

# The Committee of 100 on the Federal City



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February 22, 2017

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The Honorable Muriel Bowser  
Mayor of Washington, DC  
John A. Wilson Building  
1350 Pennsylvania Ave., NW  
Washington, DC 20004

Dear Mayor Bowser,

We are aware that representatives of Digi Media Communications LLC (“Digi”) are urging your administration to take action to legitimize the digital billboards that it installed last year without lawful authorization at various locations in the District. For two reasons, we strongly urge you to reject any such request.

*First*, the idea that Washington should be opened up for the proliferation of digital billboards across the city is terrible public policy. This hi-tech outdoor advertising technology is many times more visually intrusive on surrounding streetscapes than conventional static signage, and proportionately more lucrative. This accounts for the relentless pressure by billboard companies to reduce the spread of digital billboards in DC to a matter of routine permitting by DCRA, finally scrapping the city’s longstanding ban on new billboards. By contrast, the Council made clear in Bill 21-919 in December 2016 that any new digital billboards would have to be authorized, if at all, only by an act of Council after due consideration by the Council and thus by the public – which is as it should be.

Moreover, many cities and several states have effectively banned digital sign technology altogether. We believe that the unique view sheds of the capital city demand no lesser standard of protection. We think you may be of the same view, especially considering your record of leadership as a Council committee chair in opposition to the proliferation of the similarly intrusive huge wall signs DC has dubbed “Special Signs”.

*Secondly*, any move to proliferate permanent digital signage in DC by validating this company’s unpermitted digital billboards retroactively would be particularly outrageous. Digi — now under preliminary injunction by the Superior Court — knew exactly what risks it was running in coming into the District, misrepresenting the nature of its permit applications for installation brackets, and

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proceeding without permits for the signs, apparently in the expectation that some DCRA inspector would acquiesce in its spurious interpretation of the Regulations. This was a classic billboard industry tactic: come into a town, confront it with a *fait accompli*, and force it to acquiesce with the threat of litigation costs.

Fortunately, Digi misjudged your Department of Consumer and Regulatory Affairs and DC's Attorney General. To rescue Digi Media now would be to send a signal to the billboard industry that DC is an easy target because some high-placed official will intervene in their favor when our law enforcement officials try to do their duty. The Council recognized this in rejecting Councilmember Evans' emergency Digi rescue bill last year, and we are confident that you will as well.

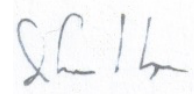
Sincerely yours,



Stephen A. Hansen, Chair



Meg Maguire, Vice Chair



Larry Hargrove, Trustee

cc: Rashad Young, City Administrator  
Karl Racine, Attorney General  
Melinda Bolling, Director, DCRA  
Beverly Perry Beverly, Senior Adviser, Office of the Mayor