



MEDIA ALERT

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Bowser leads Council to ethics reform

Unanimous approval sets stage for final vote in December, enactment in January

Washington, D.C. – After 12 competing bills were introduced, months of work, two hearings, and several meetings with citizens and stakeholders, Councilmember Bowser’s 109 page comprehensive ethics reform bill was unanimously approved by the Council today.

“Chairman Kwame Brown and my colleagues on the Council should be commended for supporting a bill that represents a sea-change for the District’s ethics laws,” said Ms. Bowser. “It’s a serious effort to address the problems of the day, to establish a framework with the ability to respond to future misconduct, and it empowers an ethics sheriff with considerable enforcement powers.”

After hearing from dozens of witness at a November 30th hearing, Councilmember Bowser updated a previous iteration of her bill. The revised measure, which includes an additional 50 pages, lowers the number of signatures needed to recall an at-large official from 10% to 5%; sets aside a non-majority party seat on the new ethics board; tasks the board with recommending those violations that should be crimes; and extends a board member’s term to 6 years. And importantly, the measure would disqualify a sitting councilmember or the Mayor for a felony conviction.

“Those who hold public office should be held to the highest standard. A violation by an elected official amplifies the harm to the public trust so it follows that the strictest sanctions, including disqualification, should apply,” said Bowser.

Before the bill is approved by a second vote in late December, several Councilmembers indicated they would draft amendments and work with Councilmember Bowser, Chairperson of the Committee on Government Operations, to refine the bill. One possible amendment might allow the Council to expel a sitting member for a violation of the code of conduct. Currently, the Council’s ability to self-enforce is limited to censure.

To fix the problem of scattered ethics laws, Councilmember Bowser's bill codifies almost 50 additional pages of existing law in one location. Having a unified, comprehensive code that is easily accessible to, and comprehensible by, public officials, the rank and file, and the public should go a long way toward compliance.

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A native Washingtonian and former ANC commissioner, Councilmember Muriel Bowser is Chair of the Committee on Government Operations. She is also a member of the Committees on: Finance and Revenue; Public Services and Consumer Affairs; Public Works and Transportation; and the Judiciary. Visit www.murielbowser.com for more information.

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