

D.C. Council Rejects Earlier Youth Curfew

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By Ashlee Clark
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The [D.C. Council](#) yesterday narrowly rejected a plan to establish an earlier curfew for youths over the summer after several council members questioned the necessity of imposing a curfew at all.

The emergency legislation, submitted by council member [Tommy Wells](#) (D-Ward 6), would have established a 10 p.m. curfew Monday through Thursday and an 11 p.m. deadline the remaining days.

The youth curfew now in effect is 11 p.m. Sunday through Thursday and midnight Friday and Saturday. In July and August, the curfew is midnight daily. The city's restrictions apply to youths 16 and younger, and the proposal would have expanded the curfew to include 17-year-olds.

Council members voted 7 to 6 in favor of the bill, two votes short of the three-quarters majority required to enact emergency legislation.

Teens and young adults opposed to the curfew filled a few rows in the council's chambers at the [John A. Wilson Building](#) during the session. Some wore shirts that read: "Real crime fighting. Not abuse of power."

Council member [Yvette M. Alexander](#) (D-Ward 7) acknowledged them but said some young people might need more guidance than those in the audience do to stay out of trouble.

"If you are not of age, you have no business to be out," she said.

Council members said a similar emergency curfew had been necessary last year after a spike in homicides. However, some members said the same urgency doesn't exist this year.

"I want our law-abiding young people to have some freedom in this world," said council member [Carol Schwartz](#) (R-At Large).

Wells defended the legislation, citing exceptions that would have allowed young

people to be on the street under the guidance of parents, civic groups, schools or churches. He said the goal of the measure was to "protect youth at a time when they don't need to be out."

"I don't think that the government should abdicate the role of protecting the health and safety of children," he said.

Council member [Jim Graham](#) (D-Ward 1), who signed on to the legislation, said his constituents strongly supported an earlier curfew.

"It's meant to preserve the peace, order and quiet of neighborhoods," he said.

Dissenting members said youth curfews have not been proven to curb crime, and some worried that the government was taking on a role reserved for parents.

"It doesn't actually fix anything, though it feels good," said council member [Phil Mendelson](#) (D-At Large). After the meeting, he said he had heard complaints that some children have been harassed by police because of curfews.

Council member [Harry Thomas Jr.](#) (D-Ward 5) said the curfew was creating a "state of apartheid" for D.C. children. He said young people shouldn't have to defend themselves to police when they are doing nothing wrong.

"We need to stop targeting those who can't defend themselves," he said.

Council member [Marion Barry](#) (D-Ward 8) advocated a focus on resources, such as extending recreation centers' hours and creating jobs for young people to keep them out of trouble.

"Some kids don't listen," he said. "Some need some extra help, but that shouldn't be the government's job." Some audience members agreed.

"We should not place a whole group under house arrest for not committing a crime," said Alex Koroknay-Palicz, executive director of the National Youth Rights Association.

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