

GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
District Department of Transportation



B21-0366, the Firehouse Parking Exception Regulation Amendment Act of 2015
and
B21-0026, the Change for Life District Donation Parking Meters Fund Act of 2015

Testimony of
Greer Gillis
Deputy Director

Before the

Committee on Transportation and the Environment

Council of the District of Columbia

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Good afternoon Chairperson Cheh, members and staff of the Committee. I am Greer Gillis, Deputy Director of the District Department of Transportation or “DDOT.” I am pleased to testify before you on the two proposed bills under consideration today: B21-0366, the Firehouse Parking Exception Regulation Amendment Act of 2015 and B21-0026, Change for Life District Donation Parking Meters Fund Act of 2015.

B21-0366, the Firehouse Parking Exception Regulation Amendment Act of 2015

This proposal would authorize DDOT to prohibit on-street parking for a distance not to exceed sixty feet (60 ft.) of a firehouse or fire station to accommodate parking for one on-duty platoon of the District Fire and Emergency Medical Services Department (DCFEMS). If the firehouse or fire station already has sufficient dedicated parking for one on-duty platoon then no additional parking shall be allowed. This bill is similar to bills introduced in 2007, 2010, 2011, and 2012.

While DDOT supports the intent, we have several concerns about the proposed legislation. DDOT does not, in general, provide on-street parking for the personal vehicles of government employees (commuters). DDOT has, however,



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worked closely with schools and with fire stations to address their specific short and long-term employee parking needs that are often created by facility renovations. Similar to schools many fire stations are located in older buildings, and renovations that extend onto existing on-site parking have caused a greater need for on-street parking. This has been problematic, particularly in areas where parking is already scarce for local businesses and residents.

We believe it to be much more effective to address these needs on a site-specific basis rather than anticipating that each station will have the same needs. There are thirty-three fire stations across the city with 6-to-14 on-duty personnel. Of these thirty-three stations, DDOT has recently received and worked with FEMS on requests for increased parking for personal vehicles at two specific firehouse locations: Engine 16 and Engine 13. Engine 16 is located at 1018 13th St NW, within the Central Business District. Several years ago, DDOT reviewed the parking available adjacent to this location and identified reserved parking spaces for 14 personal vehicles from Engine 16 in an adjacent alley. Engine 16 has 14 on-duty personnel and thus DDOT has met the needs of one on-duty platoon as would be required by the proposed legislation. Given the significant commercial, residential, and visitor parking demands in this area, DDOT does not support



converting nearby metered spaces to additional reserved parking for personal vehicles of employees of Engine 16.

Engine 13 firehouse opened earlier this year, moving several blocks from its previous location to 400 E Street Southwest. DDOT is still reviewing the DCFEMS and other parking needs at this location. However, today's legislation as proposed would designate an area "not to exceed sixty feet (60 ft.) along the curb in front, behind, or alongside any [firehouse] building." 60 feet would only be big enough to accommodate three parking spaces. Given a platoon size ranges from 6-to-14 personnel, this may not be enough to accommodate Engine 13 or other specific firehouses locations. In fact, this size limitation may actually reduce available parking at some stations. As mentioned, DDOT would prefer to work with fire stations on a station-by-station basis to identify measures to address the individual station's parking needs.

B21-0026, Change for Life District Donation Parking Meters Fund Act of 2015

The purpose of this bill is to combat homelessness in the District, discourage panhandling, encourage charitable giving and raise funds for initiatives that provide meals, job training, substance abuse counseling, housing, and other



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programs for those in need. The bill proposes that DDOT install a total of 40 clearly identified donation parking meters throughout the District. Of these, 25 donation parking meters would be placed in premium demand zones and 15 donation parking meters placed in normal demand zones. DDOT would be responsible for installation, maintenance and revenue collection from the donation parking meters.

This program is designed to redirect coins that might be given to panhandlers into initiatives to provide broader services for those in need. In 2006, Baltimore City was one of the first jurisdictions to turn refurbished parking meters into donation stations. Since then several other cities have implemented similar programs, installing anywhere from 5 to 80 donation meters. To assist the committee in its deliberations, I would like share the experience of the jurisdictions that implemented similar programs.

In several cities the program was determined to be ineffective in raising funds for the homeless services since either maintenance expenses for the coin meters, or administration cost of the program, were greater than the spare change collected. For example, the meter donation program was disbanded in Iowa City, Orlando, and Portland. In Iowa City, 10 meters generated \$60 per meter in 2011,



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\$50 per meter in 2012 and \$35 per meter in 2013; the city discontinued the program because the maintenance costs for the meters were greater than the spare change collected. The City of Orlando's experience with 15 donation meters was that the program generated in \$2,027 in three years, but that the city spent \$2,000 keeping the meters in operation. Similarly, 10 donation meters in Portland collected \$2,500 after the program had been in effect for three years.

While we support the intent to increase funding for programs serving those in need, based on our research we do have a number of concerns about the efficacy of this program.

Some cities reported a decrease in panhandling but many found that there was not a significant amount of money generated by the program. The average second year revenue ranges from \$15 to \$80 per meter. The City of Baltimore was the only jurisdiction that on average collected \$400 per donation meter per year since 2006 (for 12 meters that results in annual revenue of \$4,800). Research indicated that revenue collected from donation parking meters decreases as advances in meter technologies have eliminated the need for carrying coins. Advocacy groups also criticized the program in some cities as merely an attempt to reduce panhandling and not really to address the problem of homelessness.



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Our research indicated that those cities with programs that authorized meter sponsorships, such as proposed in the bill, generated more revenue through sponsorships than through donations. The meter donation programs were more successful in cities that allowed a meter sponsorship for an annual amount of \$1,000 a year. For example, Nashville (26 meters) and Denver (55 meters) collected between \$20,000 to \$30,000 dollars per year through their meter donation program in 2014. If all the proposed 40 donation meters are sponsored, the program may collect up to a maximum of \$40,000 per year in sponsorship money. Considering meter installation, maintenance, and administration cost of the program including staff time, we believe even the most successful program generating \$40,000 per year in sponsorship money will not result in a significant amount of revenue to combat homelessness.

The bill establishes the Change for Life District Donation Parking Meters fund and requires that all monies collected by DDOT from the donation parking meters be deposited into the Fund and used to provide services to the homeless of the District. However, administrative expenses of the Fund are also required to be paid solely from the Fund balances and no money may be paid into the Fund from the General Fund or any other District account. Again, we are concerned that the



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costs of administering the program might exceed the revenue generated by the program.

I want to thank you again for your leadership and for the opportunity to testify before you and the Committee today. I look forward to answering your questions.

