



PRESS RELEASE

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CONTACT: Phallan Davis 202-741-0915 direct line or email: pdavis@dccouncil.us

Statement: Council fails to act with fierce urgency necessary to tackle District's gang problem

Enough is enough. I could not in good faith support Councilmember Phil Mendelson's "Crime Bill Emergency Amendment Act of 2009." This legislation is a watered-down approach to dealing with crime. We need to send a clear message that we have a zero tolerance policy for gang activity. But today's action by the Council is dangerously silent on gangs. Mendelson's crime bill simply creates an illusion that decisive action is being taken. In reality, however, this legislation offers no meaningful tools against gangs. Councilmembers Jack Evans and David Catania joined me in opposition to the bill.

I believe that the usage of public nuisance law to enjoin gangs and gang members is an effective mechanism for standing up to people who will try to create distress and disorder in our society. And I would emphasize that there are several procedural mechanisms built into the bill that will protect the civil liberties of our citizens and the due process rights of gang members.

Continued reform of the criminal justice code is necessary to adapt to the changing challenges that our police, neighbors, and attorneys face every day – Evans' bill is a critical step in that direction. His bill represents an outgrowth of what I have heard from my constituents – they are fed up with living in fear and they want their government to take action. I obviously care very much about civil liberties. We cannot sit idly by while gangs infiltrate our neighborhoods. Gangs do not simply go away. They will continue to grow and fester in communities to the point where parents are afraid to have their children play outside. This is no way to live.

Today the Council failed to act in addressing gang violence.

Other legislative matters:

- In today's legislative session, Councilmember Bowser introduced the "Build the Dream Income Tax Check-off Establishment Act of 2009." This bill will allow District residents to contribute via their income tax filing to the Build the Dream Foundation. The Foundation is in the process of raising funds and obtaining final permits to begin building the Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial. As of December, the Foundation had raised \$108 million of the \$120 needed to complete construction.
- The Council approved "The Raze Permit Community Notification Amendment Act of 2009." This bill, introduced by Councilmember Bowser, will require that the owner of a

structure to be razed must post a placard, sign, or notice on the exterior of the structure 30 days prior to the due date of raze, so that the neighborhood will know that raze will take place. The notice must be visible to the street and placed on the premises at least 30 days before the demolition.

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A native Washingtonian and former ANC commissioner, Councilmember Muriel Bowser is chair of the Committee on Public Services and Consumer Affairs and is also a member of the Committee on Economic Development, Committee on Human Services, Committee on Public Works and Transportation and the Committee on Public Safety and the Judiciary. Visit www.murielbowser.com for more information on Councilmember Bowser.

For any media inquires, please contact Communications Director Phallan Davis at 202-741-0915 or pdavis@dccouncil.us

1350 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW, Suite 110, Washington, DC 20004
202-724-8052 phone 202-741-0908 fax
