



November 18, 2011

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Dear Mayor Gray,

As sympathizers with the Occupy movement, we are gratified that to date the District of Columbia government has shown respect and tolerance for the encampments at McPherson Square and Freedom Plaza. Under your leadership, the District of Columbia has thankfully remained free of the violence and controversy that has engulfed New York, Portland and other cities. In addition to respecting the First Amendment rights of the protesters, this enlightened approach has protected the protesters' health and safety, as well as the broader interests of the public, a substantial portion of whom support the Occupiers.

We are, nevertheless, well aware that the encampments pose challenges both to the protesters and the broader public. But these challenges, ranging from sanitation to traffic disruptions, are hardly unusual in urban areas, and the various agencies of the District government are perfectly competent to develop constructive solutions amicably and collaboratively with the protesters. It is in the highest interests of both the protesters and the District of Columbia government to do so.

We are dismayed that some officials have made vague statements about threats to public safety without supporting evidence. Even worse, one council member has been quoted in the media regarding the arbitrary eviction of the protesters by mid-December. These statements are both unconvincing and unhelpful. Statements of concern for the protesters' health and safety are not plausible if they are followed by armed force that inflicts injuries on the protesters. If the District uses force against the protesters in the manner of the actions in Oakland and New York, the District will face a scandal of huge proportions.

The Occupy movement is highlighting the failure of government and society to address the human needs of the 99% of our people, and it is doing so at great personal sacrifice. If all our elected officials were more committed to serving these human needs, the Occupy movement would not be necessary. Therefore, when some elected officials claim that the public interest requires evicting the Occupiers, their arguments sound hollow, to say the least.

The District of Columbia government has won the respect of both Occupiers and the public by the enlightened policies it has pursued to date regarding the encampments. The government can maintain its admirable record in this matter by respecting the protesters, communicating its concerns with clarity and specificity, establishing a commitment to collaboratively work out solutions, and giving ample and reasonable opportunity for these solutions to be implemented. By dint of such efforts, the District of Columbia government can prove that it serves the public, not just the 1%.

Sincerely,

Jerry N. Clark
Chair, DC for Democracy