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**Thomas Introduces Bill Strengthening Penalties for Crimes
Committed Within 50 Feet of Public Transit Stops**

Washington, DC—Ward 5 Councilmember Harry “Tommy” Thomas, Jr. yesterday introduced legislation to increase the penalties for crimes committed within 50 feet of mass transit stops. The bill has been referred to the Committee on Public Safety and the Judiciary.

The “Public Transportation Criminal Penalties Act of 2009” establishes increased penalties for crimes—including murder, manslaughter, aggravated assault, assault with a dangerous weapon, mayhem or maliciously disfiguring, threats to do bodily harm, sexual abuse, robbery, larceny, motor vehicle theft, attempted motor vehicle theft, carjacking, and kidnapping—occurring within a 50 foot radius of a mass transit stop. The bill defines mass transit stops as any gathering place used expressly for public or privately owned or operated commercial vehicles carrying six or more passengers, including any Metrobus, Metrorail, Metroaccess, or DC Circulator vehicle or other bus, trolley, or van operating within the District of Columbia.

The bill stipulates that persons who commit offenses against individuals within the 50 foot radius may be punished by a fine of up to 1½ times the maximum fine otherwise authorized for the offense, and may be imprisoned for a term of up to 1½ times the maximum term of imprisonment otherwise authorized by the offense, or both. Within 45 days of enactment, the bill requires operators of mass transit stops to post placards giving notice that penalties for crimes, including robberies and assaults, are increased for the 50-foot radius surrounding the stops.

“Crime has consistently increased at transit stops, and we must aggressively seek to reduce that trend,” said Councilmember Thomas. According to WMATA statistics, the total number of crimes committed at metro transit stops climbed from 1,361 in 2004 to 1821 in 2008, or 38 percent. Since January 2009, 454 robberies have occurred at metro transit stops, compared with 328 for the same period in 2008. “It is imperative that we send a strong message and stop criminals from targeting residents who use mass transportation,” stated Thomas.

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