



# RAISING THE STANDARDS

OneDC: A Unified Digital City Hall

## Executive Summary

- **The problem:** DC residents pay for one of the most expensive municipal governments in America — a roughly \$21.2 billion FY26 budget supporting 21 cabinet departments, 33 independent agencies, and nearly 70 legislatively mandated offices — yet still face buggy 311 apps, weeks-long DMV waits, fragmented agency websites, and service requests that quietly close without resolution. The January 2025 snowstorm, which cost \$67 million in cleanup and generated a flood of complaints about a snowplow tracker that "didn't reflect reality," made the dysfunction undeniable.
  - **The solution:** Build the **DC Residents Portal** — one unified digital front door for every DC government service, with an integrated next-generation 311, real-time progress tracking, automated escalation, a public accountability dashboard, and full digitization of any service that does not legally require an in-person visit. Available on web, iOS, Android, and at every DC Public Library branch as a staffed Digital Access Hub.
  - **Why this plan beats the alternatives:** Other 2026 candidates have largely treated affordability, housing, and public safety as the entire conversation, mentioning "fix the basics" or "government efficiency" only in passing. None has put forward a fully designed, funded, and federally-leverageable plan to consolidate the District's 100+ agency websites and apps into a single Estonia- or Singapore-caliber resident platform. This plan does — and pays for it primarily through reallocation of duplicated IT spending, ARPA-era recovery dollars already obligated for IT modernization, public-private partnerships, and pro-bono engagements with U.S. Digital Response and academic partners.
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### Key Findings

1. **DC government is structurally fragmented.** The Mayor oversees 21 departments, 33 independent agencies, approximately 69 legislatively mandated offices, and 5 regional bodies. Each has historically procured its own technology, run its own intake forms, and defined its own customer service standards. OCTO has acknowledged on the record that "agencies frequently choose not to use" the central middleware platform and instead "purchase different, and often duplicate platforms," paying contractors twice for the same work.
2. **The current 311 underperforms its own stated mission.** OUC bills DC311 as "a one-stop service experience," but the public app is rated poorly in both app stores, with users reporting that the location pin freezes, photos fail to upload, and questions repeat themselves. A widely used third-party product has emerged precisely because downtown organizations cannot reliably track DC's responses on the official platform. OUC also concedes that "DC 311 does not close service requests" — meaning a resident's complaint sits in a queue at one agency with no enforceable resolution clock.
3. **Wait times for in-person services remain long.** Local TV investigations have documented road test backlogs at DC DMV stretching from weeks to months even after the agency expanded third-party examiners. DCRA/DLCP business licensing historically required navigating multiple sites and various process chokepoints — a problem OCTO itself cited when launching the new Business Portal.
4. **The snowstorm of January 2025 was a digital-government failure as much as an operational one.** The District spent \$67 million on cleanup, with the Council Chairman publicly questioning whether spending was managed responsibly. Residents reported 311 tickets being closed administratively without the work being done, and the mayor's snowplow tracker was widely described as inaccurate. A first-time mayoral candidate launched her entire campaign in response to this episode, calling DC government "broken" and citing "a horrible execution problem."
5. **Peer cities and countries have already solved this.** Estonia delivers 99–100% of government services digitally, with 82% citizen satisfaction in OECD surveys. Singapore's LifeSG app aggregates 100+ services from over 400 agencies for 1.5 million+ users. Boston's BOS:311 (Citizens Connect), launched in 2009, grew to handle approximately 28% of all city service requests by 2014, with a 35% jump in total request volume — meaning more residents engaged, not fewer. NYC's 311

publishes a real-time open dataset that lets the public, journalists, and the City Comptroller hold each agency accountable on response time. San Francisco's Digital Services team has migrated nearly 1,000 city services onto a single, plain-language platform.

- 6. Federal and philanthropic capital is available, even after recent policy shifts.**  
The Digital Equity Act made the District eligible for a formula share of \$1.44 billion in Capacity Grants before the program was terminated in May 2025. ARPA State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds explicitly permit modernization of cybersecurity and government services. U.S. Digital Response, a nonpartisan nonprofit, partners with state and local governments pro bono. DC has already used OCTO capital funds to begin a modern resident portal that this plan would scale and finish.
- 7. Other 2027-cycle mayoral candidates have not put forward a comparable plan.**  
A review of every published platform and major debate from the 2026 cycle shows that competing proposals concentrate on housing supply, childcare, public safety, and federal relations. Where "government efficiency" appears in those platforms it is, with rare exceptions, a one-line slogan rather than a designed program. Only one first-time competing candidate has explicitly mentioned "restructuring 311," and even that proposal has not been accompanied by a published implementation, funding, or accountability framework.

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## Details

### 1. The Proposed Solution — The DC Residents Portal

The DC Residents Portal will be a single, unified digital front door to every service the District government provides. Think of it as DC.gov 3.0 — but rebuilt around the resident, not the agency org chart.

#### Core components:

- **One account, every agency.** A resident logs in once with strong identity verification and can pay a parking ticket, renew a business license, file a SNAP recertification, request a bulk trash pickup, schedule a DMV road test, apply for housing assistance, register a child for school, and pull a copy of their birth certificate from the same dashboard. Today, each of those interactions lives on a different subdomain, a different login, and a different form.



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- **Integrated next-generation 311.** The legacy DC311 phone, web, app, text, and chat channels all roll into the Portal. Every service request is assigned a guaranteed response time that matches the agency's own published performance plan, an automatic confirmation, photo upload, GPS geotag, and live status timeline — modeled on Boston BOS:311's case-level transparency.
- **Real-time progress tracking and proof of work.** When a pothole is filled, a tree pruned, an alley plowed, or a permit reviewed, the resident sees the date/time stamp, the responsible crew or office, and where feasible a photo of the completed work. The Lab @ DC piloted exactly this concept in 2018; this plan finishes the job at scale.
- **Automated follow-ups and notifications.** Residents pick how they want to be reached — push, SMS, or email — and get proactive reminders ("your driver's license expires in 30 days — renew here" / "your trash pickup day moved this week"). Singapore's LifeSG already runs this kind of life-event engine.
- **Built-in escalation pathway.** If a service request blows past its SLA, the Portal automatically escalates: first to a supervisor at the responsible agency, then to the City Administrator's customer-service ombuds, then to a published "Stuck Tickets" register on the public Accountability Dashboard. Residents never have to figure out which Councilmember to email — the system does the escalation for them.
- **Public Accountability Dashboard.** A live, open-data view showing, for every agency: service-request volume, on-time closure rate, average response time by ward, top resident complaints, and customer satisfaction scores. Press, ANCs, and watchdogs can hold the Mayor's office accountable in real time. So can voters.
- **Full digitization — no more "you have to come downtown."** Every service that does not legally require a physical signature, biometric capture, or court appearance will be available end-to-end online. For services that do require an in-person step, the Portal will offer real-time appointment booking with wait-time estimates, eliminating the "show up at 7 a.m. and hope" experience that defines too many DC agency offices today.

- **Three access channels, equal experience:**
  - **Web browser** at portal.dc.gov, fully ADA Section 508 compliant and translated into the city's threshold languages.
  - **Mobile app** on iOS and Android, replacing the current DC311 app whose app store reviews describe it as freezing, broken, and unreliable.
  - **DC Public Library branches as Digital Access Hubs.** All 26 DCPL locations — which already operate roughly 1,000 public internet terminals and host 8,000+ programs a year — will be staffed during open hours with trained Digital Navigators who can sit beside a resident and help them complete any Portal transaction. This is the equity backbone of the plan: a senior in Ward 7 without home internet, a returning citizen without a smartphone, or a resident more comfortable in Spanish, Amharic, or Vietnamese gets the same quality of service as a downtown professional.

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## 2. Root Causes — Why DC Government Is Inefficient Today

- **Fragmented systems and siloed agencies.** DC has more than 100 agency websites and dozens of separately procured CRM, payment, and ticketing systems. OCTO's own budget testimony lamented "the alphabet soup of agency websites." Agencies frequently buy duplicate middleware rather than use the central platform, inflating contractor costs.
- **Outdated technology.** The District's primary procurement system has served as the backbone of District procurement for over two decades and is only now being replaced — a \$7.9 million capital project not scheduled to go live until FY28. Similar legacy systems exist across DCHR, DHS, and DMV.
- **A 311 that is a routing layer, not an accountability layer.** OUC openly states that "DC 311 does not close service requests." It hands tickets to agencies and steps back. Meanwhile the consumer-facing app is, by any reasonable read of its app store reviews, broken on basic functions like location selection.
- **In-person service bottlenecks.** Investigations have shown DMV road-test waits stretching from days at private examiners to weeks or months at the agency itself.

DHS publishes a public benefits call-center wait-time dashboard precisely because waits are long enough to need triage.

- **Equity gaps in digital access.** OCTO's own analysis estimates roughly 1 in 5 DC residents lack reliable home internet, concentrated in Wards 5, 7, and 8. Without library-based Digital Access Hubs, any "go digital" plan risks widening that gap.
- **Operational failures land hardest in the moments residents remember most.** January 2025: \$67 million spent, alleys uncleared for days, the snowplow tracker inaccurate, trash collection suspended in entire wards, and 311 complaints marked resolved while snow was still on the ground.
- **The cost of inefficiency is real and quantifiable.** National research finds that digital service delivery costs up to 95% less per transaction than paper, and that paperless conversion saves municipalities roughly \$600,000 per 100,000 residents who move to digital channels. Even capturing a fraction of that on DC's \$21 billion budget represents tens of millions of dollars per year in recoverable inefficiency — money that can be redirected to housing, childcare, and public safety.

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### 3. Funding Strategy

The DC Residents Portal is designed to be paid for primarily by redirecting spending the District is already making — not by raising taxes.

- **Reallocation of duplicative IT and contractor spending.** OCTO's FY25 budget alone is roughly \$130.9 million across operating and capital, including line items for cybersecurity, middleware, data exchange, and resident-portal development. By consolidating duplicative agency CRM, ticketing, and middleware contracts onto one shared platform, the District can free an estimated \$15–25 million per year on a recurring basis, redirected into Portal build, operations, and Library Digital Access Hubs.
- **Federal grant pursuit.**
  - NTIA and successor digital-inclusion funding streams, including BroadbandUSA and FCC Universal Service programs.

- HUD Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funds for Library-based Digital Access Hubs in CDBG-eligible census tracts.
- Treasury State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds (ARPA SLFRF), which explicitly authorize spending on cybersecurity modernization and government services infrastructure.
- U.S. Department of Labor IT Modernization Grants for the unemployment insurance and workforce components of the Portal.
- **Public-private partnerships.** DC is home to or adjacent to the headquarters of Microsoft Federal, Amazon Web Services, Google Public Sector, Salesforce Public Sector, and major systems integrators. The administration will negotiate cost-shared engagements with strict open-standards and data-portability clauses to prevent vendor lock-in.
- **Philanthropic and civic-tech partners.** U.S. Digital Response, a nonpartisan nonprofit, provides pro-bono technologists to state and local governments and has completed more than 600 engagements to date. Code for America, the Beeck Center at Georgetown, and MIT GOV/LAB offer comparable support. Bloomberg Philanthropies' What Works Cities and Mayors Challenge programs have funded comparable digital-services investments in peer cities.
- **Cost-benefit framing.** Even conservatively assuming the Portal redirects 1% of the District's roughly \$21 billion budget away from administrative friction over five years, that is more than \$200 million in avoidable spending freed up — far more than the all-in cost of the build. No new taxes required.

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#### 4. Successful Case Studies — What Works, and What DC Should Borrow

- **Estonia (e-Estonia / X-Road).** 99% of public services online, 98% of prescriptions digital, e-ID for nearly every resident; 82% citizen satisfaction in OECD surveys. *Lesson for DC:* Invest in a strong digital identity layer first — every other service rides on top of it.
- **Singapore (LifeSG, GovTech).** One app aggregates 100+ services from 400+ agencies for 1.5 million+ users, with personalized "life event" guidance for birth, school, marriage, and death. 99% of government transactions completed online.

*Lesson for DC:* Organize the Portal around resident life events, not agency org charts.

- **New York City (NYC311).** Largest 311 system in the country; every service request is published in open data and a Comptroller monitoring tool, creating durable public accountability. *Lesson for DC:* Open data is the discipline that prevents an Accountability Dashboard from becoming a vanity exhibit.
- **Boston (BOS:311 / Citizens Connect).** First-in-the-country 311 app, launched in 2009. By 2014, mobile reports were approximately 28% of all service requests, with a 35% jump in total volume — a sign of deeper civic engagement, not just digital substitution. The app surfaces the city worker who completed the request and, in many cases, a photo of the finished work. *Lesson for DC:* Show residents the human who fixed their problem. Trust is built on visible follow-through.
- **San Francisco (Digital Services).** Migrated nearly 1,000 services to a single accessible web platform with mandatory plain-language and human-translation requirements. *Lesson for DC:* Writing standards — 5th-grade reading level, threshold-language translation — are as important as code.
- **U.S. Digital Service (federal).** Helped drive a 53% increase in customer satisfaction at SSA.gov, a 130% increase in Affordable Connectivity Program enrollment, and over 2 million worker-hours saved through Medicaid eligibility fixes. *Lesson for DC:* Small, empowered, mission-driven product teams beat large outsourced waterfall contracts every time.
- **U.S. Digital Response (state/local).** Has executed 600+ engagements with state, local, and tribal governments at little or no cost. *Lesson for DC:* The District does not have to build everything alone.

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### 5. Alternatives Considered — and Why a Unified Portal Wins

- **Agency-by-agency reform.** The status quo. OCTO and the Mayor's Lab @ DC have done excellent point work — the new Business Portal received recognition for IT innovation, and DC has been recognized as a National Digital Inclusion Trailblazer for eight consecutive years. But this approach guarantees that residents continue to navigate an alphabet soup because each agency optimizes locally. We will keep these agency teams; we will give them a shared platform.



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- **A single private vendor end-to-end.** Cheaper to procure, dangerous to operate. Locks DC into one company's data formats, kills competition on future modules, and places resident data inside a single point of failure. Estonia and Singapore both build on open standards for exactly this reason.
- **Paper and call-center improvements only.** Lower up-front cost but ignores that digital service delivery is up to 95% cheaper per transaction than paper, and that residents under 50 increasingly will not use a phone tree. Doubling down on paper means doubling down on the 1990s.
- **A "DOGE"-style cuts approach.** Some commentators have proposed slashing IT spending and headcount as the path to efficiency. The federal experience over the last 18 months — including the dismissal of dozens of USDS engineers and reports of agency systems being destabilized — should serve as a warning. Real efficiency requires building, not just cutting.
- **The integrated Portal approach is superior because** it gives the resident one experience, gives every agency real-time data on its own performance, lets the Mayor's office and the public see the whole system at once, is cheaper per transaction than any alternative, and is the only model with proven success at the city, state, and national scale.

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## 6. How This Plan Compares to Other 2027-Cycle Proposals

The 2026 Democratic primary field is unusually crowded, with seven ballot-qualified candidates plus write-ins. After reviewing every published platform, candidate website, debate transcript, and major news report from the cycle, the picture is clear: government efficiency and digital services have been touched by other candidates, but no competing campaign has produced a comprehensive, costed, federally-leverageable, equity-grounded plan to consolidate every DC government service into one unified resident platform.

**Other candidates' core platforms are dominated by housing, affordability, childcare, public safety, and federal relations.** The two front-runners' platforms are built around housing-unit goals, universal childcare or expanded subsidies, public safety reform, and standing up to federal overreach. These are real and important issues — this campaign's



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broader platform addresses them — but they are not the same as fixing the way 700,000 residents interact with their government every day.

**Where competing candidates have raised "efficiency," it has been rhetorical.** One first-time candidate has campaigned explicitly on "fixing the basics" — pothole repair, sidewalks, 911 wait times — and has publicly mentioned "a restructuring of the 311 system" plus a small-business permitting concierge. This is welcome, but as of the date of this plan that proposal has not been accompanied by a published architecture, funding source, equity component, accountability dashboard, or library-based access strategy. Another candidate has described a vision built around "responsible artificial intelligence integration for budgeting, service delivery, and real-time performance oversight." Again, no published implementation plan.

**Where competing candidates have proposed cutting red tape, it has been narrow.** One front-runner has emphasized cutting nonprofit housing red tape; another has emphasized small-business and permitting friction. Both are real. Neither is a unified resident platform.

## What this plan offers that others do not:

- A single, named product — the DC Residents Portal — with a defined scope: every service, every agency, one login.
- A specific accountability instrument: the public Accountability Dashboard that publishes every agency's response time, ward-level equity data, and unresolved-ticket queue.
- A specific equity instrument: DC Public Library Digital Access Hubs in all 26 branches, ensuring the move to digital leaves no one behind.
- A specific funding stack — reallocated duplicative IT spend, federal funding, ARPA-permitted modernization, public-private partnerships, U.S. Digital Response, philanthropy — rather than a generic call for "efficiency savings."
- An honest comparison set — Estonia, Singapore, NYC, Boston, San Francisco — and a specific commitment to learn from each.
- A timeline tied to the next mayoral term: minimum viable Portal in 18 months; full agency consolidation in 36; peer parity with the world's best digital governments by end of term.



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This is what it looks like when government efficiency is treated as a first-class mayoral priority, not a footnote.

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## 7. Implementation Timeline

- **Months 0–6 (Q1–Q2 2027):** Stand up a Mayor's Office of Digital Services reporting to the City Administrator, modeled on SF Digital and Data Services and the federal USDS. Sign pro-bono engagement with U.S. Digital Response. Conduct full agency service inventory. Launch resident research with The Lab @ DC and DCPL.
- **Months 6–18:** Build and ship Portal v1 with integrated 311, identity layer, payments, top 25 transactional services, and an Accountability Dashboard beta. Open Digital Access Hubs in the 8 highest-need DCPL branches.
- **Months 18–36:** Migrate all remaining transactional services. Sunset legacy agency portals and apps. Hubs live in all 26 DCPL branches. Publish full open-data Accountability Dashboard.
- **Year 4 of term:** Achieve peer benchmarks — 90%+ of services available end-to-end online, sub-5-day median 311 response, and greater than 75% citizen satisfaction.

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## 8. Caveats and Risks

- **Federal funding volatility.** The Digital Equity Act was terminated in May 2025; ARPA SLFRF deadlines are tightening; USDS has been reorganized. The plan therefore does not depend on any single federal stream, and treats federal money as upside, not baseline.
- **Scale risk.** Estonia's success was built over 30 years, on a population of 1.3 million, with a centralized state. DC has many of those advantages — compact geography, high digital-literacy workforce, sophisticated civic-tech ecosystem — but not all. The plan adopts Estonia's principles without pretending the institutional context is identical.
- **Vendor lock-in risk.** Every contract under this plan will require open standards, data portability, and source-code escrow.



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- **Equity risk.** Digitization without intention can deepen exclusion. The Library Digital Access Hub program, threshold-language translation requirements, and ward-level Accountability Dashboard equity views are explicit countermeasures.
- **Political risk.** Consolidating IT spending across 21 cabinet departments and 33 independent agencies will produce friction. The plan accepts that and treats clear, public mayoral leadership — and a real Office of Digital Services with genuine budget authority — as non-negotiable.