



*Councilmember Phil Mendelson's*

# At-Large Update

Councilmember  
Phil Mendelson  
(At-Large)

February 29, 2008

## Fighting Stolen Autos

You may have seen news reports that the Council is considering the "Motor Vehicle Theft Prevention Act of 2008." This bill would establish an authority whose sole purpose would be to reduce auto theft. The Motor Vehicle Theft Prevention Commission, which is funded by this bill, would work with the Metropolitan Police Department, other law enforcement agencies, prosecutors, and relevant groups to improve enforcement as well as to increase prevention.

There were over 6,000 autos stolen in DC last year – more than 16 cars per day and an increase from 2006. The police department has strongly supported this bill with testimony and letters. In a January 24<sup>th</sup> letter Police Chief Cathy Lanier wrote: *"I support this proposal, and believe it holds the promise of providing concentrated, sustained attention, along with the resources to reduce vehicle theft in the District of Columbia. By involving not only the police, but also prosecutors, courts, motor vehicle administrators, the civic and private sectors, and others in a sustained effort*

*to prevent this class of crime, we will have a much better opportunity to markedly reduce vehicle theft throughout our City. Placing a focus on vehicle theft will also have an effect on the reduction of other serious crimes, which are often committed using stolen vehicles."*

The Council was to have voted on this bill February 5<sup>th</sup>. But I agreed to postpone consideration because the day before the Fenty administration reversed course – opposing both the commission and the dedicated funding. The Council will hold a hearing on the funding – I had proposed a \$5 surcharge on motor vehicle registrations, but am open to alternatives. The matter is scheduled for consideration at the Council's April meeting.

I am optimistic this measure will pass. Auto theft is too frequent, and it is a crime that impacts both our wallets and quality of life. When the state of Maryland adopted similar legislation, auto theft in Baltimore City and County dropped by 50%. No wonder this bill has widespread support.

## Constituent Services Corner

A constituent contacted Councilmember Mendelson to report that a call to 311 did nothing to remove a vehicle that was parked in a rush hour lane for 8 days on a winding District road.

Mendelson's office quickly contacted Janice Quintana, Director of the Office of Unified Communication (OUC) urging a swift resolution of the problem at hand, as well as investigation of where the breakdown in communication and government response occurred.

OUC's investigation revealed a communication gap between the Department of Public Works, normally responsible for parking violations, and the Metropolitan Police Department (MPD) which only removes a vehicle if it's been in an accident. The 311 call taker should have recognized the public safety hazard posed by a vehicle left in a rush hour lane. The call should have been routed to MPD for an immediate response.

Our office's involvement resulted in not only the immediate removal of the vehicle but also training for DPW and OUC employees to properly recognize and route public safety issues.

Remember, when dealing with the District government is as frustrating as merging lanes during rush hour – call Councilmember Mendelson's office – we'll waive you in.

## Coming Soon: Phil's Town Halls on Taxes & Community Concerns

Within the coming weeks, we'll be announcing a series of Town Hall Meetings across the city, designed to address issues related to property taxes as well as other constituent concerns. Stay tuned for the when's and where's, but don't wait to jot down your questions for Phil and other government officials slated to be present!



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

### Fire-Safety Cigarette Bill Passes

Recently, the Council took an initial vote on the “Fire-Standard-Compliant Cigarettes Act of 2008”. The bill, introduced by Councilmember Mendelson and Chairman Vincent Gray last fall, would mandate that cigarettes sold in the District meet model fire safety standards, implementing best practices and aligning the District with Maryland and 21 other states.

Cigarettes are a leading cause of home fire fatalities in the country, killing approximately 700 to 900 people per year. Testimony by the DC Fire and Emergency Medical Services Department stated that 27% of total fire deaths in the District are caused by smoking products.

The difference between a regular cigarette and a fire-standard-compliant cigarette is the paper used to wrap the tobacco—new technology deters the burning of tobacco if left unattended, thus significantly lowering the risk of accidental fire.

“The technology for these types of cigarettes is out there and is being required by other jurisdictions across the country,” stated Mendelson. “More than a quarter of the fire-related deaths in the District are caused by smoking products. We can significantly reduce that number. In my view, failure to adopt these standards would be a disservice to the public.”

### Council Passes EMS Improvement Legislation

Recently, the Council voted unanimously to pass the “Emergency Medical Services Improvement Act of 2007,” introduced by Councilmember Mendelson. The provisions of the bill, born out of the tragic death of David Rosenbaum, would re-focus both the role and goals of the Emergency Medical Services system.

The legislation provides for a more medically-focused Emergency Medical Services (EMS) system by establishing the position of the Medical Director in law, with statutory powers. This includes explicit authority to order emergency rooms to stay open and take patients, instead of the unacceptable alternatives, such as stranding them in an idling ambulance in the hospital driveway. Further, the bill grants the authority for the Medical Director, who will be confirmed by the Council and can be fired only by the Mayor, to work with other health facilities to reduce the burden on EMS for non-emergent patients.

This legislation will move the District’s EMS system toward world-class. The key aspects of the “EMS Improvement Act of 2007” were derived directly from the recommendations made by the working group of stakeholders assembled by Councilmember Mendelson as well as by the Mayor’s task force; both formed after the Rosenbaum tragedy. Medical care of trauma victims, stroke victims, heart attacks, etc. does not have to begin in the emergency room – and should not. The greater and sooner the treatment – i.e., the more that can be done in the field immediately – the greater the chances for not just survival but complete recovery. With a system more focused on medical care, these types of changes can be implemented.

“I’m grateful that so many subject matter experts came together after the Rosenbaum tragedy, committed to helping reform our system. Their work helped pave the way for long-needed and significant change to our EMS system,” stated Mendelson. “Their recommendations were excellent – a more medically-driven system will surely shift the focus to where it matters most – the delivery of swift, proper, and effective care to those whose lives depend on it.”

### Upcoming Hearings of the Judiciary Committee

**Friday, April 4th at 10:00—Room 500**

Budget Oversight Hearing on the: Department of Corrections, Metropolitan Police Department & Forensics Lab, Office of Unified Communications, and Office of the Attorney General.

**Tuesday, April 8th at 10:00—Room 412**

Budget Oversight Hearing on the: Homeland Security & Emergency Management Agency, Office of the Chief Medical Examiner, Fire & Emergency Medical Services, Office of Admin. Hearings.

**Tuesday, April 22nd at 10:00—Room 412**

Budget Oversight Hearing on the: DC National Guard, Corrections Information Council, Commission on Judicial Disabilities & Tenure, Commission on Judicial Nominations, Sentencing & Criminal Code Revision Commission, Office of Police Complaints, Office of Victims Services, Justice Grants Administration, Criminal Justice Coordinating Council

Hearings are held at the Wilson Building—1350 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW