

Summary: February Car-Jacking Meeting

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Last night, about 80 neighbors attended the follow-up meeting on the Capitol Hill car-jackings sponsored by Councilmember Tommy Wells and ANC 6A Commissioner Mary Beatty.

As at the December meeting, MPD Chief Lanier brought her team and this time, had much better news to report. After the spike of car-jackings and the meeting in December, Chief Lanier committed more resources, more officers and more attention to the problem. Last night, she shared details with neighbors of the multiple levels of added enforcement — one of which earned the moniker “Ring of Steel” — as well as coordination put in place between police districts. MPD studied the crimes and very quickly established specific “escape routes.” They adjusted based on the data, and in some cases, had officers ready and waiting as the criminals tried to escape the neighborhood.

The good news… MPD has closed several of the car-jacking cases and arrested over a dozen individuals in these crimes. Since the added focus, car-jackings have decreased significantly, with the last one occurring in early January. MPD acknowledged quickly though, that doesn’t mean their work is done and they will maintain this heightened level for the near future.

In addition, MPD has a high level of confidence of where many of the offenders live, noting that half of all the cars recovered were found within a block of each other. They are targeting resources to the neighborhood — which MPD did not disclose, but is not located in Ward 6.

In the arrests noted above, all but one were juveniles. That turned the conversation to the US Attorneys Office and how the juveniles were prosecuted.

Last year, the Council passed an omnibus crime bill that among other things, gave prosecutors more ammunition to pursue stiffer penalties and sentences for crimes of violence. Under DC Code, a car-jacking, whether committed with a gun or not, is considered a crime of violence.

The Council also has put in place “three strikes” legislation for violent crimes. The law passed by the Council last year changed the three strikes law for violent offenses from a permissive “may” to a mandatory “shall” minimum 15 year sentence.

The US Attorneys Office discussed their work and desires to prosecute violent offenses to their fullest. They noted that the legal changes by Council gave them greater ability in the courtroom, but noted a significant struggle as it relates to car-jackings.

An individual can only be charged with a car-jacking if they are caught in the act. If police make the arrest an hour later, even though an individual is in a stolen vehicle, the arresting charge is often Unauthorized Use of a Vehicle (UUV). A UUV will be prosecuted, but it is not considered a violent crime. Unless MPD and the US Attorneys Office can make a clear link between the driver of the vehicle at the time of arrest, and the crime of the car-jacking itself, they cannot make a car-jacking charge. It's very difficult to make this link because the criminals are often wearing masks or victims are traumatized such that they can't identify their attacker with 100% confidence.

Tommy also talked about two additional legislative initiatives he’s been trying to move at Council.

The first is to cut in half the number of unexcused absences allowed for a child before social services are involved. Skipping school is often the first red flag that a youth is at-risk or headed in the wrong direction. The law would reverse a recent DC Office of the State Superintendent for Education (OSSE) change to the District’s truancy regulations related to educational neglect; which now allows children between the ages of 5 and 13 to accrue 10 consecutive days, or 20 total days (one full month of school days), of unexcused absences within a school year before a referral is made to the Child and Family Services Administration (CFSA). Tommy’s bill would require authorities begin looking into the child and family who has more than 10 unexcused absences within a school year.

You can read more about the “Safe Children and Safe Neighborhoods Educational Neglect Mandatory Reporting Amendment Act of 2009” by clicking here.

The second legislative initiative is to help break through the veil of juvenile confidentiality laws. Although intended as a protection for the youth themselves, confidentiality laws just as often prevent the public from being able to hold agencies accountable for providing services to at-risk youth and their family. They also prevent agencies from recognizing warning

signs and intervening before a youth hits the point of no return – ideally, we want to stop a youth from committing a violent act before it ever occurs. For example, under current confidentiality laws, a youth may have skipped school for 5 days, been kicked out of a recreation center for a fight, and been picked up by police for riding in a stolen car. Individually, each incident may register as a concern, but together, they connect the dots that something is dangerously wrong with where a youth is headed and the decisions they are making. Current law prohibits the school, the recreation center and the police to share the information with each, and they miss the red flags going up.

You can read more about the information sharing and confidentiality legislation by [clicking here](#).

Both Tommy and Commissioner Beatty agreed that if needed, another follow-up meeting will be scheduled. But neighbors generally congratulated and thanked Chief Lanier, Commander Kamperin and their officers for their outstanding efforts and added attention to address the car-jackings.