



Councilmember Phil Mendelson's

At-Large Update

**Councilmember
Phil Mendelson
(At-Large)**

April 23, 2008

Crime Cameras: A Cause For Concern

The policy to place closed circuit crime cameras on our streets has been controversial since first proposed by Mayor Williams.

My view is that the money could be better spent on street cops. Street cameras tend to displace crime, rather than deter it, and only in a very few instances do the pictures actually help solve a crime. But for many people the real concern is about civil liberties.

But with only 92 crime cameras in the city, the debate was somewhat esoteric. Until recently.

On April 8th, Mayor Fenty announced a plan to link other cameras – deployed by other agencies such as Department of Transportation, DC Public Schools, and DC Public Housing – with the MPD system, to create one interoperable system with over 5,200 cameras.

Although the program permitting the 92 MPD cameras includes detailed regulations, there has been no

thought on what, if any, restrictions will govern the expanded system. For instance, the original program permits camera usage only for crime fighting, limits access to police officers, restricts active monitoring, prohibits focusing the cameras on the inside of peoples' houses, and requires that film footage be destroyed if not evidence in a crime may use the MPD cameras.

The expanded, unregulated camera system has not been thought out. Consequently there has been considerable, legitimate criticism. Not only is there a possibility of abuse (such as someone focusing on a cute girl rather than looking for criminal activity), but there are better, more effective ways to fight crime.

The public is better served by police officers on the street rather than perched in front of a mind-numbing bank of monitors. Big Brother is not the answer.

Motor Vehicle Theft

The Council has given preliminary approval to the "Motor Vehicle Theft Prevention Act of 2008," a new initiative focused exclusively on reducing auto theft in the District.

The initiative is modeled after successful programs adopted in at least 12 states. Maryland's program has resulted in a 50% reduction in auto theft in Baltimore City and County.

The bill would establish a motor vehicle theft prevention fund, and a commission with the sole purpose of spending the monies to reduce auto theft. Funding may go to better train police to catch auto thieves and to better train prosecutors to obtain convictions. Funding may go to technologies

to improve detection – such as tag readers and bait cars. Funding may be targeted at juveniles, especially to reduce recidivism, and may support initiatives that increase community awareness at how to avoid theft.

Last year an average of 16.5 cars were stolen each day in the District. The District (as a city) leads the country when compared with metropolitan areas across the country in its stolen vehicle rate per capita. This is a crime that affects everyone's cost for insurance as well as quality of life.

By all accounts the Motor Vehicle Theft Prevention Act implements a best practice. Final consideration is scheduled for May 6th.

Constituent Services Corner

A District woman called Councilmember Mendelson's office, alarmed because she was denied use of her Medicaid card at a local pharmacy. She was therefore unable to purchase medication that was critical to the health of her ailing son.

Our office instantly contacted the Income Maintenance Administration (IMA) and requested an immediate investigation into the women's eligibility for Medicaid benefits, and an answer to why her claims were being denied.

The investigation found that both she and her son were indeed eligible for Medicaid benefits, and an error in the system was preventing her from receiving those benefits.

At once, our office arranged a conference call with IMA officials and the pharmacy so there would be no delay in getting her son his needed medication.

We know that dealing with the District government is sometimes a hard pill to swallow. That's why we are here to help. Call Councilmember Mendelson's office, we can help you get well.



**The Office of Councilmember
Phil Mendelson
1350 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Suite 402
Washington, DC 20004
Phone: 202-724-8064
Fax: 202-724-8099**

**[www.dccouncil.us/
mendelson/index.htm](http://www.dccouncil.us/mendelson/index.htm)**

Mendelson to Hold Hearing on EMS Bill

Councilmember Mendelson recently announced a Public Hearing to be held on May 22nd, to consider Bill 17-596, the "Emergency Medical Services Act of 2008".

The purpose of Bill 17-596 is act as an enabling statute to give the Department of Health licensure and regulatory authority over the various aspects of EMS. It will require the spectrum of EMS related employees, transportation, entities, and teaching institutions to be licensed or certified by the Mayor.

The legislation arises out of one of the primary recommendations by the Rosenbaum Task Force.

Scheduled for May 22, 2008 at 9:30 a.m. in the 5th Floor Council Chambers, the public is welcome to attend and/or testify. To testify, please contact Ms. Heidi Tseu, Committee Clerk, via e-mail at htseu@dccouncil.us or by phone at (202) 724-8038.

Budget Blues

The Council is winding up a month of hearings on the proposed FY 2009 budget and there are problems.

First, the budget books contain much less detail than in past years – provoking the Council unanimously to adopt legislation seeking the missing information.

Second, the City Administrator has directed subordinate agencies to withhold documents that would help legislators understand policy initiatives and agency needs. The documents, called "enhancement requests" always have been forthcoming in previous years.

Third, the budget is balanced using dubious gimmicks: \$30 million is found by increasing tax enforcement; another \$21 million is saved by zeroing-out the Settlements & Judgments Fund (stating that settlements/judgments will now be paid for out of a standing contingency reserve fund); \$6.5 million is saved in rent currently being paid for a vacant building at 225 Virginia Avenue by simply taking it off the books; and \$6 million will be raised by selling off a fire department facility (for which the fire department testified it has yet to plan).

Fourth, additional "savings" are found by transferring government employees from the operating budget to the capital budget. The effect is that now we will be using borrowed money (capital funds) to pay for personnel.

Fifth, the Mayor proposes several unwanted tax and fee increases: increasing by over 30% the E-911 tax on phone bills (\$3.8 million), repealing the commercial real property tax targeted at small businesses (\$80.7 million), and doubling EMS ambulance fees (\$7.2 million).

Because of the gimmicks, it is not correct to say that the Mayor submitted a balanced budget for our consideration. Nor would it be truthful to say the proposed budget limits the increase in spending to less than 1%. The real question is whether the Council can fix this.

Upcoming Hearings of the Judiciary Committee

**Thursday, May 1st at 12:00pm
Committee Budget Mark-Up**

**Thursday, May 15th at 10:00am
Public Hearing on Bills:**

17-663, the "Correctional Institution Worker Protection Act of 2008," **17-667**, the "Defined Contribution Plan Modifications for the Director of the Department of Corrections Devon Brown Amendment Act of 2008," and **17-676**, the Injured Firefighter Relief Amendment Act of 2008."

**Tuesday, May 20th at 10:00am
Public Hearing on Bills:**

17-585, the "Uniform Adult Guardianship and protective Proceedings Jurisdiction Act of 2008," and **17-626**, the "Uniform Child Abduction Prevention Act of 2008."

**Thursday, May 22nd at 9:30am
Public Hearing on Bill:**

17-596, the "Emergency Medical Services Act of 2008."