

TESTIMONY OF REV. WANDA THOMPSON REGARDING INITIATIVE 77 BEFORE THE COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE

D.C. COUNCIL

SEPTEMBER 17, 2018

Good Day Members of the Council. I am Rev. Wanda Thompson, a resident living in, and a pastor serving in, Ward Eight in the city. I am here today to strongly encourage your committee to honor the voting outcome of Initiative 77 for which the residents of every Ward in this city, except Ward Three, voted. I am not here to discuss which position you or I personally support. I am, however, here to remind you that we, the citizens of the District of Columbia, have the right to say what we want to happen in our city. When you consider repealing Initiative 77, you are, in fact, acting in a paternalistic, condescending manner, suggesting that you know better than the citizens who elected you what should happen.

I, along with so many here, believe that the right to vote and to have your voice heard is a sacred right. It came as a result of the hard fought efforts of our foreparents. Certainly there will be times when legislation is passed with which any one of us might disagree. Nonetheless, it is imperative that the voice of the people be heard. To disregard and overturn the will of the people essentially is to suppress the vote. I encourage my D.C. congregants to vote but I do not tell them how they should vote.

In an era when voter suppression is rearing its ugly head, it is particularly important to remember that any move to quash the vote of the people is tantamount to disenfranchisement. Some have argued that the initiative should be repealed because of low voter turnout. The truth is that many folks do not come to the polls for exactly this reason – that they believe it will not matter how and for what they vote. Any action on your part to deny people their right to vote by negating their vote will only further perpetuate this belief.

I urge you not to vote to repeal the initiative because the business community wants you to, but to allow the citizens' votes to enact Initiative 77 to be enacted because, as your constituencies, we have elected you to represent OUR interests.

I hope that you will listen to those citizens who exercised their civic duty in voting and not be deterred by any other influences. Please do not minimize or disparage either those who voted or those who did not because they did not feel it would matter. Would any of you step down from your office if the voter turnout that put you in office was low? NO, I think you would say that those who did vote should have their voices heard.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak.