



Volume 04 | April 2017



Robert White At Large



@RobertWhite_DC



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Hello, friend,

The District Government has improved significantly over the years, but we still have room to grow to meet the needs of the residents we serve. I believe that strong oversight often is just as effective as new legislation, which is why oversight over our local agencies is one of the Council's most important responsibilities.

OVERSIGHT REVIEW



The DC Council and staff collectively invested thousands of hours in the yearly oversight process to assess the performance of over 100 District agencies across 11 committees.

Every year, from early February to late March, the Council conducts oversight hearings over the nearly 100 District agencies to better understand their missions and evaluate their performance before the Mayor releases her budget recommendations. My staff and I spent many late nights and weekends digging through responses from over 70 agencies that fall under the five committees I sit on.

Covering a whole month's worth of work in my newsletter would be boring, so I'll highlight a few agencies related to my priority areas of education, affordable housing, workforce development, and returning citizens. If

you have specific questions about oversight, please contact my Legislative Director, Shawn Hilgendorf (shilgendorf@dccouncil.us, or my Legislative Counsel, Breanna Bledsoe (bbledsoe@dccouncil.us).

- **Department of Consumer and Regulatory Affairs (DCRA):**

DCRA has an enormous impact on the lives of people in our city. From enforcing housing codes to granting business licenses, their responsibilities factor into our safety and quality of life. So, I took the opportunity during the oversight process to shed light on areas where the agency must improve.

I was particularly concerned about substandard inspections of rental properties without any enforcement, and illegal construction that contributes to shoddy home redevelopments and damage to neighboring properties. I was not convinced that DCRA fully recognizes the magnitude of illegal construction or how it affects residents. I also explained how DCRA needs to step up their enforcement on vacant and blighted properties, which impact neighborhoods that are struggling to turn the corner. I was clear that I will continue to examine their performance on these fronts.

I also pushed DCRA to improve their business licensing processes because I continue to hear complaints about how difficult it is for businesses to open in the District. DCRA expressed that it believes its processes and timelines are strong. I think residents disagree, so I will continue to work with my Council colleagues to make the agency more responsive.

- **Department of Employment Services (DOES):**

Workforce development is a key priority area for me. While the District has more job openings than unemployed people, it is undeniable that we can do better at connecting the dots. I am focused on boosting employment and developing sustainable careers by ensuring that the job training programs we fund with taxpayer money are actually succeeding at getting our residents into careers. My questions to DOES were aimed at vetting our workforce training and apprenticeship programs, and how we may better help residents who have fallen through the cracks of the education system.

- **Mayor's Office on Returning Citizen Affairs (MORCA):**

I raised concerns about the limited resources MORCA is able to dedicate to returning citizens. Too many of our residents return from incarceration after many years of being away from the District and need help navigating their future. As you may know, my experience working with and advocating for returning citizens comes from helping my brother when he returned from incarceration and my years of work with Congresswoman Eleanor Holmes Norton on the issues affecting our incarcerated residents and those recently released. MORCA is the local agency tasked with helping residents transition back to our city and get the resources they need to be self-sufficient and productive citizens.

I appreciate the dedication and hard work of Council Chairman Phil Mendelson (Committee of the Whole), committee chairpersons David Grosso (Committee on Education), Anita Bonds (Committee on Labor and Workforce Development), Elissa Silverman (Committee on Labor and Workforce Development), Brianne Nadeau (Committee on Human Services), and Jack Evans (Committee on Finance and Revenue), who chair the committees I sit on, and their staff. I especially liked seeing the dozens of everyday residents who took the time to testify on the strengths and weaknesses of the agencies they interact with or depend on daily.

A LOOK AT LEGISLATION

While I listened to residents testify at the oversight hearings and in other meetings with constituents, I've gained valuable insights that I've used to draft new legislation. Here are a couple of the bills that I've been working on.

INTRODUCED LEGISLATION

University of the District of Columbia Student Attraction and Retention Amendment Act of 2017

I introduced this bill to help our public university, the University of the District of Columbia (UDC), attract more high-performing students by giving full academic scholarships to the top 10% of all graduating seniors

from DC schools. This bill also provides a tuition reduction of up to \$5,000 for transfer students from any other university who have a 3.0 or better grade point average (GPA) and maintain at least a 2.5 GPA. This bill would help UDC attract the best students and would strengthen its academic standings nationally.

Returning Citizens Opportunity to Succeed Amendment Act of 2017

I wrote this bill to help returning citizens get government identification before they return home from prison, and grant a short-term transportation stipend to help them find jobs and housing. The bill requires the Mayor’s Office on Returning Citizen Affairs to establish contact with District inmates six months before they return home to help them create a transition plan. This bill would significantly reduce the number of homeless, unemployed, and reoffending returning citizens.

CO-INTRODUCED LEGISLATION

Housing Production Trust Fund Guarantee Funding Amendment Act of 2017

This bill, drafted by Councilmember Anita Bonds, would increase the minimum annual funding for the Housing Production Trust Fund (HPTF) to \$120 million. The HPTF funds construction and preservation of affordable housing, so this would help stem the affordable housing crisis in the District.

CONNECTING WITH THE COMMUNITY





counter-clockwise from top of the previous page: engaging with student advocates from Capitol Hill Montessori school | checking in on students and staff at Savoy Elementary School | advocating for returning citizens at the DC Prisoner and Reentry Symposium | interacting with students at Walker-Jones Education Campus for National School Breakfast Week

Since I took office, my team and I have connected with hundreds of residents. Here are a few highlights from our community involvement over the past month:

- Visited a group of budding scholars who were participating in the Jumpstart for Young Children program in Ward 5 and saw how this program strengthens their core reading and other academic skills. I observed how literacy coaching helps our children learn in their early years.
- Spoke to the residents at Seabury at Friendship Terrace Senior Living Community in Ward 3. I really enjoyed talking to these engaged seniors about the work I am doing on the Council.
- Learned about how the adult workforce training programs at the Carlos Rosario Sonia Gutierrez Campus in Ward 5 instilled important career skills for District residents, especially the immigrant community. My favorite part was tasting some of the masterful culinary work of the student chefs.
- Held my first Community Conversation, an engagement effort to meet residents in their communities. I started in Ward 7 and will be hosting more in each ward. I received a lot of good feedback, and was thankful for Ward 7 Councilmember Vince Gray who joined me at my first Community Conversation.

FIND US IN THE COMMUNITY

If you would like to connect with my team and me, here are upcoming meetings where you can find us:

**Dates, times, and locations are subject to change.*

Tuesday, April 18, 2017:

Martha's Table Career Day | 4:00 PM | Martha's Table | 2114 14th Street NW

Tuesday, April 18, 2017:

Greater Washington Hispanic Chamber of Commerce Minority Business Expo | 10:30 AM | Walter E. Washington Convention Center | 801 Mt Vernon Place, NW

Wednesday, April 19, 2017:

ANC 2A | 7:00 PM | George Washington University's Fungler Hall, Room 103 | 2201 G Street, NW

Saturday, April 22, 2017:

Earth Day Cleanup in Ward 8 | Please call (202) 724-8174 for more information.

Saturday, April 22, 2017:

W Street Home Owners' Association Ward 8 Block Party | 2:00 PM | 1800 block of W Street, SE

Monday, April 24, 2017:

AARP Washington, DC Chapter Meeting | 12:00 PM | Pennsylvania Avenue Baptist Church | 3000 Pennsylvania Avenue, SE

Tuesday, April 25, 2017:

2017 Shaw Main Streets Gala 'A Taste of Shaw' | 7:00 PM | The Howard Theatre | 620 T Street, NW

IN THE NEXT NEWSLETTER...

MAKING DECISIONS FOR NEXT YEAR'S CITY BUDGET



Mayor Bowser recently released her fiscal year 2018 budget recommendations to the public and the Council, and I have started poring over every detail. My Council colleagues and I will invest countless more hours to determine how to best spend our nearly \$14 billion city budget.

Between April 7 and May 11, the Council will conduct more public hearings to receive input from local agencies, residents, and advocates on their budget priorities. I encourage you to attend or testify at these hearings to help us understand what your communities need. You can find the budget hearings schedule at <https://goo.gl/GH1oDN>.

NEED HELP?

PLEASE CONTACT ME OR ANYONE ON MY TEAM

I hope you enjoyed this month's edition of my newsletter. If you have any questions or need to bring an issue to my attention, please call my office at 202-724-8174 or reach out to my team.

- **Robert White** | Councilmember | rwhite@dccouncil.us
- **Mtokufa Ngwenya** | Chief of Staff | mngwenya@dccouncil.us
- **Shawn Hilgendorf** | Legislative Director | shilgendorf@dccouncil.us
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My Best,

Robert

