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**Thomas' Oversight Hearing Finds that DC Department of Parks and Recreation
Has Failed to Follow the Law Regarding Day Care Program Closures**

Washington, DC—Ward 5 Councilmember Harry “Tommy” Thomas, Jr., Chair of the Council’s Committee on Libraries, Parks and Recreation, held an oversight hearing on September 9, 2009 regarding the status of the DC Department of Parks and Recreation’s (DPR) child care facilities and services.

The purpose of the hearing was to investigate the closure of a number of DPR daycare sites, contrary to Council passage of two separate acts, including one unanimous emergency act that requires the sites to remain open until September 30, 2009 and directs the Executive to rescind any solicitations to third party vendors to take over the DPR day care program. The act also prohibits closure of the DPR day care sites until the Council receives from the Executive a comprehensive analysis of the city’s day care program, a determination as to whether the District’s laws on privatization have been followed, and a detailed report on the future of special needs/developmental programs and care in the Department of Parks and Recreation and the District.

The emergency legislation that became effective on May 26, 2009 states that *“the Mayor shall withdraw any requests for offers for the use of any District-owned or District-operated property for any child development program ...”* The United Planning Organization (UPO) testified that the organization responded to a Request for Offers issued by the District’s Department of Real Estate Services (DRES) in April 2009 to operate six of DPR’s nine day care sites. The offers were accepted on July 20, 2009 and provisional operating licenses subsequently were issued, according to UPO.

Acting DPR Director Dr. Ximena Hartstock acknowledged that the agency has not submitted a comprehensive analysis of the city’s day care program and denied that the agency has closed some of its day care sites. She testified that DPR day care centers are not being closed, but are “being transitioned.” She stated that sites with no children are not necessarily deemed closed. “These are distinctions without a difference,” commented Councilmember Thomas.

Dr. Hartsock also testified that she did not know which District agency would be monitoring the UPO contract or whether DPR had entered into an agreement to cede control and maintenance responsibility of its day care facilities to DRES or any other District agency. Dr. Hartsock was also unable to articulate the core mission of DPR, which was established in a 1942 Congressional act requiring the District to have a “comprehensive program of public recreation which shall include the operation and direction of games, sports, arts and crafts, hobby shops, music, drama, speech, *nursery play*, dancing, lectures, forum for information discussion, and other such physical, social, mental and creative opportunities for leisure-time participation...”

“DPR has closed and relocated its day care centers in flagrant violation of the law and the agency’s core mission,” said Councilmember Thomas. “Rather than flouting the law, this government should be servicing the needs of the people.”

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