



chairman's update

the NEWSLETTER of DC Council Chairman Phil Mendelson

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Fall Legislation: A Look Ahead

There are two months and five meetings left before this Council Period ends with the swearing-in of a new Council on January 2nd. It will be a busy two months as Council Committees try to finish up business. Here's a sample of what's on my plate:

The biggest bill in the Committee of the Whole is the Universal Paid Leave Act (Bill 21-415). The bill would provide paid leave in extraordinary circumstances for all employees in the District – circumstances such as birth of a child, care for a parent, and extended leave due to illness. The details, of course, are complicated and whatever I recommend will likely be met with pushback.

On the other hand, a bill with widespread support is the UDC Dream Act (Bill 21-0422), which would clarify that all residents of the District are entitled to in-state tuition rates at our public University, regardless of immigration status.

Another bill that may come to the full Council is the "Contractor Pay-to-Play Elimination Amendment Act of 2015" (Bill 21-22) which revisits the controversial issue of campaign contributions from contractors. In June a similar proposal failed on a 7-6 vote. Rather than ban contributions, this bill would prohibit city relationships, such as contracts and tax abatements with contributors for a limited period of time.

A month ago I co-introduced with Councilmember Cheh Bill 21-887, which would remove procurement authority from the Department of General Services (DGS). Virtually all of the contentious contracts over the last two years have originated from DGS – including this summer's controversy over DGS resignations and firings. The time is ripe to fix this problem.

Bills I'm working on that are under the purview of other committees include gun control. One bill would restore re-registration for gun owners. Struck down by the Courts, a similar provision did not have a substantial legislative record. In my view the need is simple: if registration has a value – which I firmly believe it does – then registrations must be kept current.

On the same topic, the Council must address the District's absolute ban on stun guns, which the Supreme Court recently held are protected under the Second Amendment. In the same bill (Bill 21-886) I introduced to address this, we are also considering repealing the registration requirement for mace.

Recently, a hearing was held on a bill I co-introduced with Councilmember Bonds (Bill 21-837) that would take four crumbling houses in the Anacostia Historic District – which the city owns and have been boarded up for years – and give them to the L'Enfant Trust. The Trust has a proven record of restoration and preservation. Over a score of neighborhood residents testified in support. The only opposition was from the city. I hope this bill moves this fall.

Finally, I continue to deal with economic development issues. The Mayor transmitted almost a dozen bills in recent weeks hoping the Council will squeeze them into our busy agenda. Most of them have strong neighborhood support – like Stevens School and the Strand Theater – or are important for improving affordable housing – like Park Morten. We will do our best to get these to a vote this year.

Constituent Services Corner

A constituent recently contacted our office to request help with the DMV: Upon moving back to the District, he was unable to get his driver's license transferred from Maryland. He was informed that he owed over \$16,000 in DC parking tickets in the last six months!

It turns out that the car in question had not been in his possession for several years; he had returned the vehicle to the dealership and surrendered the tags to MVA in 2012. The constituent surmised that the vehicle had been resold but subsequently issued 124 tickets for his previously-registered VIN number because the new owner did not have tags. The constituent tried to advocate for himself, made several trips to DMV, and had a hearing -- all to no avail.

Our Constituent Services Team was able step in and to get the tickets dismissed within a few days and now the constituent is the proud owner of DC license.

If you find the government is driving you crazy, contact us! We'll do our best to fix the problem and get you back in the driver's seat!

**Contact the Constituent
Services Team at
(202) 724-8032**

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Departure of High Profile District Leaders

This year the Bowser administration lost three high-profile leaders: Public Schools Chancellor Kaya Henderson who announced she is stepping down on October 1; Metropolitan Police Chief Cathy Lanier who retired earlier last month; and Department of General Services (DGS) Director Chris Weaver who resigned for "personal reasons" on August 12.

I remember when Chief Lanier came before me for confirmation when I chaired the Committee on the Judiciary in 2007. It was clearly a proud moment for her personally, and there was a lot of hope and optimism. She has not disappointed. Under her tenure the District has seen an overall decline (23%) in violent crime; improvement in police-community relations; and a responsiveness to controversy that has been remarkable and for the good.

Unlike most of us, the longer the Chief stayed in office, the more her ratings improved. She was, in terms of community support, the envy of everyone at the Wilson Building. While her leaving was a loss, the Metropolitan Police Department, under Chief Lanier's tenure, has developed a strong backbench. The Interim Chief, Pete Newsham, is someone in whom I have complete confidence.

Kaya Henderson has been a pleasure to work with. Her predecessor's tenure was marked by four years of never-ending controversy. But with Kaya, there has been relatively little controversy and stable improvement within the schools. We also have seen considerable attention to reducing truancy and increasing in-seat attendance. Additionally, test scores have steadily improved. Moreover, the Chancellor has instituted a number of innovative programs to improve educational outcomes within DCPS. For example: ninth grade reading academies to help students struggling to read at grade level; extended school days and school years to provide more classroom time to students who need it; establishing the LEAP program to allow for more engaging and robust teacher professional development; and providing an opportunity for hundreds of students to travel abroad in summer for free. DCPS is growing in enrollment and that itself speaks to the progress Kaya has brought to public education.

DGS is far less interactive with the public than MPD or DCPS. Instead, it is an inside-serving agency, managing public buildings such as schools and city hall or other agencies. The agency has historically been very troubled. Chris Weaver came with great fanfare to DGS a little over a year ago. Generally, Councilmembers thought well of Chris and saw improvements. So it came as a shock – and concern to some – when Director Weaver suddenly announced his resignation. I'm hopeful the resignation is not a setback, and that Interim Director Greer Gillis keeps the agency moving forward.

These resignations could be viewed as blow to the District. But just as easily, this can be viewed as an opportunity to continue progress with great quality successors.

Upcoming Hearings of the Committee of the Whole

Additional Committee of the Whole Meeting
October 18, 2016
10 a.m. in Room 500

Public Hearing on "Deferred Compensation Program Enrollment Amendment Act of 2015" (B21-380)
October 25, 2016
11:30 a.m. in Room 412

Public Hearings on Interagency Council on Homelessness Confirmations
October 25, 2016
12:30 p.m. in Room 412

Legislative Meeting
November 1, 2016
10 a.m. in Room 500

Public Hearings on "William H. Jackson Way Designation Act of 2015" (B21-469), "Walter Way Designation Act of 2015" (B21-476), "McGill Alley Designation Act of 2016" (B21-765), "Janice Wade McCree Way Designation Act of 2016" (B21-788)
November 8, 2016
12 p.m. in Room 412

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

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