

10/26/18 Testimony of Barbara Kahlow
on B 22-0959, East End Health Equity Act of 2018

I, Barbara Kahlow, live at 800 25th Street, N.W. in the Foggy Bottom part of Ward 2. I am representing the West End Citizens Association (WECA), one of the oldest citizens associations in DC (we began in 1910). The WECA is primarily interested in maintaining the quality of life for the existing residential community in Foggy Bottom-West End.

I am testifying in opposition to B 22-0959, a proposed bill oddly captioned “East End Health Equity Act” but which helps the East End at the expense of dramatically and adversely affecting Foggy Bottom-West End. The bill calls for almost a 100% increase in the size of the George Washington University (GWU) Hospital in Foggy Bottom and – without any justification at all – would exempt this huge proposed expansion from the statutorily-required and community-protective Certificate of Need (CON) process. On October 11, 2018, the WECA Board voted to oppose B 22-0959.

In fact, the Foggy Bottom-West End community – including ANC-2A, the WECA, and the Foggy Bottom Association – is united in serious opposition to the bill. We all support full medical services in the East End but not at the expense of our community. The quid pro quo in the bill is flatly unacceptable. Our community will oppose this expansion and exemption not only before the Council but also before the Zoning Commission which, under the 2007 GWU Campus Plan, would need to review and approve any expansion proposal. We understand from two high-level GWU Hospital officials that the likely location for the expansion would be directly to the South of the Hospital (in Square 41) on one of the 16 specifically-identified GWU development sites in the 20-year Campus Plan (2006-2025).

The bill’s caption states in pertinent part, “To exempt certain health care projects of the District of Columbia and District Hospital Partners, LP, doing business as George Washington University Hospital (“GWU Hospital”) from the Certificate of Need process.”

Today, according to GWU Hospital CEO Kim Russo, the GWU Hospital in Foggy Bottom has 385 beds. The 1999 zoning Order No. 16389 stated, “The proposed replacement hospital [*moving from East of 23rd Street to West of 23rd Street*] will have capacity for 458 licensed beds, 371 of which will be opened immediately” (p. 10). We understand that the CON process back then never authorized the additional 87 beds. But, according to Russo, more recently, 14 beds were added in two separate CON proceedings. In any case, the WECA is unclear if the 270 bed increase in the bill is on the 458 licensed beds basis, the 371 initial beds basis, or the 385 current beds basis. The bill could result in a 96% increase in size.

Any huge expansion would adversely affect our community, especially: (a) double the number of ambulances and other hospital traffic around Washington Circle and on 23rd Street, which since the hospital’s move across 23rd Street, has resulted in unacceptable congestion; and (b) further strains on limited on-street residential parking in our residential community. In 1998-99, the Foggy Bottom community testified in opposition to the hospital’s proposed move across 23rd Street specifically on these two and many other quality of life issues.

BZA Vice Chair Betty King voted to deny the hospital’s move application and wrote detailed reasons (7/30/99 3-page minority report, BZA Exh. 98). Then DC Department of Public Works (now DDOT) raised major objections and recommended 4 specific substantial changes (such as

moving the proposed emergency room off Washington Circle) (1/5/99 BZA transcript, pp. 23-27 and 12/30/98 letter, BZA Exh. 79). Ward 2 Councilmember Jack Evans can vouch for the current traffic mess around Washington Circle.

In addition, after extensive meetings and negotiations, GWU executives and GWU hospital officials committed to the position that there would never be a requested expansion in the number of beds. In fact, their witness asserted “it will have over 50 year life” at the requested capacity after its move to West of 23rd Street (11/18/98 BZA transcript, p. 187).

Since Sec. 2 of B 22-0959 amends Section 8(b) of the Health Services Planning Program Re-Establishment Act of 1996 (DC Law 11-191, DC Official Code § 44-407) which identifies specific projects exempt from certificate of need review, the WECA would like the Committee to consider the following amendment to the bill text of B 22-0959¹:

- Removal of lines 38 through 42, which state,

(d) A new paragraph (16) is added to read as follows:
 (16) The construction, equipment acquisition, and operation by GWU Hospital of a new bed tower on or adjacent to the existing GWU Hospital campus, which shall increase the licensed bed capacity of GWU Hospital by 270 beds;
- Removal of the references in Sec. 3(b) lines 73 and 76 to Sec. 2(d) which will no longer exist after its removal.

Thank you for your consideration of our views.

¹I previously served as a Congressional Subcommittee Staff Director; so, I have knowledge of the legislative process – from bill introduction to amendments to a vote.