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Local

Proposed fee would fund D.C. auto-theft program

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WASHINGTON -

The [D.C. Council](#) will consider legislation today that would raise the District's vehicle registration fee by \$5 to finance a more aggressive campaign against motor vehicle theft.

Introduced by at-large [Councilman Phil Mendelson](#), the bill would establish an independent nine-member authority charged with combating auto theft in the District, and provide the group a dedicated revenue source of roughly \$1.3 million a year to implement its plans.

"These additional resources should make a difference," Mendelson said Monday. "We really aren't providing the resources we need."

The \$5 registration increase, which would take the fee to \$77 per Class A automobile, is expected to generate \$1.1 million annually. The authority also would receive about \$250,000 in fines from uninsured motorists.

Mendelson originally provided for a \$1 registration increase, which would have raised \$217,000 a year, but it was amended in committee to raise significantly more. For that reason, Ward 1 [D.C. Councilman Jim Graham](#) said Monday he will fight the bill.

"I'm opposed unless there's an opportunity for public comment," he said. "You don't make this kind of significant increase without that happening. We've already got the highest registration fees in the region."

Graham, who has oversight of motor vehicle matters, said Mendelson's public safety committee "has no jurisdiction to make that kind of significant change."

Auto thefts, while a major problem for the Metropolitan Police Department, have steadily declined since spiking in 2002 at 9,168 incidents, according to MPD statistics.

An independent authority would be able to focus solely on the such thefts, Mendelson said, and not get "distracted" by spikes in other kinds of crime.

The authority will have the power to make grants to law enforcement agencies for new auto-theft programs, to implement plans and strategies to combat the problems, to purchase new technology such as bait cars and to conduct public outreach programs.

Hot wheels

Auto thefts by year

» 2000: 6,600

» 2001: 7,970

» 2002: 9,168

» 2003: 9,549

» 2004: 8,136

» 2005: 7,467

» 2006: 6,101

» 2007: 5,793 (through November)

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