

April 6, 2013

Mr. Helder Gil  
Legislative Affairs Specialist  
Department of Consumer and Regulatory Affairs  
1100 Fourth Street SW  
Room 5164  
Washington, DC 20024

Dear Mr. Gil:

My name is Sandra Panetta and I am the sole owner of the Sweetbites food truck that has been operating in DC for 3 years. 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. I am writing to provide comments about the Fourth Proposed Rulemaking for Street Vending.

The significance of the issues that I write to you about is overwhelming. If the proposed changes to the vending regulations pass I am clearly looking at losing my business and my entire investment, declaring bankruptcy and foreclosing on my home. I am a single mother of 2 ninth-graders and I rely on my truck business to support my family and pay my employees. I am writing to you to ask you to please prevent me from losing my business. Please do not pass these proposed regulations.

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. More trucks appeared, the people kept coming and they were happy! I certainly would not get rich, but I did the right thing.

Then the struggle began. Because current food truck rules require me to have a line of customers in order to do business, I was suddenly deemed a criminal for offering a cupcake and cup of coffee if no one was waiting. Officers from the Metropolitan Police Department have boarded my truck, threatened to arrest me and ordered me to shut down and drive away. Customers were frustrated and confused and

told to leave by police. Nothing made sense. My livelihood was at stake. "How could this be happening?" I thought.

The trouble didn't stop there!! Too many trucks were permitted to operate without any regard for how they would function. One arm of DC government is continuing to issue permits to more trucks while another arm is collecting thousands of dollars in parking tickets, another is collecting thousands of dollars in sales taxes and yet another is writing regulations that would limit us to only a few parking spots! Again, nothing makes sense and my livelihood is seriously at stake. A lottery system is now being proposed where only a limited number of trucks will be working at the prime spots where I built up my business over the last 3 years. I am shocked and devastated at how the DC government is treating my business. My customers are outraged at the possibility of losing access to my product.

My food truck provides me the opportunity to earn a living working for myself and provide for my two children. However, narrow special interests are calling for you and the DC government to decide where I can and cannot park to do business. Regardless of their stated reasons, please recognize they seek to manipulate 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. If these regulations pass, I will not be able to sustain my business.

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 in favor of a process that would drive me out of business. We need regulations that will let my small business thrive. The food trucks are loved by the people of DC and were advertised by DC as one of the Top 10 attractions for tourists!! Please rethink these regulations and propose a fair and supportive system of operation.

Please do not cave into special interest. Having been a public servant for nearly 30 years myself 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