



September 18, 2013

chairman's update

the NEWSLETTER of
DC Council Chairman Phil Mendelson

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Budget Accomplishments Taking Effect Soon

The Budget for Fiscal Year 2014, which begins in less than a month, was my first as Council Chairman. I am responsible for synthesizing the recommendations of the Council's Committees, brokering differences with the Mayor, and putting together the final proposal for Council consideration. I think we did rather well this year.

I am most pleased that, beginning October 1st, the District's sales tax will be reduced from 6 percent to 5.75 percent. I remember the days when our sales tax was as high as 7 percent. Soon, our sales tax will be the lowest in the region. The District already has the lowest residential real property tax rate in the region.

We funded other tax relief – including updating the Schedule H (income tax) credit for low income homeowners and renters. Initially established in 1978, for the past 35 years the credit has been limited to individuals with income below \$20,000. Following changes we made in the Fiscal Year 2014 budget, that limit will now be \$40,000, and in a year it will be \$50,000. Accordingly, many more lower-income residents will now be able to benefit.

We also increased the availability of the senior citizen real property tax relief, which is a 50 percent credit on a homeowner's real property tax. For about 20 years this credit has been limited to households with adjusted gross income less than \$100,000. We raised it to \$125,000. This too, will provide real tax relief to our senior population.

When the Mayor submitted his budget proposal in March, AARP and others asked the Council to add \$5.8 million to the Office on Aging to support social workers, homebound meals, and transportation. We were able to add \$7 million, and AARP DC recently wrote that with this budget the Council "took an important step in the transformation of the District into an Age-Friendly City – a place where persons of all ages can live and thrive."

One of the barriers to escaping poverty is the inability of single parents seeking a job to find affordable child care. Mayor Gray included \$11 million for this purpose on a wish list, but the Council was able to structure the budget and manipulate the timing so that the \$11 million will in fact be funded out of revised revenue estimates.

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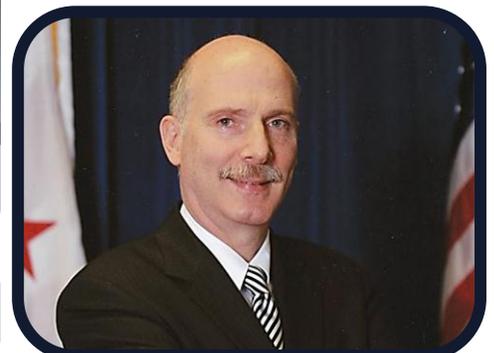
Constituent Services Corner

A Ward One senior could not pay her rent for the first time in 35 years. She had been self-employed and doing well for many years, but as a result of a recent injury she had fallen behind on her rent.

While seeking assistance she became very frustrated because she did not know which programs she could apply for and how to go about making an application with the city's various social service agencies. Not knowing where to turn, she contacted my office.

My staff immediately contacted the Department of Human Services and requested an emergency intake interview. The intake interview found that she was eligible for emergency housing assistance, which would pay her rent. Also it was determined that her injury was significant enough for her to apply for Social Security Insurance benefits.

So when you feel like the city is giving you the runaround, slow down and call me, I will point you in the right direction.



www.chairmanmendelson.com

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We used another \$4 million of the June revised revenue estimate to fund adult literacy/vocational training programs.

We increased funding for the Access to Justice Initiative, which provides civil legal services for indigent clients needing help with housing, food stamps, Social Security, and other such benefits. Often, resolving these issues makes the difference in whether a person will become homeless.

With regard to housing, the Council added to the \$100 million the Mayor proposed for affordable housing. I added \$1.75 million to the permanent supportive housing program to get people out of homelessness, \$4.75 million for the local rent supplement program, and almost \$1 million for emergency rental assistance and rapid rehousing.

We doubled the subsidy for the Children's Advocacy Center, which is the first stop for children who are victims of abuse and which coordinates the law enforcement investigations into these cases. We also added resources to the new Department of Forensic Science, principally to improve firearms identification, DNA analysis, fingerprint examination, and crime scene investigation.

Finally, the Council added over \$19 million to the Mayor's proposed funding for public education. Among our increases were \$1 million (added to the Mayor's \$1 million) to be targeted at truancy reduction; almost \$2 million for school-based mental health services; \$4 million for technology funding within individual DCPS and charter schools; \$4.3 million for the UDC Community College; and \$3.9 million to subsidize 100% transportation for K-12 students.

Electing District AG Should Occur Without Delay

With the Council's return from recess, attention turns to the final vote on the *Elected Attorney General Implementation and Legal Services Establishment Act*. I strongly believe that this bill—which removes attorneys from under the reporting structure of the AG and places them under the authority of the Mayor—sets the District back in its efforts toward ensuring independent legal advice. However, at first reading the Council made the situation worse: members adopted an amendment to delay the election for *at least* another four years. I, along with many others, believe the Council lacks the legal authority to delay the election. But more importantly, the Council is wrong to even consider interfering with the voters' ability to elect an AG—especially when voters overwhelmingly supported electing this position in a 2012 referendum. Second reading on the bill occurs October 1.

Upcoming Hearings of the Committee of the Whole

PR 20-375, Collective Bargaining Agreement b/w the District's Department of General Services and Teamster Locals 63 and 730 Approval Resolution of 2013

Public Roundtable on Tuesday, September 24, 2013 at 11:00 a.m. in Room 412

The Progress of the University of the District of Columbia's Strategic Plan and Its Impact on Accreditation

Public Oversight Hearing on Friday, September 27, 2013 at 12:30 p.m. in Room 412

Bill 20-298, Closing of a Public Alley in Square 5452, S.O. 12-03541, Act of 2013; and

Bill 20-388, Closing of a Public Alley in Square 858, S.O. 12-03336, Act of 2013

Public Hearing on Thursday, October 3, 2013 at 11:00 a.m. in Room 412

PR 20-354, Contract Appeals Board Monica Parchment Confirmation Resolution of 2013

Public Hearing on Thursday, October 3, 2013 at 12:30 p.m. in Room 412

Truancy Reduction in the D.C. Public Education System

Joint Public Oversight Hearing on Thursday, October 10, 2013 at 10:00 a.m. in Room 412 (w/ Committee on Education)

To sign up to testify, or for more information, contact the Committee at (202) 724-8196.