

**Testimony of Andrew Schichtel
Executive Director, Casey Trees**

May 1, 2026

**Budget Oversight Hearing for the District Department of Energy & Environment
Committee on Transportation and the Environment**

Good morning and thank you Chairperson Allen for your commitment to environmentalism in Washington, DC. We appreciate your interest in our programs and their efficacy in the District. My name is Andrew Schichtel, I'm the Executive Director at Casey Trees, and a resident of Historic Anacostia in Ward 8.

Washington, DC is known for its vibrant parks, lush tree canopy, and commitment to sustainability—qualities that make our city healthy and resilient. This placement and position of our city as a green oasis happened because the District has been proactive and consistent with our investments in environmental priorities – assets that now make DC an exceptional place to live, do business, and visit.

The proposed budget threatens to undermine decades of progress by making dramatic cuts to the very programs that protect our environment, support public health, ensure green jobs and build climate resilience. The Department of Energy and Environment is facing a 28% budget reduction, compounded by the fact that many federal funds will be left unspent because there is no local commitment of funds to match. This means many DOEE programs are set to be abandoned or severely underfunded. These programs are critical to our communities, particularly those disproportionately experiencing climate and health impacts.

Pulling back now and redirecting special purpose funds is going to make our city less sustainable, our most vulnerable residents less resilient, and our city's children less knowledgeable about their environment. While we want to see all of DOEE's funding restored, we are particularly concerned about the future of the following green investments:

DOEE is the only agency funding applied environmental education for our city's children. The Nature Near Schools grants help get 4th and 5th grade kids outside and learning about our environment. This programming takes place at Title 1 schools, with the assistance of over seven non-profit partners, including Casey Trees. These funds are once again set to be slashed from a funding high two years ago, reducing the number of children served. **We ask Council to help us get kids outside and engaged in our environment and fully restore these funds in FY27.**

DOEE is also the primary agency tasked with managing the city's natural spaces, the remaining woodlands, wetlands, and meadows that are urban sanctuaries for biodiversity and connect our residents to nearby nature. They manage invasive plant species and train partners in this work, building green jobs and funding them through Park Maintenance Grants. **This year, Park Maintenance Grants are set to be eliminated, and invasive plant management funds cut in half.**

In addition, DOEE's Green Infrastructure Maintenance Program is also zeroed out for a second year in a row, effectively undermining the investments the District has already made in stormwater management by reducing our capacity to meet MS4 permit requirements, putting into jeopardy federal funding that requires local match, and reducing green jobs and training for our residents most in need. **The District has dedicated years of work and investment in the green fabric of our city; our green infrastructure requires ongoing care and maintenance, just like our grey infrastructure. Collectively, these cuts send the message we are abandoning that work.**

Historically, DOEE's budget has largely been funded by fees accrued in Special Purpose Revenue funds (SPRs) as well as federal funds. Unlike many agencies, DOEE programs are largely self-funding. Many of these SPRs, such as the Stormwater Fee, are meant to fund mitigation activities to offset environmental impacts. However, as with the cost of living, these mitigation activities have faced increased costs and so the fees should be updated to reflect those rising costs. Otherwise, we are shortchanging our environmental and mitigation programs incrementally until they are rendered ineffective.

Protecting our environment, clean air, and clean water is paramount. The investments we make today will pay dividends in public health, community, and climate resilience for generations to come. Without action now, we risk losing the progress we've made and leaving future generations with a less healthy, less resilient city. Let's not leave our city's future behind.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.