

Orange council rejects private crossing guards

By Chris Sykes
Staff Writer

City Council members unanimously voted against a resolution two weeks ago to privatize the city's school crossing guards.

The measure that would have awarded a contract to DMS Systems of Jersey City for approximately \$170,000 was the subject of much discussion during the Jan. 18 meeting by council members, crossing guards and Mayor Eldridge Hawkins Jr.

"We have eight school guards that are working right now but not receiving the right pay, but that does not deter them from doing their jobs," said Alvenia Jones, who said she spoke on behalf of the guards. Her relation to the guards was not known. She continued that while some crossing guards have been assigned to specific corners on a "permanent" basis, they are classified by the city as "substitute guards."

Jones added that privatizing the service would be tantamount to a de facto layoff of more city employees since the administration is responsible for employing crossing guards, not the Orange Board of Education.

"I was told by Mr. Mason this move would save the city \$200,000. When I crunched the numbers myself, it only came out to \$115,000," said Jones, referring to Business Administrator John Mason. "As far as I'm concerned, we have too many assistant directors working in the city. One of them only works 20 hours a week, but he gets medical benefits."

Jones did not state the assistant director to whom she referred.

Gloria Stewart, a longtime city resident and homeowner who is employed by the Board of Education, said she was glad that Jones spoke against Hawkins' privatization plan. Stewart claimed the city's past history with outsourcing has not always gone according to plan.

"I feel so good that my supervi-

sor got up here and talked about what I see with my own eyes every day and how our crossing guards care for our kids," said Stewart. "We always want to outsource and give away our services, but we end up suffering. You weren't here a few years ago when we privatized the water service and it was a disaster."

Hawkins defended his plan.

"I have spoken to the company that we want to contract with and asked them to retain the current employees in whatever capacity they can," Hawkins said during the meeting.

South Ward Councilman Edward Marable, an attorney, said unless Hawkins' assurances were written into the contract and language of the proposed resolution to privatize the service, he believed there was no guarantee DMS would follow the mayor's request.

"If it's not in the contract, then it's not enforceable. I've read through the contract and I don't see any language like that. I think it should be reduced to writing," said Marable. "Ms. Jones said the hours in the proposed contract are not right. As I look at the contract, the times in it are 2:45 a.m. to 8 a.m., and another time in the afternoon that also does not correspond to the actual hours in the day when students are going to or from school."

Marable then called Carole Murray, a crossing guard, to address the council about the inaccuracies. Murray confirmed the information Marable read was incorrect. She added the contract did not allow for time worked beyond listed hours as students continue to walk to and from school.

"The real times are 7:15-9:15 a.m. and 2:15-4 p.m., but sometimes it varies because it depends on where you're stationed at," said Murray. "Please say what you mean and mean what you say when it comes to keeping kids first in Orange. Say 'no' to privatizing the crossing guards."