 7 are people who have been arrested at least once before in the last five years.

Our direct experience demonstrates that we, as a city, and an office, need to do more to serve our clients who reside in and around Kensington. To that end, our office is working to prioritize maintaining the integrity of Black and Brown families; and building our capacity to use a place-based response system to trigger social service referrals for people who have multiple arrests in a one-year period or reside in and around Kensington and other neighborhoods with high levels of community violence.

FIGURE 1: ARRESTEES BY COUNCILMANIC DISTRICT



With this year’s investment from Council, **we will be able to staff all the child welfare courtrooms and continue to advocate on behalf of young people seeking return to their families.** We are also investing in a Youth Advisory Panel and are working to secure additional funding to provide young people, involved with the dependency systems, opportunities to serve as peer mentors for our current child clients. Our Junior Defender program provides 10 young people with a summer internship opportunity and next year we will prioritize slots for our previously dependent clients.

We are also leveraging those resources to explore strategies to safely reduce the prison population, working to embed trauma-centered lawyering to our practice, and continuing to partner with community organizations to serve our clients with substance use disorders and trauma histories.

Our clients who reside in and near Kensington have experienced years of disinvestment and institutional discrimination. In our experience, many obstacles to improving safety and quality of life are largely systemic and we could use City Council’s help in overcoming these barriers.

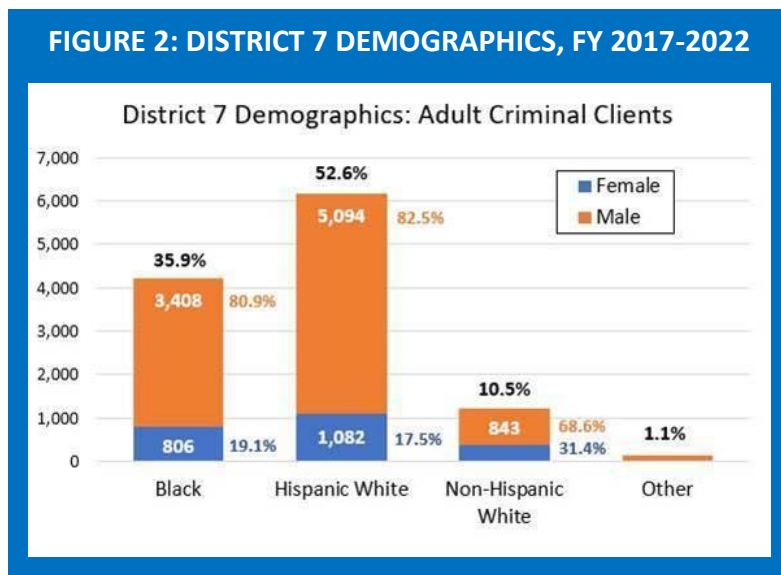
To overcome these obstacles, we recommend:

1. **Prioritizing justice system involved adults and their families for social services, including housing, workforce development, substance use and mental health treatment,**
2. **Ensuring all children and families who reside in areas with high levels of community violence have immediate access to culturally appropriate trauma treatment,**
3. **Investing in neighborhood-based, culturally appropriate services, especially housing and mental health and substance use treatment for children and families involved in the dependency or delinquency systems and**
4. **Reshaping policies which govern the ‘best interest’ of children to acknowledge the harm imposed upon them by separation from their families and neighborhoods.**

These recommendations are informed by both the unique challenges faced by clients who reside in Kensington and the relative weight that improvements in quality of life in the neighborhood will have on individuals, families, and the city of Philadelphia. Because **arrests in Kensington**

disproportionately impact justice system resources, prioritizing residents of this community for services will not just improve the safety and quality of life for residents of Kensington but allow us to reinvest criminal justice resources throughout the city.

FIGURE 2: DISTRICT 7 DEMOGRAPHICS, FY 2017-2022



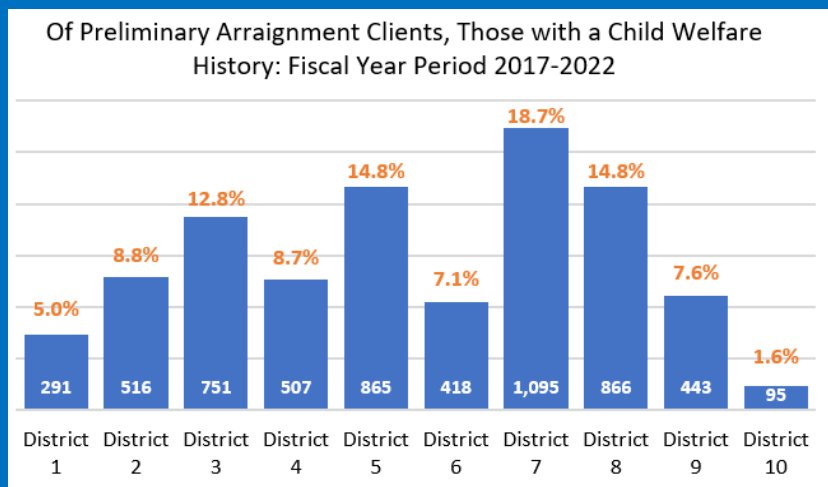
These investments will also help us achieve more equitable criminal justice case outcomes for our Latinx residents. Last year 85% of the adults we represented in criminal cases and 95% of the children we represented in delinquency cases were People of Color with 17% identifying as White Hispanic.

But in the last 5 years, White Hispanic people comprised 53% of our clients¹ residing in Councilmanic District 7.

Our Kensington clients experience more frequent and extended entanglement with the criminal legal system than our other clients. We attribute this to systemic barriers to housing, employment, and accessible, affordable, culturally appropriate healthcare (including substance abuse and mental health treatment). Adopting a place-based model that prioritizes residents who are returning to their communities following periods of incarceration for supportive services will address the obstacles they face to successful re-entry.

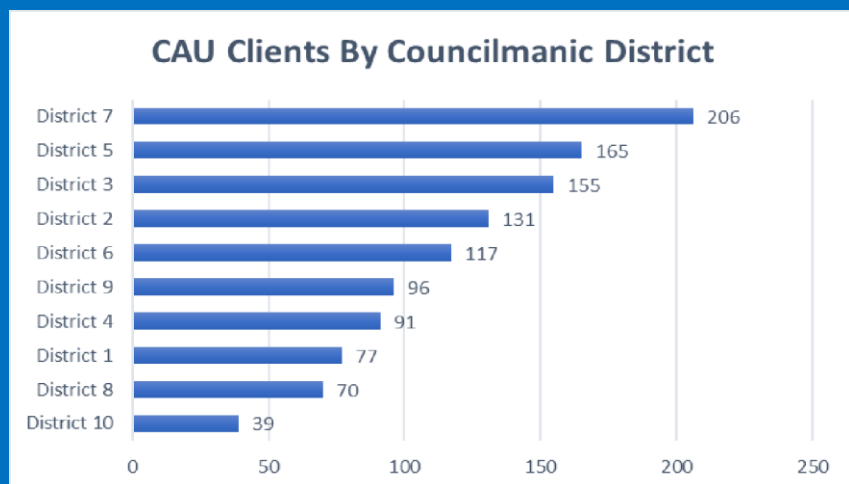
Our clients, particularly those who reside in Kensington, need trauma-centered care to be embedded in city and community based service delivery systems, in part because they have the city's highest rates of childhood involvement in the dependency system. For example, 19% of our clients residing in District 7 have a history of involvement with the child welfare system when they were children, but only 12% of our overall adult client population do.

FIGURE 3: ADULT ARRESTEES WITH CHILD WELFARE HISTORY



Children and families involved in the dependency system who reside in Kensington also need to be prioritized for services that support family reunification and keep children in their home neighborhoods. Conditions of poverty, which lead to child neglect, often drive families into the child welfare system. These services need to support and respect the integrity of families—who are largely Latinx—that reside in Kensington. To repair and

FIGURE 4: CHILD WELFARE CLIENTS BY DISTRICT



preserve the social fabric of the neighborhood, we need more community-based services that can

¹ This includes 11,743 clients for whom demographic data is available.

serve as an alternative to justice system-involved youth, children and families involved in dependency.

We must also look at the overlapping nature of dependency and justice system involvement and prioritize service delivery and financial investment in the spaces where we see high rates of community level violence, child welfare cases, and use of controlled substances. We see extraordinary overlap in the places where we note the largest number of arrests for drug-related behaviors and removals of children from their homes.

Thank you again for inviting us to share our perspectives, insights and data on some of the issues contributing to the conditions in Kensington. As you can see, there are myriad complex challenges that will require a citywide commitment and approach to address. Our office welcomes any and all of you to reach out with any additional questions or a more in-depth discussion of the issues we raised here today. We appreciate the trust and support Council has given to us to be innovative and thoughtful in our representation of our city's most vulnerable citizens and look forward to partnering with you on solutions that will create a safer Kensington and Philadelphia.