

Dear Mayor Gray: Please Do Not Threaten to Eliminate My Food Truck Business

My name is Sandra Panetta and I am the sole owner and operator of the Sweetbites food truck. My mobile vending truck serves gourmet cupcakes and other baked goods, as well as hot beverages to customers in the DC area. I have over 4,000 Twitter followers and many repeat visitors to my truck every day.

Given the significance of the issues that I write to you about, I wish I could write a well-thought out and eloquent letter to you about my journey into this business and how I feel about the proposals to change vending regulations. However, as a single mom of 2 active ninth-graders, and the sole operator of a highly successful dessert truck business that I rely on to support my family and pay my employees, I will not have the time I wish I could devote to this letter. So I offer you the following:

I worked as a Policy Analyst at the Environmental Protection Agency for 23 years before retiring to run Sweetbites. After visiting other cities with successful and thriving food truck industries, and with 10 years of moonlight baking experience under my belt, I thought what a wonderful thing this could be for DC as well. I invested \$150,000 to build a commercial baking kitchen and a well-constructed and attractive food truck. When I launched my truck I was one of only a handful of trucks on the DC streets. The reception I received was overwhelmingly positive! People came out into the fresh air to chat, grab a quick and delicious lunch and a freshly-baked and fabulously yummy cupcake from my truck. I was thrilled about what I had accomplished as an entrepreneur, and felt that the risk I had taken had paid off. Despite how difficult it was to keep my truck running and maintain a high-quality product, I felt confident that my business would grow and thrive because of the outpouring of supportive fans. The DC government embraced the food truck business and permitted many more trucks to operate. The people kept coming out to enjoy the trucks and they were happy! I certainly would not get rich, but I did the right thing.

Now a new set of proposed DC regulations eliminates access to my most successful vending locations where I have built up hundreds of satisfied repeat customers. The DC government's proposed vending regulations threaten to take away my ability to operate my small business and directly threaten my livelihood. My customers have all been outraged at the possibility of losing the food trucks. They love frequenting the food trucks in prime business locations where they work. They want the access to convenient choices and quality food that the mobile vendors provide.

My food truck provides me the opportunity to earn a living working for myself and provide for my two children. However, if the DC government decides to drive my business away from prime locations, the outcome is the manipulation of city policy to favor one business over another, limit competition and consumer choice and ultimately drive out my and every other food truck in the District. Since the first food truck opened in DC more than three years ago we have been licensed by the DC government to do business from most any legal parking space without incident. You have no reason to abruptly alter that precedent now.

Mayor Gray, please do not pass these regulations. Having been a public servant myself for nearly 30 years with experience in all levels of government, I trust our local leaders to do the right thing. Please

pass fair and logical regulations for the beloved trucks of the District. Although the special interest groups who are pressuring you are using an indirect strategy to ultimately eliminate food trucks, please know that your constituents – the thousands of residents of Washington, DC looking to you to do the right thing – clearly want food trucks to stay.

Thank you for supporting food trucks and ensuring that my business, like all other businesses in DC, is allowed to thrive and grow. **We need regulations that continue to give customers the choices and convenience that they want.** And food truck owners deserve to be taken seriously as small business owners with employees to support, mortgages to pay, and mouths to feed.

Sincerely,

Sandra Panetta

Owner-Operator, Sweetbites LLC