At the heart of the DMV region, the District of Columbia currently counts more than 670,000 residents. With 1,000 moving to the city every month, the District is growing at a rapid pace. The VoicesDMV survey results for the District reflect a community that is wrestling with this growth and its impacts on our neighbors—both positive and negative.

HIGHLIGHTS, CHALLENGES, AND OPPORTUNITIES

People in the District are happier in their neighborhood and with their surroundings and amenities than many of their neighboring jurisdictions. Residents of DC were most likely to want to remain in their current neighborhood (59 percent), if given the choice of moving somewhere in the near future. Residents of the suburban jurisdictions were more likely to say they would leave the DMV (23 to 30 percent), compared with people in DC (14 percent), if given the opportunity to live anywhere they wanted.

DC residents also reported high uptake of nonprofit services compared to other jurisdictions, with more than half the population doing so at least once in the past year.

On the flip side, District residents were less likely to note the availability of good jobs as a positive aspect of the jurisdiction, with 19 to 23 percent in the surrounding jurisdictions noting this as a positive versus only 10 percent in DC. Traffic was by far the top complaint in the suburban jurisdictions, but in DC, people ranked traffic, crime and safety, and the cost of living more evenly as the worst things.

Safety was a greater concern for residents in DC and Prince George’s County (33 and 40 percent) than the other jurisdictions (9 to 14 percent). Interestingly, people in suburban jurisdictions were more likely to list “too many people,” revealing concerns about congestion, overpopulation, and overdevelopment (8 to 11 percent) than DC residents (4 percent).

The survey responses in the District show a community of great wealth as well as a community that is leaving behind many vulnerable residents. When asked what would happen if they lost their current sources of income, 35 percent of DC respondents noted they could not get by for more than two months—much higher than in some suburban jurisdictions.

Although most people in the VoicesDMV survey reported they were doing well enough to not have to worry about basic needs, 18 percent said they did not have enough money for either food or housing at some point in the past 12 months. Food and housing insecurity were higher for Hispanics and blacks and for people living in Prince George’s County or DC.
ISSUE FOCUS: DISCRIMINATION

Like other jurisdictions, the District reported high relative levels of perceived discrimination, with 26 percent of respondents noting they felt discriminated against in the past year. While every jurisdiction ranked discrimination because of race and ethnicity as most common, in the District there were relatively higher numbers of people reporting discrimination based on gender (61 percent), appearance (49 percent), and sexual orientation or gender identity (25 percent).

DC respondents were more likely to report feelings of unfair treatment by law enforcement than in other jurisdictions. While regionally, 17 percent of residents in the DMV reported their daily life was “somewhat” or “a lot” affected by the fear that they themselves or a loved one would be arrested or questioned by police, more than a quarter of DC respondents felt this way.

CIVIC ENGAGEMENT AND COMMUNITY PRIORITIES

District-based respondents are very civically engaged, with 26 percent of respondents noting they felt they had “great” or “moderate” influence over local government decisionmaking, much higher than in most surrounding jurisdictions.

“[DC is] great if you have the means – access to food, a safe environment, money. It is very challenging if you don’t have money.”

District-based respondents were more likely than people from other jurisdictions to say that issues such as helping people with basic needs and employment should be high or extremely high priorities for local government. And while they still ranked among the lowest-rated issues, residents of DC exceeded all other jurisdictions in saying that green issues such as protection from pollution and bike safety should be “extremely high” priorities for local government.