



May 14, 2024

The Honorable Mike Johnson
Speaker of the House
United States House of Representatives
H-232, The Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Hakeem Jeffries
Minority Leader
United States House of Representatives
2433 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Speaker Johnson and Leader Jeffries:

We write today to express our opposition to H.R. 7530, the “DC CRIMES Act,” which we understand the House will consider this week.

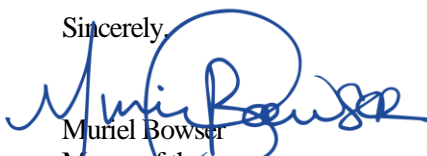
Since the start of the 118th Congress, the House has made a number of attempts to legislate on local District affairs. We always welcome opportunities to partner with Congress on issues. But the proposals included in H.R. 7530 would actually prevent the District government from taking steps to address dynamic crime trends.


In recent months, the Mayor and the Council have put into place several pieces of public safety legislation that included more than 100 new initiatives that have, among other things, expanded pretrial detention for violent offenders and enhanced penalties for certain gun crimes. Violent crime has decreased by 25 percent and property crime has decreased by 14 percent when compared to the same period last year. The Metropolitan Police Department (MPD) is making more arrests and the Office of the Attorney General is prosecuting cases at a rate almost double the pre-pandemic rates. And just this week, the Council is continuing its work on a Fiscal Year 2025 budget proposed by the Mayor that will make further strategic investments in MPD and crime prevention efforts.


If H.R. 7530 were law today, it would block us from taking some of these steps. By prohibiting the Council from enacting “any act, resolution, or rule to change any criminal liability sentence,” the bill would prevent District policymakers from responding to emerging crime trends by enhancing criminal penalties, or even create new crimes. Swift and certain consequences are essential to deterring crime, and persistent congressional interference is at odds with that goal. Given recent experience, these delays could be extensive, preventing courts from imposing longer sentences while legislation languishes in Congress.

Due to the District’s unique status, Congress already has a role to play, particularly in fully funding the federal agencies that are an integral part of our criminal justice system. As we know you are both aware, the Fiscal Year 2024 (FY24) appropriations bill funding the Public Defender Service for the District of Columbia (PDS) contains a significant error that blocks the agency’s access to a portion of its budget. The loss of these funds will force PDS to furlough staff for at least one day each week for the remainder of the fiscal year starting in June, routinely slowing down criminal proceedings. This delay only compounds the difficulties posed by the numerous court vacancies that Congress has failed to fill. PDS is a federal agency outside of our control. We ask Congress to set aside H.R. 7530, and work with us in partnership to ensure that PDS has the funds it needs, and our court system is able to function.

Sincerely,


Muriel Bowser
Mayor of the
District of Columbia


Phil Mendelson
Chairman, Council of the
District of Columbia


Brian L. Schwalb
Attorney General for the
District of Columbia