

Cummings to present anti-crime

bill today

Congressman's legislation
was inspired by deaths
of Dawson family in city

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Rep. Elijah E. Cummings is proposing a bill called the Dawson Family Community Protection Act that would provide up to \$1 million annually to Baltimore and other cities that are battling severe drug problems and violent crime.

Cummings will hold a hearing on the proposed bill today at the University of Maryland School of Nursing.

Named after Angela and Carnell Dawson and their five children, who died from injuries sustained in an arson fire at their East Preston Street home in October, the bill could come up on the House floor as early as this week. It has been passed in the subcommittee on Criminal Justice, Drug Policy and Human Resources, which is chaired by Mark E. Souder, an Indiana Republican who supports it.

The bill would provide money to Baltimore and other cities designated as High Intensity Drug Trafficking Areas. Cities could then use the money for additional police officers, anonymous hot lines for residents to phone in tips, improved lighting in drug-infested neighborhoods and overtime for officers.

Philadelphia, Atlanta and Los Angeles are among other HIDTA cities.

Cummings, who spoke at the funeral for Angela Dawson and her children, said he is confident the bill will pass.

"When the Dawsons perished so tragically, a number of us in the city and in Congress made a decision that we were not going to allow them to die in vain," said Cummings, a Maryland Democrat who was born and raised in Baltimore. "What we wanted to do was make sure that we did all we could to pro-

vide resources to help [citizens] create the kind of environment where drug sales people felt unwelcomed."

Baltimore residents who call drug-infested neighborhoods home are often faced with the problem of whether to report illegal drug activity to police and risk retribution.

Police and court records showed that Angela Dawson made several calls to authorities in the weeks leading to her death.

"One of my greatest fears when the Dawson incident happened was that it would have a chilling effect on the people who want to cooperate with the police, thus making the problem even worse," Cummings said. "I think that's part of the intent of whoever perpetrated this horrific offense, to intimidate, to send a message. We all read about people in the drug trafficking field sending messages.

... We as a society have to address it. That's why this is a bipartisan bill."

Chris Donesa, staff director for Souder, said the congressman strongly supports the bill.

"He feels it's important just to make sure the federal government supports people who want to come forward in their communities," Donesa said.

Cummings said he thinks his bill — if passed — will be effective. To ensure its passage, the bill has been included in a larger bill, the Office of National Drug Control Policy Reauthorization.

"It's going to take time," Cummings said. "I am hopeful that most of the money will be used for additional officers. There are a lot of people who want to cooperate with the police but they're simply afraid, and I understand their fear."

Today's hearing is expected to begin at 10:30 a.m. and last for two hours.

Several local officials and community leaders are expected to attend, including Mayor Martin O'Malley, freshman Democratic Rep. C.A. Dutch Ruppersberger, Police Commissioner Kevin P. Clark and Thomas Carr, director of the Washington-Baltimore High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area project.

Efforts to reach Clark, with

whom Cummings said he has spoken about the Dawson Family Community Protection Act, were unsuccessful.