

Background

The District of Columbia Open Meetings Act (OMA) requires transparency and openness in public matters like D.C. City Council meetings. This important law ensures that the public is given adequate notice and access to the meetings, making D.C. officials accountable. However, the City Council and Mayor Bowser are gutting the requirements of this law through the Open Meetings Clarification Temporary Amendment Act (OMCTA), which would allow the City Council and the Mayor to meet in secret.

While D.C. officials claim this will make the City Council more efficient, it is a clear attempt to secretly plot against President Trump and Congress. After President Trump signed an executive order establishing the D.C. Safe and Beautiful Task Force, D.C. officials attacked it for being “anti-home rule.” Shortly after, the D.C. City Council began making changes to the OMA for the explicit purpose of avoiding scrutiny from the Trump administration:

- Phil Mendelson, D.C. City Council Chairman: **“As chairman, I may want to gather members to discuss how to deal with congressional interference in our laws.”**
- Zachary Parker, Ward Member: “In fact, I think we need to address the elephant in the room...the catalyst for much of this was congressional interference and the need for the council to be able to nimbly discuss and maneuver with the mayor.”
- Robert Becker, D.C. Open Government (speaking in opposition to the bill but stating the obvious): **“I understand that the 900 pound gorilla in this room is threats to Home Rule.”**
- Robert Vinson Brannum, D.C. Federation of Civic Associations, Inc. (speaking in opposition to the bill but stating the obvious): **“When you gather us to champion the cause of the District of Columbia against an adversary—I’m in a public testimony so I need to be careful what I say—an adversary at 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue two blocks from here, we are not afraid. I am not afraid. If there is something coming down the road or down the street, the people need to be part of the defense.”**¹

This thinly veiled attempt to combat President Trump’s efforts to make D.C. safe from violent crime is controversial even among the Left. The ACLU of D.C. called efforts to water down the OMA a slippery slope² while the D.C. Open Government Coalition blasted secret meetings as “a substantial threat to the right of D.C. residents to see and hear about what their government is doing on their behalf, and to fulfill their duty as part of an informed electorate.”³

Bottomline

The D.C. City Council’s OMCTA allows for closed-door meetings between members of the D.C. City Council and the Mayor. The bill also guts transparency requirements for the Criminal Justice Coordinating Council (CJCC), which is responsible for for addressing crime and public safety issues.

Article I, Section 8, of the United States Constitution requires Congress “to exercise exclusive Legislation in all Cases whatsoever” related to D.C. governance. Congress must hold D.C. officials accountable for their failure to keep D.C. safe and beautiful, and it must reject any effort by D.C. officials to combat President Trump.

¹ Council of the District of Columbia, *Public Hearing: Bill 26-208: Open Meetings Clarification Amendment Act of 2025*, Apr. 22, 2025.

² WJLA News, *Debate intensifies on DC Council's move towards permanent private meetings*, Apr. 22, 2025.

³ D.C. Open Government Coalition letter, *Bills 26-199, 26-200 & 26-208 — the “Open Meetings Clarification [Emergency, Temporary & Permanent] Amendment Act[s] of 2025*, Mar. 31, 2025.