



chairman's update

the NEWSLETTER of
DC Council Chairman Phil Mendelson

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LOOKING AHEAD: REDUCING HOMELESSNESS IN THE DISTRICT

Last week we celebrated the Council's unanimous vote to close and replace DC General with smaller, more dignified shelter facilities located across the city. I am very grateful that the Council and Mayor were able to work together to craft a shelter plan that is fiscally responsible and meets the needs of homeless families. The Council maintained the Mayor's concept of shared responsibility across the city, but required that shelter sites be government-owned, rather than leased, saving the District \$165 million over the next 20 years.

While we should all be proud of the plan, we must remember that this is only one step of many required to end homelessness in the District. The replacement shelters – one in each of six wards – will provide only about 270 units of shelter, while more than 1,000 families are currently in the District's shelter system. Meanwhile, thousands of individuals in the District remain homeless.

During the past year, the Department of Human Services (DHS) has improved efforts to identify families on the brink of homelessness and implemented intervention strategies to keep families from entering the shelter system. The District has also made great strides in ending Veteran homelessness.

Nonetheless, DHS must do more to move families more rapidly through the shelter system and into permanent housing. Though the goal is to limit shelter stays to 60 days, the current average length of stay at DC General is nine months. In the months ahead, the District must continue to improve preventive measures and speed movement through the system. Doing so will have a far more significant effect on reducing homelessness than our action last week.

CONSTITUENT SERVICES CORNER

Residents along the 3300 block of 5th street in Southeast reached out to our constituent services team after they stated the street lights on the block had remained off during evening hours for two months. The residents voiced concerns after a recent uptick in crime in the area and a holiday weekend approaching.

After the residents reached out to 311 and other offices over the two months, our constituent services team jumped into action. We contacted DDOT to have them send an inspector to the site the next day and found that a bulb was out on one of the street lights. The DDOT Chief of Staff put a rush on the work and was able to have the bulb replaced and the lights turned back on over Memorial Day weekend.

If you're feeling in the dark, let Chairman Mendelson's team shed some light on the situation.

**Contact the
Constituent Services Team
At (202) 724-8158**

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Face-Off with Congress Over Our Budget

Last month a House subcommittee set out to overturn the Superior Court decision upholding the Budget Autonomy Act -- which states that the Council, the Mayor, and the District voters lawfully exercised their collective power to gain control over expenditure of local funds.

While budget autonomy is important for Home Rule it is especially important to our finances. It helps us budget better: over time we may want to change our fiscal year to better align with the school year and almost all U.S states and local jurisdictions. And the revenue estimates upon which the budget is based will be closer in time to the fiscal year. It will save us money: our credit rating is helped if we separate from the federal appropriation process. Our borrowing costs may lower. We may not have to borrow as much. It will eliminate uncertainty: no longer will we have to shut down when congressional inaction shuts down the federal government. Nor will we have to govern on a continuing resolution when Congress fails to appropriate on time.

While budget autonomy makes a big difference for the District, it does not make a big difference for Congress. Congress has failed to adopt our budget on time in 20 years, and has not made any substantive changes to our local funds budget since the Control Board left some 15 years ago.

Congress loses nothing fundamental with Budget Autonomy, because Congress will always have budget authority over us; it has plenary authority in the Constitution. Just as important, Congress is no longer set up for it. The House and Senate District Committees were disbanded years ago and D.C. Appropriations are almost an afterthought in current committees concerned with federal issues.

Some members of Congress are angry at the District, I believe, and they are trying to punish the city for enacting legislation concerning social issues – including marijuana legalization and LGBT protections in the Human Rights Act. Unfortunately, no one benefits from this punishment.

The House action is contrary to the Republican concept of local government and local control, and contrary to the Republican concept of pushing power away from Congress and respecting the people we represent. Importantly, these actions also are contrary to the Republican concept of smart financial management.

Upcoming Hearings of the Committee of the Whole

Legislative Meeting
June 7, 2016
10 a.m. in Room 500

"Closing of Public Streets and Dedication of Land for Street and Alley Purposes" (B21-445 and B21-672)
June 15, 2016
10:30 a.m. in Room 412

Committee of the Whole Meeting
June 21, 2016
10 a.m. in Room 500

Joint Hearing on the "Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority Compact Amendment Act of 2016" (B21-635)
June 23, 2016
10 a.m. in Room 500

Historic Preservation Review Board Confirmations (PR 21-682, PR 21-683, PR 21-776, PR 21-777)
June 30, 2016
11 a.m. in Room 412

DC Commemorative Works Committee Otto Condon Confirmation (PR 21-460)
June 30, 2016
11:30 a.m. in Room 412

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

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