



January 2, 2020

The Committee of the Whole
Council of the District of Columbia
The Honorable Phil Mendelson, Chairman

Testimony by Jenny Bilfield, President & CEO, Washington Performing Arts
On behalf of Rhona Friedman

January 9, 2020

**PR23-577, the “Commission on the Arts and Humanities
Rhona Friedman Confirmation Resolution of 2019”**

Dear Chairman Mendelson and Members of the Committee of the Whole,

Travel precludes my ability to participate in the PR23-577 Confirmation Hearing for Rhona Friedman on January 9, 2020. However, I would like to convey my support for Ms. Friedman and share specific examples of how her service, expertise, and commitment as a current Commissioner, have so deeply benefitted the residents of our city.

One of the most important things to know about Rhona Friedman is that she is thorough, well-informed, and a tenacious problem-solver in every pursuit. I have observed myriad examples of these qualities in the 7 years I have known her.

Rhona Friedman has been a tireless champion for Arts Education in the D.C. Public Schools, as a fundamental necessity for our schoolchildren. I have been impressed with Friedman’s laser-focus on the creation (and adoption, by the Council) of an arts policy for public and charter schools. To formulate and refine her recommendations, Friedman convened and led public symposia that explored best practices in public arts education – within D.C. and in other U.S. cities. She held roundtables with local practitioners and thought leaders to understand where opportunity gaps and challenges exist, and how best to sustain access to resources (teachers, program partnerships, etc.) for the benefit of our students. I was impressed with Friedman’s agendas and selection of presenters at the symposia hosted by Shakespeare Theater Company and the Library of Congress; both daylong events were standing-room-only, filled with experienced professionals and those eager to learn and advocate. My own organization, Washington Performing Arts, is heavily invested in arts education (we have programs in 100 public schools), thus I know first-hand how essential informed (with data and research) advocacy is. As Chair of the Arts Education Committee at the DCCAH, Friedman brings her extensive knowledge to a most important forum, one where critical decisions are being made around impact and funding for the benefit of D.C. schoolchildren.

Rhona Friedman is a proponent of accountability and good governance. I have known many people who have served with Friedman on Boards of arts and culture institutions and schools, and each has shared that they have relied upon her unwavering ethics, problem-solving skills, and expertise in governance, at times when complex and nuanced decisions needed to be made. For those who have read the publicly available Commission meeting minutes, it is clear that Friedman is well-prepared and highly participatory in key discussions around resource use, decision-making, reporting, and operations. For any public agency, accountability is paramount and public trust is always at stake. Having chaired the Finance Committee at DCCA, Friedman's experience, continuity and equanimity as a Commissioner will continue offer value in the years ahead.

In parallel to her role on the Commission, **Rhona Friedman is sought for her ability to find common ground across the arts and culture community.** She was a Keynote Speaker for the first public event (at the Library of Congress) of *SHIFT: A Festival of American Orchestras*, launched by Washington Performing Arts and The Kennedy Center. And, she has worked closely with former Mayor Sharon Pratt (serving as the Fellow on Arts and Humanities) on the newly launched *Institute on Public Policy and History (IPPH)* at the University of District of Columbia. Friedman has seamlessly navigated the fields of American Orchestras and Higher Education, forging connections between practitioners, experts and newcomers alike – just two examples of her deft skill in connecting stakeholders from varied backgrounds.

As both a D.C. resident and President & CEO of one of Washington's most storied organizations, I value Rhona Friedman's legacy of service to our community in ways that directly impact our residents and especially our students. I am delighted that Mayor Bowser has recommended her for another term, and am grateful that Friedman is willing and eager to serve.

Thank you for indulging this lengthy testimony. Please call on me if I can be of further assistance.

Sincerely,

Jenny Bilfield

Jenny Bilfield
President & CEO
Washington Performing Arts
jbilfield@washingtonperformingarts.org
202.533.1895