

STATEMENT ENCOURAGING RESTRAINT AND DEFERENCE

Earlier this week, I was contacted by a local TV reporter seeking comment regarding allegations of violent, out of control behavior at Dunbar Senior High School, just next door. The reporter wanted to know what the residents of this neighborhood were saying about reported fighting by students inside the school and gun violence at or around school events. I told him that I haven't heard any comments from the community regarding those allegations and that the constituents of this Single Member District have been by and large complimentary of the school and its interaction with the community. That's where the conversation ended. Later that day, on the 5 o'clock news, that reporter came on the air with a story about how violence at Dunbar had gotten out of control. On the 2 minute news segment, there was footage of a melee in the school hallway with punches and books being thrown and with chaotic shouting, pushing and shoving by students and faculty. One parent was interviewed for the piece as an alleged organizer of a protest by parents and alumni. To add further credence to the story, the reporter interviewed an individual, with the caption beneath her reading "ANC Commissioner", who bolstered the claim that there was absolutely no discipline at Dunbar. Needless to say, the story was very harmful to the reputation of Dunbar, an institution with such a distinguished legacy, and very damaging to the efforts of this community as we try to raise the profile of the neighborhood in the eyes of prospective new residents and investors.

As it turned out, the interviewed parent had a personal gripe against the school principal and the protest consisted of no more than three additional supportive individuals. More significantly, the video clip of the hallway melee was taken at another school bearing the name "Dunbar", located in a mid-west city nearly 1,000 miles away from here. These facts,

having been brought to the attention of the station's news anchor, the 2 minute segment was removed from the station's website by 9 pm and on the station's 11 o'clock newscast, there was a partial retraction of the story and an apology for using the wrong video clip. I have since spoken to the news anchor and he is very interested in doing some positive stories about Dunbar, and this neighborhood, to counterbalance the negative impact of this week's newscast.

But the reason I am making this statement tonight is that as Advisory Neighborhood Commissioners, we sometimes need to be reminded of the "stay in your own lane" principle. The Commissioner who was interviewed for the story does not represent this Single Member District and naturally, therefore, is not in immediate touch with the pulse of this community. I understand the time pressure that the reporter might have been under to pull together his two minute segment in time to run it on the 5 o'clock news and his frustration in not getting from me, as the ANC for the Dunbar neighborhood, a statement that fit the narrative he believed at the time was correct. But the proper protocol is that when asked about a matter taking place in another Single Member District, a Commissioner ought to decline comment and refer the reporter to the Commissioner who represents that Single Member District. It's the orderly thing to do. It's the respectful thing to do. And it helps insure that the story that is aired more accurately reflects the sentiments of the community most directly impacted. There will be times when ANC5E, as a body, has voted to take a certain position on an issue. In those instances, it may be appropriate for the Chair or some other designated Commissioner to act as a spokesperson for the entire commission. But absent those circumstances, I implore each of us to use restraint, respect protocol and stay in our own lanes because, simply put, it's the right thing to do.