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Thomas Holds Hearing on Bill to Prevent Bullying

Washington, DC—Ward 5 Councilmember Harry “Tommy” Thomas, Jr., Chair of the Committee on Libraries, Parks and Recreation, held a hearing today on Bill 18-1057, “The Harassment and Intimidation Prevention Act of 2010.” Because the bill addresses bullying in public education facilities in addition to libraries and recreation centers, the hearing was held jointly with the Committee of the Whole, which has purview over public education and is chaired by Council Chairman Vincent Gray.

Bill 18-1057, which 11 councilmembers enthusiastically co-sponsored, calls for the establishment within District of Columbia Public Schools, District of Columbia Public Charter Schools, the Department of Parks and Recreation, the District of Columbia Public Library, and the University of the District of Columbia policies to prohibit harassment, intimidation, and bullying, including by means of electronic communication. The bill also calls for establishment bullying prevention programs in the respective agencies.

In preparation for the hearing, Councilmember Thomas and his staff worked closely with stakeholder groups to ensure that the bill is comprehensive and effective in addressing the serious and disturbing challenge of bullying and intimidation. The Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network, for example, offered meaningful suggestions to strengthen reporting requirements and the scope of groups expressly covered in the legislation.

The bill also received enthusiastic support from the DC Public Library (DCPL) and the DC Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR), agencies under the purview of the Committee on Libraries, Parks and Recreation. Chief Librarian Ginnie Cooper testified at the hearing about DCPL’s Adaptive Services Division for hearing- and vision-challenged patrons, and how the legislation complements DCPL’s mission of inclusiveness. DPR Director Jesus Aguirre discussed the agency’s code of conduct policy, its work in inclusive recreation, and how the legislation will strengthen DPR’s core mission to serve all residents.

“There is no telling how many young men and women drop out of school, or stay away from our recreation centers or libraries, to avoid torment and intolerance,” said Councilmember Thomas. “The goal of today’s hearing is to move forward with swiftly adopting policies so that our young people are safe and secure from bullying and intimidation whether at school or at play.”

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