

GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA



Public Hearing on
B26-332, the “Vending Modernization Amendment Act of 2025”
B26-370, the “Vending Compliance and Modernization Amendment Act of 2025”

Testimony of Tiffany Crowe
Director, Department of Licensing and Consumer Protection

Before the Honorable Brianne Nadeau, Chairperson
Committee on Public Works and Operations
Council of the District of Columbia
1350 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20004

Thursday, February 24, 2026, 2 p.m.

Good afternoon Chairperson Nadeau, members of the Committee on Public Works and Operations (Committee), and staff. My name is Tiffany Crowe, Director of the Department of Licensing and Consumer Protection (DLCP), and I am here to testify in support of Mayor Bowser’s legislation, Bill 26-370, the “Vending Compliance and Modernization Amendment Act of 2025” (the “Mayor’s Proposal”). I will also present testimony on Bill 26-332, the “Vending Modernization Amendment Act of 2025”. Both proposals support legal vending and the vibrancy that local vendors bring the District. They also provide the District with enforcement authority to hold illegal vendors accountable and to address health and safety risks they present. As we prepare for the America 250 celebrations, which will attract hundreds of thousands of tourists and visitors to the District over the coming months, it is important that the District has a robust vending regulatory system in place with streamlined licensing processes and strong accountability measures.

In an effort to support vendors, in 2023, the Council passed D.C. Law 25-21, the “Street Vendor Advancement Amendment Act,” which removed criminal penalties for violating the District’s vending laws and established the Columbia Heights-Mount Pleasant Vending Zone, and the Vendor Amnesty Program. This law resulted in a number of consequences that present substantial health and safety risks to District residents and visitors. For example, unlicensed food truck vendors who are vending illegally along the National Mall present substantial public safety risks. They are frequently parked in bike lanes and crosswalks, and block fire hydrants, driveways, and entrances outside the Smithsonian museums and federal offices. Unlicensed food truck operators have prevented licensed food truck operators from utilizing their licensed spots by leaving “junk cars” overnight in the spots so licensed vendors – or anyone looking for a parking space – would not be able to use them. The situation has, on multiple occasions, become simply chaotic: several unlicensed food trucks have caught fire; fights have broken out between

unlicensed vendors; and customers have been scammed by paying more for purchases than they were told.

The problem is not limited to just the National Mall or food trucks. Unlicensed street and sidewalk vendors present similar risks. DLCP frequently receives complaints from businesses expressing frustration with vendors who set up their stands in front of their entrances preventing customers from easily entering or leaving. Unlicensed sidewalk vendors often block sidewalks and crosswalk ramps, making it challenging for pedestrians with ambulatory challenges and exposing the District to liability from Americans with Disabilities Act violations. Unlicensed food vendors, including food trucks, present health risks, such as food poisoning, because they ignore DC health codes and avoid health inspections. Unlicensed vendors – whether on sidewalks or in food trucks – don't pay their fair share. They don't pay sales taxes, business license fees, or health certificate fees. Supporting vendors cannot come at the risk of harming District residents, visitors, and businesses.

The agency's efforts, however, have not been limited to enforcement. We have also engaged in robust efforts to help vendors to become and/or remain licensed. For instance, DLCP has hosted vendor-specific outreach events to assist vendors with obtaining a license. In some instances, vendors were issued a vending license on the spot. In addition, every other month, DLCP meets with the Beloved Community Incubators to assist vendors with applying for vending licenses. Further, we have partnered with the Office of Tax to help vendors to apply for the Vendor Amnesty Program. Our collective efforts are reflected in the 21% increase of new vending licenses issued in Fiscal Year 2025, compared to the prior fiscal year, and the increase in vendors participating in the Vendor Amnesty Program. While we are proud of what we have accomplished, the District requires more tools to improve the market. This is why DLCP supports the vending modernization proposals that are shared in the Mayor's Proposal and

adopted in Councilmember Nadeau's Proposal. These include:

1. **No longer requiring an applicant to identify a site at the application stage of a vending license.** Under both proposals, a licensed vendor would be able to vend from any lawful vending spot in the city. This proposal would make it easier for individuals to obtain a vending license, while at the same time encouraging vendors to vend in new spots throughout the city as opposed to being clustered in certain locations.
2. **Establishing mobile vending locations.** Both proposals would establish mobile vending zones throughout the city that would be dedicated to food truck operators. What we have heard from mobile vendors is that there are not enough locations for food trucks. This bill addresses that.
3. **Expanding sidewalk vending zones.** Both proposals support our goal of spreading vendors throughout the District while reducing some of the regulatory hurdles on vendors. Those operating within the zone would be able to vend anywhere within the zone. Further, food vendors would be able to vend from tables, which is not the case for sidewalk vendors. Additionally, it would allow the sidewalk vending zone to be managed by a for-profit or non-profit organization.

While both proposals share positive attributes like the ones I just mentioned, they differ critically on matters of enforcement. Operators that flagrantly disobey the law and vend in public space illegally pose a grave risk to the public, for whom DLCP is charged with protecting.

From day one of my taking on this position, my team and I have received numerous complaints about unlicensed vendors across the District. Our federal partners, including the Smithsonian Institution and National Park Service, regularly identify illegally parked unlicensed food truck vendors along the National Mall, blocking crosswalks, fire hydrants, entrances, loading docks,

and presenting health and safety hazards to pedestrians in critical tourism hot spots. For example, the two food trucks that caught fire a year ago were unlicensed. Had they been properly licensed, they would have been inspected by the Fire and Emergency Medical Services Department and DC Health. These illegal food trucks also contribute to large volumes of trash that overwhelm the NPS-maintained trash cans along the National Mall, resulting in a huge increase in rats and presenting a poor image of the city. Supporting vendors and their ability to operate in the District should not pose health and safety risks to residents and visitors.

DLCP takes all the complaints it receives seriously, and it investigates them thoroughly, and when appropriate, takes the necessary enforcement action. However, the District's current enforcement mechanisms are insufficient to curb bad behavior. DLCP needs additional enforcement tools, as set forth in the Mayor's Proposal, such as:

1. **Enhanced civil penalties for unlicensed vendors.** Unlicensed vending is a Class I infraction, which carries a \$2,549 fine. Although the fine is adjusted annually based on the Consumer Price Index for All Consumers in the Washington Metropolitan Statistical Area, it is too low to be a deterrent. For many vendors, particularly unlicensed food truck operators who make thousands of dollars a day and fail to pay any taxes, paying the civil fine is the price of doing business. Civil fines must be high enough to discourage bad actors from repeatedly engaging in illegal activity.
2. **Altered criminal infractions.** The Mayor's Proposal would make the following acts criminal misdemeanor offenses: (a) vending without a license, permit or other authorization; (b) vending from an unauthorized location; (c) falsifying a license, permit or other authorization; (d) failing to produce a vending license or other required authorization; and (e) failing to produce identification. Given the egregious threats to public health and safety, these violations need strong accountability to deter bad actors. On multiple occasions, DLCP inspectors have been threatened by

unlicensed vendors. We also have numerous unlicensed vendors who ignore the civil fines or pay them and continue the same illegal activities. We need a strong deterrent for repeated unlawful behavior by bad actors.

3. **An expedited hearing process when goods are seized or the food truck is towed and impounded.** The Mayor's Proposal would allow vendors whose goods, merchandise and vending equipment are seized or food trucks that are towed and impounded to request an expedited hearing from the Office of Administrative Hearings (OAH), authorizing hearings and decisions within 10 business days. This new process is vital to the operators as we expand enforcement, and is also consistent with other District laws, such as for summary closures and summary suspensions.

We recognize that addressing illegal vending is not easy, and we appreciate the Council's, and particularly this Committee's, willingness to work with us in this effort. The Mayor's Proposal is designed to support entrepreneurs who want to start their own businesses and operate legally. Encouraging compliance with the District's laws and regulations creates a safer marketplace, where District consumers are protected and businesses have certainty. The Mayor's Proposal strikes the appropriate balance of supporting the vibrancy of our local vending market while protecting the health, safety and welfare of consumers and residents. We strongly encourage Council to move this measure forward as quickly as possible so the District has an effective vending regulatory system in place for the America 250 celebrations that start in a few months. We are committed to continuing to work with Council on this issue.

Thank you, Councilmember Nadeau, for allowing me to testify today and I am happy to answer any questions you may have.