



**TESTIMONY OF**

**MS. NATALIE WILLIAMS,**

**PRESIDENT OF THE WARD EIGHT DEMOCRATS, INC.**

**BEFORE THE**

**DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA BOARD OF ELECTIONS AND ETHICS**

**ON THE**

**2013 PRECINCT BOUNDARY EFFICIENCY PLAN**

**PRESENTED ON:**

**THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 21, 2013 at 10AM**

Good morning Chairperson Nichols and members of the Board of Elections and Ethics. My name is Natalie Williams. I am a Ward Eight resident, an Advisory Neighborhood Commissioner representing 8A07, and the President of the Ward Eight Democrats.

I am here this morning to testify on behalf of the Ward Eight Democrats regarding the Board's plan to realign the voting precincts in the District of Columbia in general, and specifically those in the Ward Eight section of the city.

At the Ward Eight Democrats' recent General Business Meeting, held on Saturday, November 16, 2013, it was unanimous amongst the members present and the members of our Executive Committee that we, as a collective body, call upon the Board of Elections to withdraw this plan for any further consideration.

Our members expressed many points of opposition to the plan as it is presented. However, one proposed change that the Ward Eight Democrats believe we can adopt is the numbering system. We believe that the way that polling places would be identified is not only acceptable but also most appropriate. Having the Ward number precede the sequential number identifying the representative polling place will be beneficial, not only in Ward Eight, but across the city.

With that being said, and stated for the record, please allow me to outline for you the Ward Eight Democrats' concerns regarding the overall plan:

- 1) Ward Eight is a very populated Ward consisting of many seniors, disabled, single parent households, and physically challenged residents.
- 2) Ward Eight has some significant geographical spatial challenges, created by national park land, infrastructure impediments, and a lack of adequate public transportation in some areas.
- 3) Ward Eight would be negatively impacted by this plan if implemented creating less, convenient access to polling places.
- 4) Ward Eight would become disenfranchised as it relates to exercising our right to vote; more than other Wards in the city, who are more densely populated, have

better infrastructures, and access to more public and private transportation options.

Moreover, it also concerns the Ward Eight Democrats that you are proposing this realignment without having identified all of the needed polling places. This presents a problem to us, for if this plan was adopted and new polling places were not identified in time for voting where would those voters go to vote? This would further disenfranchise Ward Eight voters.

I would like to also cite one example, out of many that I could have lifted from this plan, which would create a hardship for the people of Ward Eight. As I stated earlier, I am also the ANC Commissioner for 8A07, which is the Hillsdale neighborhood of our ward. The proposed plan would close Wilkinson Elementary School, which is currently precinct 118, and move the voting to Union Temple Baptist Church – the proposed new number 807.

While your efficiency plan on paper makes it look like this would be the best thing to do, in reality it creates multiple barriers to voting access for members of my Single Member District. First, the new proposed voting precinct is exactly one mile away from the heart of my single member district. For some this may not seem far, but for those travelling by foot, walkers, wheel chairs and baby carriages this is extremely far. Not to mention the hills voters would have to climb and descend, and in some places the lack of sidewalks, and poorly maintained streets. Oh and by the way, I forgot to mention the multiple buses we would have to take if we opted for public transportation, and the lack of sufficient off street parking, for those who drive.

Madam Chairperson, please allow me to go on record to expressly request that you withdraw from further consideration the Proposed 2013 Precinct Boundary Efficiency Plan. However, please note that while we believe that one size does not fit all, and what might be efficient for one, is not necessarily efficient for others, if you were to proceed with this plan, and it looks like certain parts of the city would benefit from its adoption, we respectfully request that Ward Eight be exempted from the changes as

proposed, with the exception of the new polling place numbering system as planned – something that the Ward Eight Democrats would support.

Thank you for your time and consideration of my testimony, and the concerns of the residents of Ward Eight, I will remain for any questions you might have.