

3/12/18 Testimony of Barbara Kahlow
on B 22-579, Helicopter Landing Pad Amendment Act of 2017

I, Barbara Kahlow, live at 800 25th Street, N.W. in the Foggy Bottom part of Ward 2. Thank you for allowing me to be the first witness today. Today, 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 22-579, a proposed bill to amend current protective law (authored by former Ward 2 Councilmember John Wilson) which prohibits any new helipads in residential areas, including specifically for the George Washington University (GWU) Hospital in Foggy Bottom. On February 1, **2018**, the WECA Board voted to oppose B 22-579.

In fact, the other major Foggy Bottom-West End citizens association (the Foggy Bottom Association) took no position on this bill since its members were split. And, the Foggy Bottom-West End Advisory Neighborhood Commission (ANC-2A) took a 3-2 vote of its 8-Member Commission¹ for conditional support of the bill. However, one of the 3 ‘yes’ votes resigned from ANC-2A shortly thereafter due to her graduation from GWU and move outside of Foggy Bottom-West End. So, the ANC was also split and should not be given “great weight” in this instance.

In addition, the ANC’s basically meaningless and toothless “Voluntary Neighborhood Agreement” with the GWU Hospital (which was dated before the ANC vote²) does not even provide a maximum cap (earlier drafts included a 175 flights per year cap) or limit flights to only ‘mass casualty’ (i.e., not also non-critical, etc.) events. It also provides for a laundry list of “exemptions,” leading to an unknown number of flights (even from WV and DE) and at an unacceptable level. Lastly and most importantly, there are no enforcement provisions to protect our residential community.

As acknowledged by Patrick Kennedy, then Chair of ANC-2A, the overwhelming number of resident comments in writing to him or orally stated at various ANC meetings held strong views in opposition. So, although there is some limited support in the community, the vast majority of permanent residents are in strong opposition to this bill.

Today, I will discuss three significant areas of WECA’s objection:

- (a) **safety** due to helicopter accidents, such as those for the former helipad on the NYC Pan Am building which led to discontinuation of all flights.

- (b) **damage** to the Foggy Bottom Historic District homes – apparently, hospital providers in others communities – none of which are in an historic district as far as we know – have paid for structural analyses, new windows, damage, etc. but the GWU Hospital is unwilling to do anything to protect vibration damage to our fragile homes.

¹ As for the three other Commissioners, one (William Kennedy Smith) recused himself since he was negotiating with GWU Hospital for work and two were absent from the 10/18/17 ANC meeting.

² The agreement states, “ANC 2A will pass a resolution at its October 18, 2017 regularly scheduled meeting supporting ...”

- (c) **noise** - GWU Hospital will not agree to even follow Reagan DCA's restricted late night flight hours; instead, GWU Hospital even wants to operate flights after 11 PM and until 6 AM – the one-day helicopter test by the GWU Hospital resulted in reported objectionable noise by most respondents to the 'survey' and the October 8, 2017 Army Ten-Miler race produced not only deafening noise and widespread building vibrations but terrifying close helicopters to our homes, including my 7th floor apartment.

In addition, on February 2, **2017**, the WECA met with two GWU Hospital staff and a lobbyist for the Hospital and were disappointed that the promised follow-up meeting which the WECA had requested the Hospital to convene with DDOT, the WECA, and the Hospital was never convened. This objection was re-raised when the Hospital attended a March 25, **2017** WECA Membership meeting. What a disappointment! In addition, the excellent analysis by a Foggy Bottom resident expert (John P. George Director, CGI Digital Innovations Group, Health Industry Community) about the various economic reasons for the proposed GWU Hospital helipad were never addressed by the Hospital. I hope that you will also hear from this expert later today.

The WECA would like the Committee to consider the following amendments to B 22-579³:

- (1) To ensure residential **safety**, amend Sec. 2 to provide that if there is even one accident, the helicopter pad will be shut down permanently.
- (2) To remediate **damage**, amend Sec. 2 to provide that if any homes in the Foggy Bottom Historic District are damaged by the helipad's vibrations, GWU Hospital will pay for full restoration.
- (3) To remediate objectionable **noise**, amend Sec. 2 to provide that if the late operational hours (between 11 PM and 6 AM) produce objectionable noise, all such late hours will be permanently discontinued.
- (4) Amend Sec. 2 to include a hard cap of 175 flights a year and for mass casualties only.

Thank you for your consideration of our views.

³I previously served as a Congressional Subcommittee Staff Director; so, I have knowledge of the legislative process – from bill introduction to amendments to a vote.