COUNCIL OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
1350 PENNSYLVANIA AVENUE, N.W.
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20004

Phil Mendelson
Chairman

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March 19, 2024

The Honorable Kay Granger
Chairwoman
Committee on Appropriations
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Rosa DeLauro
Ranking Member
Committee on Appropriations
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Patty Murray
Chair
Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Susan Collins
Vice Chair
Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairwoman Granger, Ranking Member DeLauro, Chair Murray, and Vice Chair Collins:

As you complete your work on the remaining Fiscal Year (FY) 2024 spending bills that must be enacted by the end of the week, I urge you to reject provisions that would repeal or amend laws enacted by the Mayor and the Council of the District of Columbia or that place restrictions on the use of local District funds. I am especially concerned when these efforts are undertaken in spending bills that are often passed quickly and with little public notice to avoid federal government shutdowns. I appreciate, then, that S. 2309, the Senate's version of the Financial Services and General Government (FSGG) bill that includes funding for the District includes only two so-called "legacy riders" that have been in place for several years. While I would prefer that negotiators reconsider these provisions, I prefer S. 2309's restraint to the large number of riders in the House FSGG bill that would jeopardize public health and safety in the District, unbalance the District's FY24 budget, and undermine Home Rule.

For example, one of the House riders would prevent the District from deploying photo traffic enforcement technology to combat reckless driving that endangers residents, workers, and visitors. This technology is a critical and well-studied tool that is helping the District save lives and reduce injuries. The House rider would inevitably lead to more deaths on District streets. In addition, the District's independent Office of the Chief Financial Officer estimates that the District would lose nearly $1 billion over the course of its four-year financial plan if it were unable to deploy traffic cameras. Another provision in the House bill that would shift millions of dollars in education funding from District public schools to private school vouchers would similarly create a hole in the District's budget that could force catastrophic cuts. Let me be clear, though: all of the House riders would be damaging.

As you consider FY24 policy riders affecting the District, I respectfully request that you also remove the "legacy" rider preventing us from regulating recreational cannabis sales that is unfortunately included in both the House and Senate FSGG bills. The rider has been in place for more than a decade and has contributed to the growth of a robust illegal market in recreational marijuana that is growing around the District. That market involves cash-only storefronts and pop-up events that are difficult to contain and that attract crime—including deadly shootings. These businesses also sell products grown or made outside of the District that are not regulated for potency or safety. At a time when 24 states have shown how to effectively handle recreational cannabis sales, it is long past time for Congress to let the District do the same.

Finally, as I have stated before, both the House and Senate FSGG bills provide less than the Metropolitan Police Department (MPD) needs and has requested to reimburse it for the federal work it performs. The District's court system, which has significant vacancies and capital needs, also needs additional funding. I was pleased to see that the President's FY25 budget request would at least partially address these deficiencies next year. If additional finding for MPD and our courts is available in FY24, we would appreciate your making those investments in your final bill to assist the District as we work together to respond to recent crime trends.

Sincerely,

Phil Mendelson
Chairman