

**COUNCIL OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA  
COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE  
COMMITTEE REPORT**

1350 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW, Washington, DC 20004

**DRAFT**

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**TO:** All Councilmembers

**FROM:** Chairman Phil Mendelson  
Committee of the Whole

**DATE:** October 6, 2020

**SUBJECT:** Report on PR 23-892, “Sense of the Council Woodrow Wilson High School Renaming Protocol Resolution of 2020”

The Committee of the Whole, to which PR 23-892, “Sense of the Council Woodrow Wilson High School Renaming Protocol Resolution of 2020” was referred, reports favorably thereon with amendments, and recommends approval by the Council.

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**I. BACKGROUND AND NEED**

*“The colored people of Washington have never recovered from the blow that struck them in the time of Woodrow Wilson. Although sporadic anti-discrimination measures have been sponsored by succeeding administrations, the example set by the government has been one of exclusion and segregation in menial jobs.”<sup>1</sup>*

***“Woodrow Wilson” Should Not Be The Name For Our High School***

Woodrow Wilson High School, named after the nation’s 28<sup>th</sup> President, is located in Washington DC – home to the federal government – and part of the public school system for a city in which a large percentage of the populace is African American: 30% in the 1910 Census; estimated to be 47% in 2018. The name of a public school should not be antagonistic to local

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<sup>1</sup> SEGREGATION IN WASHINGTON: A REPORT OF THE NATIONAL COMMITTEE ON SEGREGATION IN THE NATION’S CAPITAL, 62 (November 1948). [hereinafter 1948 Report]

values. Yet Woodrow Wilson’s Presidential administration was not only antagonistic, but actually harmful, to the African American community of Washington, D.C.

Wilson “Racially segregated the U.S. federal government and oversaw the expansion of Jim Crow segregation measures in the District of Columbia.”<sup>2</sup> Segregation had not existed in the federal government from the Civil War through the administration of Theodore Roosevelt. “At a time when black Americans not only were denied access to social and economic mobility, but also literally were hunted and murdered for the cause of white supremacy, the federal government before Wilson was a remarkably equal opportunity employer.”<sup>3</sup> Then Jim Crow crept into the Census Bureau during the Taft Administration. Still, “...segregation did not become general government policy until the presidency of Woodrow Wilson.”<sup>4</sup>

Before President Wilson took office in 1913, employment by the federal government was an engine of growth for the Black middle class in the District. As of 1907, there were 2,800 Black federal workers. The District had the nation’s largest Black population and boasted a rich array of Black-run schools, churches, businesses, newspapers, and civic organizations. With steady work and decent pay, federal agencies gave Black men and women a chance to buy homes and provide a stable life for their families. Federal jobs, appointed or merit-based, sustained the city’s Black middle and upper classes.<sup>5</sup>

Soon after his inauguration, President Wilson’s Administration oversaw the demotion and firing of Black workers, isolating them in “Negro corners,” forcing them to use “colored” toilets, and erecting “Whites Only” signs in federal buildings. Beginning in 1914, the Civil Service Commission required photographs with job applications so as to avoid the hiring of Black applicants. Under a systematic purge, virtually all Blacks were removed from management positions, moved to menial jobs, or dismissed. Throughout Wilson’s two terms in office, White administrators refused to hire or appoint qualified Black applicants, wrote negative personnel reports on Black employees, and denied promotions to longtime Black workers.<sup>6</sup>

At the time, and for decades since, the federal government was the dominant employer in the District. Not only, therefore, did its personnel policies affect a substantial number of District residents, but its policies influenced the private sector generally. “With the government setting the example for the community, Negroes lost what rights they had previously enjoyed in Washington theaters and restaurants, and were systematically segregated in housing and private employment.”<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> *About Woodrow Wilson* (October 4, 2020), <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/about-woodrow-wilson>.

<sup>3</sup> Eric S. Yellin, *Remembering Woodrow Wilson’s Racism Isn’t Enough*, (November 25, 2015), <https://www.usatoday.com/story/opinion/2015/11/25/woodrow-wilson-princeton-racism-students-column/76333192/>.

<sup>4</sup> 1948 Report at 62.

<sup>5</sup> Chris Myers Ashe, *Woodrow Wilson’s Racist Legacy*, WASHINGTON POST, December 11, 2015. [hereinafter Ashe]

<sup>6</sup> ERIC S. YELLIN, *RACISM IN THE NATION’S SERVICE: GOVERNMENT WORKERS AND THE COLOR LINE IN WOODROW WILSON’S AMERICA* (UNC Press 2013). Also, 1948 Report at 61.

<sup>7</sup> 1948 Report at 62.

President Wilson’s racism had a disproportionate impact on our city. Accordingly, it is not appropriate to have one of our high schools named after this public figure, despite other aspects of his record.<sup>8</sup> “While Wilson has a complicated legacy that includes genuine accomplishments, his record in the District is unambiguously negative. In a diverse area with a rich black history, we should not have the name of an unabashed white supremacist atop one of the District’s few public high schools.”<sup>9</sup> PR 23-892 supports efforts to change the name of Woodrow Wilson High School.

### ***A History of Wilson High School***

Woodrow Wilson High School is Washington, DC’s largest public high school. Wilson is a comprehensive neighborhood school, with over one-third of its students hailing from neighborhoods outside of the school’s zoned boundary. Based on data from the 2018-19 school year, of its 1,800 students, 31% were African American, 21% Hispanic, 37% White, and 6% Asian. Wilson High School opened in 1935 as an all-White school. Wilson’s first Black teachers, Edna Jackson and Archie Lucas, joined the faculty in the 1950s, shortly after the Supreme Court ordered the District’s schools to be desegregated in *Bolling v. Sharpe*. Wilson did not, however, see a significant influx of Black students until 1969, following the court decision in *Hobson v. Hansen* that put an end to a discriminatory tracking system, and the expansion of the school’s boundaries to encompass a more diverse student population.

In 2015, a group of Wilson teachers began a concerted effort to change the name of the school by urging their colleagues to join a discussion on the subject as a predicate to a faculty vote. The teachers encouraged others in the community to engage in similar discussions. Since then, the DC History and Justice Collective has held several community forums, met with Councilmembers, engaged with DCPS Central Office officials who expressed openness to the name change, and directed advocates to the DCPS school naming policy and the necessary steps that would need to be taken to change the school’s name.

Then, on May 25, 2020, police officers in Minneapolis, Minnesota murdered George Floyd in a killing recorded on camera, sparking demonstrations that evolved into nationwide protests and sending shock waves around the world. George Floyd’s murder, and other incidents of Black people being killed at the hands of police in recent years with little or no consequence, has forced all cities and our nation to reckon with its racist past and present.

In June 2020, the District’s State Board of Education wrote a letter to DCPS Chancellor Ferebee urging him to take quick action to change the name of Wilson High School. The members

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<sup>8</sup> Wilson Administration’s accomplishments include: creation of the Federal Reserve; creation of the Federal Trade Commission; adoption of the Clayton Antitrust Act; adoption of the Federal Farm Loan Act; implementation of the Revenue Act of 1913 establishing the federal income tax; adoption of the first federal laws mandating an 8-hour workday and restricting child labor; and Congressional approval of the 19th Amendment (although at first he did not support women’s suffrage). His leadership in foreign policy helped bring an end to the Great War and established a new world order through creation of the League of Nations (precursor to today’s United Nations). Woodrow Wilson was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1919.

<sup>9</sup> Ashe.

wrote: “This request has heightened urgency for us given our country’s and city’s broad examination of race and racism – and their connection to our schools. Whatever one might think of Wilson’s efforts in international affairs or on other matters, as president, his role in Washington DC was ugly and civically corrosive – he worked systematically to demote and segregate DC’s African-American civil servants, who had previously built a thriving middle-class community.”<sup>10</sup>

In July 2020, Princeton University decided to remove the name of Woodrow Wilson from its School of Public and International Affairs and from a residential college. The announcement noted that “Wilson’s racism was significant and consequential even by the standards of his own time. ... He not only acquiesced in but added to the persistent practice of racism in this country, a practice that continues to do harm today.”<sup>11</sup>

Also in July, Mayor Bowser announced the formation of the District of Columbia Facilities and Commemorative Expressions (FACES) Working Group to examine names on public buildings, public spaces, and monuments and to make recommendations as to what, if any, actions need to be taken if the person the facility is named for is “inconsistent with DC values...”<sup>12</sup>

Then all members of the Council co-introduced PR 23-892, authored by Councilmember Mary Cheh, expressing support for “efforts to consider whether or not to change the name of Woodrow Wilson High School and, more broadly, all public schools in the District of Columbia, to ensure that the individuals for whom the schools buildings are named represent the mission, vision, and values of DCPS and the residents of the District, including consideration of whether the building name honors an individual who supported or enabled acts of discrimination.”

### ***What’s in a name?***

We name our schools to identify and distinguish them. We could instead number them (e.g., “Public High School No. 8”), but actual names are more interesting, human, and an opportunity. An opportunity to honor someone or something, or an opportunity to inspire. Surely the high school at 3950 Chesapeake Street, NW was named both to honor the 28th President and to inspire students with the example of an accomplished national and world leader.

However, a name should be agreeable to the public. And the values embraced by the public in one era may change significantly three generations later. Woodrow Wilson’s progressive accomplishments and world leadership were important when Woodrow Wilson High School opened during the Great Depression, on the eve of World War II. Today, the tough challenge of overcoming racism dominates the national debate, the nation is grappling with how to end systemic and implied racism, and President Wilson’s Jim Crow legacy can no longer be brushed aside, especially in light of the public’s demand to cleanse the public space of racist symbols.

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<sup>10</sup> Letter from District of Columbia State Board of Education, all Members, to Dr. Lewis Ferebee, Chancellor, District of Columbia Public Schools (June 23, 2020) (on file with the Committee of the Whole).

<sup>11</sup> Letter from Princeton University President Christopher L. Eisgruber, to Members of the Princeton Community (June 27, 2020) (on file with the Committee of the Whole).

<sup>12</sup> DCFACES at 3.

It is the Committee's view that the naming of public school buildings should be both to honor and inspire. More broadly, the name of a public building, space, or street should: (1) be one that the community supports; (2) honors a person, event, or place for a clearly articulated reason, and (3) may be inspirational, such as to the students of a school. It must be recognized that when the name honors a person there are seldom bright lines in history.

The District government has not been good about specifying why an individual is being honored – that is, actually articulating the primary reason(s). Perhaps in the moment the reasons are assumed to be obvious, except that often a name is chosen soon after the honoree's death when grief overwhelms perspective. As a result, the original basis for many of our public schools' names has become obscure, and the rationale for keeping a name becomes one of tradition. Indeed, tradition is an argument raised today by many of Wilson High School's graduates.

PR 23-892 urges the DC Public Schools system to quickly update its school naming protocol and to consider whether other public schools in the District should be renamed. The Committee hopes DCPS will adopt standards that will prioritize certain criteria (e.g., a name that is inspirational) and evaluate whether the significance of the name will transcend generations. For example, naming an elementary school after the first U.S. Secretary of the Navy has little meaning to today's children – which is not to say that the school should be renamed, but rather that the meaningfulness of that choice has not transcended generations.

It also must be recognized that bright lines are problematic. People are not perfect, and often there are reasons to single out certain good deeds from an otherwise complex life. This heightens the need for explanation at the time a public building or public space is named: what are the qualities for which the person is being honored?

### ***Choosing a New Name***

The Committee believes that DCPS should act quickly to update its school naming protocol and move quickly with a community engagement process to address the issue of renaming Wilson High School. The recent experience with efforts to rename Aiton Elementary School (*see* Bill 23-263) was not satisfactory because DCPS failed to respond timely to the initial request, nor acted quickly to engage the community. That experience cannot be repeated with Wilson High School – a far more politically sensitive matter.

The Committee has received a number of suggestions for a new name. But neither the Committee Print nor this report endorse a particular name. The Committee urges, however, that DCPS follow the guidance of this report: choose a name that honors an individual, event, or place, that has the support of the community, and that is inspirational to students for generations to come. Recognizing that people are flawed, it is important that DCPS articulate what values or deeds of the honoree are being recognized.

Because DCPS has indicated that the complete replacement of all signs, logos, insignia, etc. could cost perhaps \$1.2 million, the Committee recommends that DCPS consider phasing the replacement process. Further, the use of interpretive measures where signs are not immediately

removed may actually add to the students' understanding of President Wilson, the history of Washington and Jim Crow, and the complexities of historical figures.

PR 23-892 was introduced in July and a public hearing was held September 15<sup>th</sup>. In light of the clear public support for changing the name, DCPS has announced a timeline and process for the renaming, with a request for the public to suggest names through October 30<sup>th</sup> and determination of a name by December 30<sup>th</sup>. The Committee expects DCPS will use this report as guidance.

Changing the name of Woodrow Wilson High School and developing a new protocol to consider the renaming of other schools will not end the systemic racism that afflicts our society. But just as symbolism can honor and inspire, so, too, can it offend. The Committee hopes that PR 23-892 is another step toward a racially just society, and therefore recommends its adoption.

## II. LEGISLATIVE CHRONOLOGY

- |                    |  |
|--------------------|--|
| July 20, 2020      | PR 23-892, "Sense of the Council Woodrow Wilson High School Renaming Protocol Resolution of 2020," is introduced by Councilmembers Cheh, Grosso, R. White, Pinto, McDuffie, Gray, T. White, Bonds, Silverman, Nadeau, Todd, Allen, and Chairman Mendelson. |
| July 28, 2020      | PR 23-892 is "read" at a legislative meeting; on this date the referral of the bill to the Committee of the Whole is official.   |
| July 31, 2020      | Notice of Intent to Act on PR 23-892 is published in the <i>District of Columbia Register</i> .  |
| August 4, 2020     | Notice of a Public Hearing on PR 23-892 is filed in the Office of the Secretary.   |
| September 15, 2020 | The Committee of the Whole holds a public hearing on PR 23-892.  |

## III. POSITION OF THE EXECUTIVE

No one testified on behalf of the Mayor. Ms. Shanita Burney, Communications and Engagement Officer for District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS) testified on behalf of DCPS. Her testimony is summarized in Section V of this report.

#### IV. COMMENTS OF ADVISORY NEIGHBORHOOD COMMISSIONS

The Committee received no testimony or comments from any Advisory Neighborhood Commission.

#### V. SUMMARY OF TESTIMONY

The Committee of the Whole held a public hearing on PR 23-892 on September 15, 2020. The testimony from that hearing is summarized below. Copies of written testimony are attached to this report.

**Judith Ingram, Co-Founder, DC History and Justice Collective**, testified in support of PR 23-892 and said “the Council should immediately strip Wilson’s name off the school.” Ms. Ingram described the steps that the Collective has taken to establish community input on the name change. Ms. Ingram did not suggest a replacement name.

**Ayomi Wolff, Wilson High School, Class of 2020**, testified in support of PR 23-892, citing the racist and discriminatory history of Woodrow Wilson as just cause for the immediate name change.

**Sarah Morgan, Wilson High School, Class of 2021**, testified in support of PR 23-892. Ms. Morgan shared her experiences as a student of color at Wilson and called for the immediate name change to help restore a sense of belonging for students.

**Michele Bollinger, Wilson High School Social Studies Teacher**, testified in support of PR 23-892. Ms. Bollinger spoke of the informal culture of exclusion and gatekeeping that students of color at Wilson have experienced, and how attempts to address these challenges have been undermined by the fact that the school is named after a deeply flawed leader.

**Sally Schwartz, Public Witness**, testified in support of PR 23-892 and spoke to the urgency the community is conveying about the name change. Ms. Schwartz urged the Council to push DCPS to immediately remove the current name of the school and asked that we not wait until funding is identified for new signage.

**Justin Connor, DCPS Elementary School Parent**, testified in support of PR 23-892. Mr. Connor provided alternate name suggestions in his written testimony (Lawrence Guyot or Eleanor Holmes Norton).

**Neil Flanagan, Public Witness**, testified in support of PR 23-892. “Woodrow Wilson’s personal views and contributions elsewhere are not important in the matter of whether a school in the District of Columbia should be named after the man. What is important is the institutionalization of racism he oversaw in the District of Columbia.” Mr. Flanagan encouraged the Council to empower an approach to renaming schools based on research identifying the specific impact of these individuals on the District of Columbia.

***Erich Martel, Retired DCPS High School History Teacher***, testified in support of PR 23-892. “When a prominent individual long credited with great achievements in our history books faces criticism for having caused great harms, the facts supporting revision must be overwhelming...” Mr. Martel testified as to how they are overwhelming and fully documented.

***Guy Durant, Wilson High Graduate***, testified in support of PR 23-892 but suggested a limited renaming of Woodrow Wilson High School: to keep the Wilson name by re-naming the school after former Council Chairman John Wilson.

***Donald Graham, Public Witness***, testified in support of PR 23-892. Mr. Graham favors renaming Wilson High School after Vincent E. Reed, the first African-American principal of Wilson and “Washington’s greatest superintendent in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century.”

***Shanita Burney, Communications and Engagement Officer, District of Columbia Public Schools***, testified on behalf of the Executive. Ms. Burney testified that DCPS recognizes that Wilson High School is one of the 21 school buildings that the Mayor’s DC FACES report identified as potentially in need of change. DCPS will work to ensure that the citywide renaming process moves forward equitably and works to empower the voices of diverse stakeholders.

The Committee received additional statements and emails in support and opposed to PR 23-892. They are filed in the record of the hearing.

## VI. IMPACT ON EXISTING LAW

PR 23-892 has no impact on existing law.

## VII. FISCAL IMPACT

PR 23-892 will have no fiscal impact on the District of Columbia budget or financial plan. However, there will be a fiscal impact when the name of a DCPS school changes. There are items in the school that will required to be replaced, which includes most outdoor signage (entry and marquee), scoreboards, athletic signage, etc. Removed items will still require patching and repairing in areas but may not be as expensive as a full replacement. DCPS has indicated that the complete replacement of all signs, logos, insignia, etc. could cost perhaps \$1.2 million.

## VIII. SECTION-BY-SECTION ANALYSIS

<u>Section 1</u>	States the short title of Bill 23-892.
<u>Section 2</u>	States the Council’s findings regarding Woodrow Wilson High School, its history, its namesake, and outlines DCPS’s school naming protocol.
<u>Section 3</u>	Expresses the sense of the Council that DCPS supports a name change; that a school name should honor a person, event or place for a clearly articulated

reason, and preferably should be a source of inspiration for its students or integrally relate to the history of the school; that DCPS must act quickly to update its school naming policy; and DCPS should immediately convene community meetings to consider whether the name of Woodrow Wilson High School should be changed and, if so, what name should be selected.

Section 4                      Transmission

Section 5                      Provides that PR 23-892 should take effect upon publication in the *Register*.

## IX. COMMITTEE ACTION

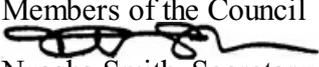
## X. ATTACHMENTS

1. PR 23-892 as introduced.
2. Written Testimony.
3. Selection of Articles
4. Committee Print for Bill 23-892.

**COUNCIL OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA**  
**1350 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.**  
**Washington D.C. 20004**

Memorandum

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To : Members of the Council  
From :  Nyasha Smith, Secretary to the Council  
Date : Wednesday, July 29, 2020  
Subject : Referral of Proposed Legislation

Notice is given that the attached proposed legislation was introduced in the Office of the Secretary on Monday, July 20, 2020. Copies are available in Room 10, the Legislative Services Division.

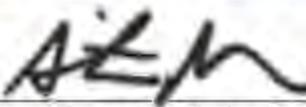
TITLE: "Sense of the Council Woodrow Wilson High School Renaming Protocol Resolution of 2020", PR23-0892

INTRODUCED BY: Councilmembers Cheh, Grosso, R. White, Pinto, McDuffie, Gray, T. White, Bonds, Silverman, Nadeau, Todd, Allen, and Chairman Mendelson

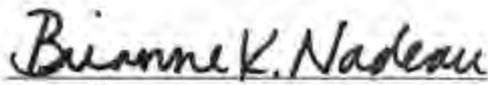
The Chairman is referring this legislation to Committee of the Whole.

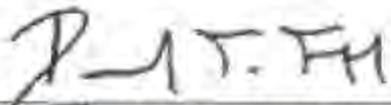
Attachment  
cc: General Counsel  
Budget Director  
Legislative Services

1   
2 Chairman Phil Mendelson

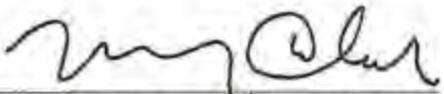
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6 Councilmember Anita Bonds

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10 Councilmember Elissa Silverman

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14 Councilmember Brianne K. Nadeau

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18 Councilmember Brandon T. Todd

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22 Councilmember Charles Allen

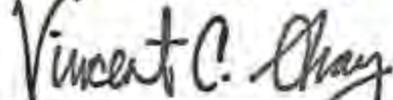
  
Councilmember Mary. M Cheh

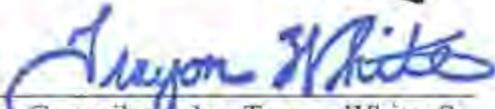
  
Councilmember David Grosso

  
Councilmember Robert C. White, Jr.

  
Councilmember Brooke Pinto

  
Councilmember Kenyan McBuffie

  
Councilmember Vincent C. Gray

  
Councilmember Trayon White, Sr.

28  
29 A PROPOSED RESOLUTION

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33 IN THE COUNCIL OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA  
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38 To declare the sense of the Council that the Council supports efforts to reconsider the name of  
39 Woodrow Wilson High School and, more broadly, the names of all public schools, to  
40 ensure that the individuals for whom the school buildings are named represent the  
41 mission, vision, and values of DCPS and the residents of the District, including  
42 consideration of whether the building name honors an individual who supported or  
43 enabled acts of discrimination; that DCPS should act quickly to update its school naming  
44 protocol; that DCPS should provide the Council and members of the public with  
45 information on or before July 27, 2020, regarding when the new protocol will be  
46 finalized; and to call on DCPS to convene community meetings to consider whether the

47 name of Woodrow Wilson High School should be changed, and, if so, what name should  
48 be selected.

49  
50 RESOLVED, BY THE COUNCIL OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA, That this  
51 resolution may be cited as the "Sense of the Council Woodrow Wilson High School Renaming  
52 Protocol Resolution of 2020".

53 Sec. 2. The Council finds that:

54 (1) On May 25, 2020, George Floyd, an African American man, was killed by  
55 Minneapolis police during an arrest. Within days, protests arose across the globe to demand an  
56 end to police violence against Black men and women, and to demand local and federal reforms  
57 to address racial injustices and inequities built into the functioning of our justice systems. These  
58 calls for reform, however, are not limited to our police departments, courts, and penal system.  
59 Jurisdictions have been called on to engage in a top-to-bottom, ongoing review of their laws,  
60 regulations, operations, and programs, to identify and address where these policies and practices  
61 have a disparate impact on persons of color.

62 (2) In addition to elevating the need to broadly assess existing policies and practices for  
63 any racial disparate impact, recent protests have drawn attention to the number of buildings,  
64 monuments, and statues across the country that honor historical figures who benefited from or  
65 supported white supremacy and discrimination against persons of color. A number of  
66 jurisdictions have taken action to rename buildings and remove statues and monuments, in  
67 recognition of the very real harm caused to persons and communities of color by honoring  
68 individuals who supported or enabled racial prejudice. Honoring such individuals also sends a  
69 harmful and wrong message to the broader community that racial discrimination is acceptable in  
70 certain contexts.

71 (3) In December 2017, the District of Columbia Public Schools (“DCPS”) promulgated a  
72 protocol for school naming, which includes procedures for residents to petition DCPS to rename  
73 a particular school. According to the protocol, one key factor in DCPS’s decision to name a  
74 school after a particular person is whether the individual “[r]epresents the DCPS mission, vision,  
75 and values.” However, the protocol does not contemplate a proposal including information on  
76 why the legacy of an individual for whom a school building is currently named represents—or  
77 does not represent—the mission, vision, and values of DCPS.

78 (4) Woodrow Wilson High School is a DCPS secondary school located in the  
79 Tenleytown neighborhood of Ward 3. The high school’s catchment area is the largest of all  
80 DCPS schools, and includes portions of Wards 1, 2, 3, and 4. Even with such a large catchment  
81 area, the school’s student body includes students from all 8 wards; for school year 2018-2019,  
82 38% of Woodrow Wilson High School students were considered out-of-boundary. The school  
83 also boasts one of the most diverse student bodies in the District. For school year 2018-2019, the  
84 school’s student body was 31% Black, 21% Hispanic or Latino, 37% White, 6% Asian, 1%  
85 Native American or Alaskan Native, and 4% mixed-race.

86 (5) Woodrow Wilson High School is named after President Woodrow Wilson. President  
87 Wilson is most often remembered for his leadership during World War I and role in the creation  
88 of the League of Nations. As president, however, Wilson was a noted supporter of segregation  
89 efforts, including appointing a number of segregationists to cabinet positions and condoning  
90 efforts by his administration to segregate government offices and engage in racially  
91 discriminatory hiring practices. Wilson and his administration oversaw the segregation,  
92 demotion, and firing of Black employees throughout the federal government for the sole reason

93 that they were Black, facilitating the destruction of the growing Black middle class in the District  
94 of Columbia.

95 (6) For a number of years, advocates have petitioned DCPS to change the name of  
96 Woodrow Wilson High School to honor an individual whose legacy reflects and celebrates the  
97 school's diversity and history. In addition, students, faculty, and staff have engaged in school-  
98 wide discussions about the changing of the school's name, including holding a community forum  
99 in 2019. Although advocates and members of the community have suggested a number of new  
100 names for the school, neither the advocates nor DCPS have come to consensus on a new name,  
101 nor initiated a formalized process to select or approve one.

102 (7) Under DCPS's school naming protocol, a proposal to rename a school must include  
103 not only the request to change the existing name, but also a specific recommendation for the new  
104 name. After receiving a complete proposal, DCPS will decide whether to move forward with the  
105 name change. Under the protocol, only then will DCPS begin community engagement, which  
106 may include direct communication with the school community, school surveys and petitions, and  
107 public meetings with the relevant Local School Advisory Team, ANC, and Community Civic  
108 Association.

109 (8) By requiring that a specific name be selected before the start of any community  
110 engagement, DCPS does not provide a formal opportunity for the community to propose or  
111 consider additional potential new names for a school.

112 (9) In Spring 2020, DCPS initiated a review of its school naming protocol. During this  
113 review, which is ongoing, DCPS could update the protocol to provide for community  
114 engagement prior to selection of a particular name for consideration; such a change would help  
115 facilitate the high school and Tenleytown communities coming to consensus on a new name for

116 the school. However, it is unclear how long review of the protocol will take, and advocates have  
117 raised concerns that it could be months before the new protocol is finalized, significantly  
118 delaying efforts to consider a new name for Woodrow Wilson High School.

119       Sec. 3. It is the sense of the Council that:

120       (1) The Council supports efforts to consider whether or not to change the name of  
121 Woodrow Wilson High School and, more broadly, all public schools in the District of Columbia,  
122 to ensure that the individuals for whom the schools buildings are named represent the mission,  
123 vision, and values of DCPS and the residents of the District, including consideration of whether  
124 the building name honors an individual who supported or enabled acts of discrimination.

125       (2) DCPS should act quickly to update its school naming protocol, which should include  
126 procedures for DCPS to seek community input on potential new names prior to a specific name  
127 being proposed or otherwise selected, and procedures that permit a proposal to provide  
128 information on how the current name of a school does not represent the DCPS mission, vision,  
129 and values.

130       (3) DCPS should provide the Council and members of the public with information on or  
131 before July 27th, 2020 regarding the date that the new school naming protocol will be released.

132       (4) DCPS should immediately convene virtual community meetings, at least one each  
133 with the school's Local School Advisory Team, ANC 3E, and the Tenleytown Neighbors  
134 Association, to consider whether the name of Woodrow Wilson High School should be changed,  
135 and, if so, what name should be selected; and, following those meetings, DCPS should provide  
136 the Council with a summary of the discussion, including any recommendations made.

137       Sec. 4. The Council shall transmit a copy of this resolution, upon its adoption, to the  
138 Mayor, the Deputy Mayor for Education, the Chancellor of the District of Columbia Public

139 Schools, the principal of Woodrow Wilson High School, and the Chairpersons of ANC 3E, the  
140 Tenleytown Neighbors Association, and the Woodrow Wilson High School Local School  
141 Advisory Team.

142           Sec. 5. This resolution shall take effect immediately upon the first date of publication in  
143 the District of Columbia Register.

Good morning members of the council, comrades, and fellow Washingtonians.

My name is Ayomi Wolff and I am a 2020 graduate of Wilson High school

Despite feeling tremendous pride to have graduated from Wilson, I have found great disdain in seeing the name that my diploma bears: Woodrow Wilson.

This enmity began when a presentation was given at a Diversity Task Force meeting during my sophomore year. We learned about the horrible destruction of Reno city and how the policies Wilson implemented during his presidency were harnessed to destroy and disperse a primarily Black neighborhood that once stood where my high school stands today.

With that information, I was eager to join the movement to change my school's name. I was approached by the amazing Judy Ingram, a co-founder of the History and justice collective, to speak at a panel discussion on the name change in February of 2018.

From that moment, I was hooked, From then on until the summer following my senior year, I worked with Judy and Tim and Sally and many more to change my school's name. We arranged meetings with council members, wrote letters, had presentations, protested, and generally worked our butts off for 2 years.

A question I am often posed with is why? Why do people feel the need to change the names of school, of bridges, to tear down statues and monuments? I cannot speak for all people but what I can say is this: Woodrow Wilson's name upon my school is a sickening reminder of the evil he has done to people who looked like me. Woodrow Wilson was a racist man. He segregated the federal government, destroying the black middle class. He showed Birth of a Nation at the White House, a movie that would reignite the KKK. When asked to address lynchings, he denied aid and reform.

Knowing that, how could I walk every day underneath his name knowing what he did, what he believed in? How could I feel safe in a building named after a man who believed that a Black man's place was beneath the white man's boot? How could I let students remain ignorant of what he did? How could I?

I want to go back to something I said almost 2 years ago at the panel discussion when a Wilson alum questioned my school spirit for wanting to change the name. I soon found out that the alum was from Wilson prior to desegregation so take with that what you will. The City Paper actually quoted me on this and I present the quote to you now: "To say that it's not worth it to change the name just because you may feel like you're losing some school spirit...I'm not losing any school spirit. I'm enacting school spirit by wanting to change the name."

I love my school so much. I really do; and I want to be a part of its growth. I want my school to be the best it can both inside and out.

However, this is not to say that once we change the name the systemic problems surrounding education will be gone and the school itself will be cured of the racism inside. I only wish that perhaps through small changes like this, because this is small in comparison to the tremendous work that needs to be done to fix Wilson and all high schools in DCPS, through small changes like this, we can provide hope to the community that further change is possible.

We must make a change for the better because if not now, then when?

Chair Mendelson, council members: I come before you to testify in favor of renaming Woodrow Wilson High School in honor of Vincent E. Reed, the first African-American principal of Wilson and Washington's greatest superintendent in the late 20th century.

If I owned a time machine, all I would have to do to persuade you would be to let you do what I did many times--walk down any street in Washington with Vince Reed. It took half an hour to walk a block as citizen after citizen rushed up to tell him how much they loved him, to remember being taught by Vince, or to share some memory of Vince as principal or superintendent.

The 14th of 17 children in a family in St. Louis, Vince was captain of the football team at West Virginia State before coming to Washington as a graphic arts teacher. He was smart, hard-working and a born leader; he worked his way up through the system and became the first Black principal of Woodrow Wilson High School. Before long, he was the deputy superintendent of schools.

In the 1970's, as more than one superintendent came to town and quickly left, I guessed that the elected school board did not want to promote Vince Reed. Perhaps they sensed that he was tougher than they were. At last, after a particularly embarrassing firing of his predecessor, he became superintendent of the DC Public Schools.

Addressing everyone who worked in the school system, Vince made clear that he would focus on simple goals: every school would focus on teaching reading, writing and math above all else. The system was willing to be judged by its test scores (this had been controversial).

The public face of the school system Vince inherited was chaos. Books and supplies were not being delivered to classrooms on time; teachers went unpaid. Vince once told me that one of his predecessors had hired teachers without giving them a test of any kind, more or less on a first-come first-served basis. Vince quickly address the chaos and somehow solved it. Complaints about teachers' pay fell almost to zero.

And then, miracle of miracles, city-wide test scores started to rise, three years in row.

It seemed too much for the elected DC school board, then in one of its craziest periods.

I once asked Vince why urban superintendents everywhere seemed to rotate so quickly in and out of their positions. He told me that in his first week on the job a school board member came to him and noted that an assistant principal in his ward's high school had resigned; the board member wanted the job for his brother-in-law. Both knew that if Vince said no, there'd be one vote against renewing his contract.

Vince said no.

It became pretty clear that the board—with the exception of Vince's perennial champion, your former colleague Carol Schwartz, was trying to get him to resign by turning down his favorite projects. And there's no question what his favorite was. Vince wanted to create a college prep high school in D.C.— Benjamin Banneker Senior High School. He wanted a place where Black students, year after year, would show the world how smart they were. The school board repeatedly turned him down.

After a last turndown—the fourth, I believe-- Vince resigned. What ensued was the closest thing to a spontaneous political uprising I have ever seen in Washington. Ordinary citizens called, wrote, and picketed the school board, demanding that they approve the school and re-hire Vince.

Then, reluctantly and narrowly, the board approved Banneker. Vince went on to become the Assistant Secretary of the U.S. Department of Education and then, thank goodness, joined The Post for 15 wonderful years during which he started the region's first teachers' awards, another award honoring principals, and a principals' training institute we named for him.

But Vince's monument is Banneker. Every year since its creation, the school graduates about a hundred motivated and well-prepared students, almost every one of whom enrolls in college the following fall. It would never have been created when it was without him.

But that isn't Vince's only monument.

He leaves behind the memories of thousands of students like Helaine Cohen of Silver Spring, who wrote to the Post when Vince retired:

“He was the most caring, involved, hands-on principal one could ever imagine having. He knew every student in the school, most by name. But I will mostly remember Mr. Reed for giving me faith in myself. “Mr. Reed stopped me in the hall during my junior year and asked about my plans for college. I told him that I was going to take a year or so off. He would not allow me to make that decision without a fight. ...He constantly stopped me to follow up on my intentions, he contacted my family and wrote an unsolicited letter of recommendation to be enclosed with my college applications. “But his persistence paid off. I applied to several colleges, enclosing the letter. When I graduated with honors, I knew whom to thank. “

I think naming that school for its first black leader, a great public-school educator, would be a great way for the city to say thank you to Vincent Reed. His 88-year-old widow Frances, suffering from cancer, still lives; I pray she can see her late husband honored.

Council of the District of Columbia  
Committee of the Whole

Council Resolution PR 23-892, "Sense of the Council Woodrow Wilson High School Renaming Protocol Resolution of 2020"

September 15, 2020

Testimony by Erich Martel, Retired DCPS high school history & social studies teacher

Chairman Mendelson and Members of the Council,

When a prominent individual long credited with great achievements in our history books faces criticism for having caused great harms, the facts supporting revision must be overwhelming and fully documented. The fact that the harms mattered to those affected and that they made their plight known through personal petitions and public appeals also be established to eliminate charges that current ethical and legal standards did not yet exist. And finally, the process of revision must be fully transparent.

I fully support the removal of President Woodrow Wilson's name from DC's Wilson H.S., where I taught world and U.S. history for 25 of my 42 DCPS years, because the D.C. History and Justice Collective has met these criteria. For more than two years, it has held public meetings, invited pro and con testimony from established historians of the Wilson administration and from Wilson H.S. alumni/-ae, teachers, local residents and their elected representatives.

By contrast, the DC FACES project has been rushed and secretive and has still not released its full report. How, for example, did it miss the fact that D.C. Commissioners appointed by President Calvin Coolidge (1923-29) were responsible for the removal of the mostly African-American community known as Reno City, the location of Deal M.S.?

President Wilson, through his appointed agency heads, succeeded in stifling the remains of the post-Civil War's political revolution encoded in the 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment's promising definition of citizenship (1868) that made African-Americans the constitutional equals of White Americans. By 1913, when he took office, a combination of terror, legal sophistry and political cynicism, White supremacists had driven African-Americans from elective and appointive offices and reversing the progress of Congressional Reconstruction (1867-1877) and the foundational 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment. Wilson and his administration were determined to end the remaining symbol of Black achievement and hope: federal employment, advancement and respect in the District of Columbia. This is thoroughly described in Eric Yellin's "Racism in the Nation's Service," 2013.

To understand how Wilson's reputation as a Progressive Era reformer included attacking Black civil servants, one must understand that the post-Civil War Southern Democratic Party regained control of state governments by labeling Black elected and appointed officials as corrupt. The Democratic Party of Woodrow Wilson equated Black office holders, especially those in positions of responsibility, with corruption.

Yellin:

[Racism in the Nation's Service](#)

<https://theconversation.com/how-the-black-middle-class-was-attacked-by-woodrow-wilsons-administration-52200>

Justice Louis Brandeis (1916) and Justice James McReynolds (1914)

<https://constitutioncenter.org/blog/louis-brandeis-confirmed-as-justice-100-year-ago-today>

Presidential historian Michael Beschloss, "*On this World War I anniversary, let's not celebrate Woodrow Wilson*"

[https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/on-this-world-war-i-anniversary-lets-not-celebrate-woodrow-wilson/2018/11/09/1c7ca77c-e456-11e8-b759-3d88a5ce9e19\\_story.html?utm\\_term=.971d8dca7a29](https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/on-this-world-war-i-anniversary-lets-not-celebrate-woodrow-wilson/2018/11/09/1c7ca77c-e456-11e8-b759-3d88a5ce9e19_story.html?utm_term=.971d8dca7a29)

My Name is Guy Durant and I graduated from Wilson High School in 1982 and I live in Ward 5 in NE near the Brookland/CUA metro. I am a native Washingtonian and I lived in Ward 3 at the time of attending Woodrow Wilson High School in the early 80's.

I am testifying today to support a limited renaming of Woodrow Wilson High School, but only to Keep the Wilson name under another Wilson name. I rise in support of renaming our high school to John A. Wilson Senior High School or to August Wilson Senior High School. Both Men are considered African-American.

Nobody is perfect but John A. Wilson is also the name of the City Hall Building, so I figure it should be fine for our local Wilson High School as well. We as Alumni have invested a lot into the "Wilson" name and we as Wilson Tigers don't want to lose that moniker, but we can tweak it by using another Wilson as our namesake. There are no saints, only sinners in this world. I am Black, but we all have mixtures of American heritage both bad and good.

I attended Wilson ignorant of his racist past and had I known, I would have chalked it up to normal, since Washington, Jefferson and many other founding fathers were also racists, but I don't advocate for removing all monuments or names of racists, since that would pretty much eliminate most of America's founding fathers. Rather, I think education is the key and if we rename, just remember we have to be aware of human frailties. A few years ago, we might have named schools after Bill Cosby or a Boy Scout Troop Leader or a Priest with a questionable past. Even Dr. King was not perfect, but we love him. My only point is that when we rename, let's do so only for the most racist and the most despicable and not just those who are average for their time and culture. Woodrow Wilson is despicable, but he was elected by a Racist Nation, so I figure it was par for the course at the time. Let's use another Wilson name, but symbols don't fix history, only hard work fighting for social justice will fix the future. I am a descendent of Thomas Jefferson and Black and Native American ancestors in Charlottesville. I still have family in Charlottesville, Virginia. I know that Racism is a legacy that lasts, but would I remove Jefferson from my history?... Probably not. I live with that cruel past and move on towards a greater future. I don't feel the need to forget Evil men to transcend beyond them. Renaming may help, but I look forward. Maybe I am too old to ask for wiping out all racist names, but the new generation may wish to think about the fact that nobody's perfect."

Judith Ingram, Co-Founder, D.C. History and Justice Collective  
Regarding PR 23-892, Sense of the Council Woodrow Wilson High School Renaming Protocol  
Resolution of 2020  
September 15, 2020

Chair Mendelson and members of the Council, my name is Judith Ingram, and I am a co-founder of the D.C. History and Justice Collective.

For over two years, we have engaged in a comprehensive grassroots education and organizing effort, aimed at stripping the racist president Woodrow Wilson's name off D.C.'s largest and most diverse school. Our entire campaign is documented, with many resources, at <https://renamewilsonhs.org/>.

We call for that change not in a month or a year or whenever the community comes to consensus on a more fitting name, but *now*. Not one more student should graduate from a school named after the leader who segregated the federal government and spurred the forces that would destroy Black communities to make way for exclusively white neighborhoods.

Chair Mendelson, when we met with you last summer to request DC Council action, you sent us to DCPS, noting that it had a naming policy in place.

The three-and-a-half page protocol was short on detail but the main planks were clear: grassroots initiative, community engagement managed by DCPS, decision made by the Chancellor and approved by the Mayor and Council.

When we met with DCPS last fall, the community engagement staff seemed encouraging and offered to contribute a survey to measure public support.

But the survey never came, and the only community engagement was what our collective had initiated: a scholarly forum and community discussion on President Wilson's legacy, a Change.org petition, a Black History Month presentation for Wilson students. For months, we heard nothing from the central office.

DCPS officials finally let us know early this year that they were reevaluating the school naming policy. DCPS seemed to fear the very community engagement it was supposed to support.

One telling sign was on the night of our February 2019 community forum. No one from the central office showed up, but I overheard someone from that office call and direct a Wilson administrator not to allow TV cameras into the event. Were they scared of genuine public debate?

A tumultuous year and a half has passed since then. The twin tragedies of the pandemic, with its disproportionately harsh toll on communities of color, and the police killings of Breonna Taylor, George Floyd and other Black citizens, have thrown the legacy of racist leaders such as Wilson into stark relief. They are the direct motivation for the vast majority of our 22,000-plus Change.org signatories to demand that Wilson High School be renamed.

Considering DCPS' record of stalling on this issue, we propose that the Council now exert its authority and take the lead.

As a first step, the Council should immediately strip Wilson's name off the school. If the Council still wants DCPS input, it should direct it to solicit community ideas and recommend a new name in very short order, by no later than January 30.

That would allow the Council time to enact legislation to ensure that the new name is printed on the diplomas of the Class of 2021. We owe that to our students, teachers, and everyone who calls D.C. home.

Thank you for listening to our testimony and advancing this cause.

Testimony of Justin Connor before the US City Council on the renaming of Wilson High School.

1. My name is Justin Connor. I am a Washington DC resident, since 1999. I live, vote, work and raise my daughter in Washington DC, where she attends DC Public Schools (Murch Elementary). My family and I are very appreciative and loyal constituents of Councilmember Mary Cheh, and our family lives a quarter of a mile from Wilson High School.
2. I am familiar with the history of Mr. Wilson's actions to re-segregate our Federal government, which had been integrated and hired many African Americans in Washington DC as a result of Reconstruction. Wilson himself fired 15 out of 17 Black supervisors working in the Federal government at that time. To further enable his racist discrimination, in 1914 under his tenure, the Federal government began requiring photographs on job applications. As noted by Councilmember Grosso, Wilson's policies were even racist for his time, even when we consider what was the norm of the day in terms of how African Americans were treated, and there is no need to further recount the President Wilson's racist history, which has already been done so ably by others today and as recognized by Princeton University's decision three months ago to rename its public policy school.
3. I see a clear Washington DC nexus between Wilson's racist figure and how his actions affected African-American employees of the Federal government, which is of course a major employer in our area, and that connection to Washington DC should not be overlooked in considering where to have a Washington DC public school named after him. I strongly support this legislative proposal to rename Wilson High School.
4. Two names that I would suggest for consideration as potential honorable replacements for the name of the school would be Mr. Lawrence Guyot or Ms. Eleanor Holmes Norton. Both Mr. Guyot and Ms. Norton were civil rights activists in the 1960s in America, and helped us to bring America closer to our values of freedom and justice for all. Mr. Guyot graduated with a bachelor's degree in biology and chemistry in 1963. Guyot also directed the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) project in Hattiesburg, Mississippi, and later became director of the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party. Guyot was severely beaten many times, including while at the Mississippi State Penitentiary known as Parchman Farm. Guyot helped lay the groundwork for the Voting Rights Act of 1965. He received a degree in law in 1971 from Rutgers University, and then moved to Washington, D.C., where he lived and worked until he passed away in 2012.
5. Eleanor K. Holmes was born in Washington, D.C., graduated from Dunbar High School where she was elected junior class president and was a member of the National Honor Society.[1] She attended Antioch College (B.A. 1960), Yale University (M.A. in American Studies 1963)[2] and Yale Law School (LL.B 1964). While in college and graduate school, she was active in the civil rights movement and an organizer for the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee. While in law school, she traveled to Mississippi for the Mississippi Freedom Summer and worked with civil rights stalwarts such as Medgar Evers. Ms. Norton has served the District of Columbia with distinction and represented us with distinction since 1990 when she was first elected to serve us as a delegate to the House of Representatives. Ms. Norton has spoken out so many times on behalf of the residents of the District of Columbia, she is a wonderful representative for us in the United States Congress, and she is extremely responsive

to her constituents, employs a terrific staff, and would be a wonderful person to honor by renaming Wilson High School after her.

6. Thank you for the opportunity to testify before the Council today in support of this legislation.

Greetings,

Thank you for having me today. My name is Michele Bollinger. I have been a Social Studies teacher at Woodrow Wilson High School for over 15 years. I began teaching there in the fall of 2000 and aside from when I was home with my own children, have spent my entire career there. I am here to offer testimony on why you should commit to a concrete plan to change the name of Wilson High School. What I have to say is based on the work of mostly Black historians, and hundreds of conversations about Wilson, the president, race, and our school, mostly with Black teachers and students, going back 20 years. What I have to say is also due to the great work of the DC History and Justice Collective, which has inspired me a great deal in the past few years, as have Wilson students Ayomi and Sarah. I am proud of both of them.

As a history teacher, I could discuss at length the problematic policies and prejudiced views held by the nation's 28th president, and his own relationship and role in the perpetuation and expansion of white supremacy in this country. But I trust that you have already become familiar with the truth about Woodrow Wilson, so instead I thought I would share what it means to teach young people of different racial, ethnic and cultural backgrounds in a place named after a leader like him.

I am not sure if you have ever been inside Wilson High School but I hope you have the chance to do so someday. The students are amazing; engaged, curious, energetic, thoughtful, accomplished, and of course, diverse. Maybe  $\frac{1}{3}$  Black,  $\frac{1}{3}$  white,  $\frac{1}{5}$  Latinx, over 5% Asian and many students who identify as multiracial. We have our challenges, limitations and blind spots. But we have a teaching faculty, staff and administration devoted to building a healthy and equitable community in which all students can thrive. To be frank, we commit to what educators call "doing the work" in order to compensate for the ways in which our students are systematically denied equity and justice by the society that we live in.

So, we teach young people who know what is going on.

They recognize the attempt to manipulate and gaslight when Woodrow Wilson told civil rights activists that instead of seeing segregation as a "humiliation," they should see it as a "benefit" and when he directed Monroe Trotter to go and convince Black Americans of that notion.

They recognize Wilson's culpability when he was slow to intervene as armed white lynch mobs roamed our city in 1919, terrorizing Black residents.

Rather than see Wilson as "a man of his times," our students know that those times were also shaped by the people who challenged Wilson - including Ida B. Wells, Monroe Trotter, Mary Church Terrell and more. In 2020 it's perhaps the words of WEB DuBois are the most appropriate. A year into Wilson's first term DuBois lamented that via Wilson, "every enemy of the Negro race is greatly encouraged," and went on to name the worst bigots in US history - a lamentation that has an eerie resonance today.

Finally our students recognize one of the most insidious forms of white supremacy that can be manifest in educational settings: in informal culture of exclusion and gatekeeping that serves its purpose just as well - if not better - than formal Jim Crow laws. "The whole temper and tradition of the place are such that no negro has ever applied for admission," he assured his colleagues at Princeton.

"The whole temper and tradition of the place." That is what sticks with me the most, perhaps. What is the temper and tradition of our community?

I will admit that there are dynamics in our school that I am not proud of. We have far to go before we reach the kind of enriching and invigorating and safe community in which our students can thrive. The work of Zaretta Hammond and others show us that culturally responsive teaching and a culturally responsive climate make a big difference in student learning. But our attempts to address these challenges will always be undermined by the fact that we are named after a deeply flawed leader. It is just not appropriate.

I would like to stress that we want to do our best by all of our students - and that includes white students, who are done a disservice by the continued presence of Wilson as our school's name. Students are taught that racism is not a disqualifying factor when evaluating the impact of a historical figure. They are taught to be passive and complacent in the face of racist acts. They are taught that you can say one thing and do another. And in turn, white people in our community, certainly not just students, actually do say one thing and do another.

One last note, and that is about change. I sometimes don't think elected officials know what young people think about change.

Despite being told constantly that they can make a difference, I think the message a lot of young people get is the exact opposite. Change is hard fought, and comes slowly, if at all. This can create bitterness and alienation. We can do better by our young people who frankly deserve better.

Thank you.

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

**Councilmembers,**

Thank you for taking up this important resolution at a time of many crises. I am the author of *The Battle of Fort Reno*, the article that I think I can claim precipitated the incredible campaign that these students, alumni, and parents have put together. I fully support the renaming, and want to thank the Council taking this on.

When I was writing the article, I came to a point where I had to explain what a space like Reno meant to its residents, and for these Black men who parachuted in to defend it. As I researched their lives, I found it impossible to tell their story without explaining the suffering caused by the segregation of the federal workforce and other policies under Woodrow Wilson's administration. For these men, two of whom were present at Monroe Trotter's heated conferences with Wilson, the administration had ended 50 years of rare opportunity for the Black middle class and dismantled the economic base of DC's African American community, leading to decades of dispossession that continue to this day.

Much can be said for Wilson's contributions elsewhere, and his often-odious personal views. But to my mind, Woodrow Wilson's personal views and contributions elsewhere are not important in the matter of whether a school in the District of Columbia should be named after the man. What is important is the institutionalization of racism he oversaw in the District of Columbia.

Regarding Reno itself—and I use the term “Reno” exclusively, not “Reno City” or “Reno Town” because that is what its residents used—it is true that Wilson had no personal part in it. Unfortunately, my research asks us to take a closer look at other area my subsequent research at the DC Archives implicates a large number of building namesakes, particularly Melvin Hazen, Charles Glover, and Frank Ballou.

But to address this problem, we need a better approach than the one seen in the Mayor's DCFACES project, where superficial research was turned into specific prescriptions. Rather, the council should empower communities to form campaigns like this on, by supporting research into various figures and the DC Archives to identify the specific impact of these individuals on the District of Columbia.

I appreciate the hard work of the DC History and Justice Collective and encourage the Council to see their initiative as a model for communities to repair their history.

Neil Flanagan  
ANC 5E05

**TESTIMONY FOR DC COUNCIL**  
**COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE PUBLIC HEARING**  
**PR 23-892. Woodrow Wilson High School Renaming Protocol Resolution of 2020**  
**September 15, 2020**

**Submitted by Sally Schwartz**

My name is Sally Schwartz, and I'm a proud graduate of Woodrow Wilson High School-Class of 1968. Thank you for holding this hearing to hopefully clarify and expedite the process for renaming Wilson High School. This effort has been a slow-moving train, and we clearly need the DC Council to help get us to the finish line, especially during this difficult time when COVID-19 is occupying so much of our attention. I'm testifying today simply to make two points:

1. The decision to remove Woodrow Wilson's name from the school needs to be announced immediately.
2. DCPS needs to put in place and announce a school renaming process that is clear, transparent, allowing for broad community participation, and tied to critical discussions around our shared history and aspirations for creating more equitable, inclusive, and inspiring schools.

You may remember that I was part of a group from the DC History and Justice Collective that met with you, Chairman Mendelson, last September to seek your support for the effort to rename Wilson High School. You strongly advised us to go back and work with DCPS in accordance with their renaming process. And we did that. We met with a team from DCPS to review the process, and we agreed on the path forward. At that time, we also agreed that a two-step process in this situation was most appropriate – first, the decision to remove the name Wilson, and second, the selection of a new name. Since then, the process has been revoked and reviewed; and our efforts seem to be stuck on step 1.

I personally know there have been efforts to rename Wilson High School at least since the 1970s. Many of us have wanted the school named after Vincent Reed, who was my Assistant Principal at Wilson, and who went on to become Principal and DCPS Superintendent. He was the first Black principal west of the Park, and absolutely beloved by students and colleagues throughout his entire career. But more recently

attention has focused on Woodrow Wilson himself and his racist and segregationist policies and deeply destructive long-term impact on our city. In 2015 a group of Wilson teachers organized an effort to confront the Wilson name issue. In 2018 the DC History and Justice Collective launched their community-based effort. And then, of course, interest accelerated after the murder of George Floyd and a resurgent Black Lives Matter movement sparked new attention on the historical figures we honor through our statues and public buildings. At this point, Woodrow Wilson's name has already been removed from schools across the country, including Princeton University, where Wilson served as President. We have really come to a point of broad consensus. Locally, members of the State Board of Education, the Mayor, and members of the Council have expressed support for a name change or "consideration" of a name change, as in the resolution being considered today. The Mayor's DCFACES Task Force has come out in support of the name change.

Yet we are still here talking about Woodrow Wilson and still stuck, apparently, in the same place. No decision has been made to remove Wilson's name. Or has there? Who's in charge? There is no publicly shared process for removing the name, and no direction as to the next steps. It feels Kafkaesque at this point.

I urge the Council to press DCPS to announce their new school renaming process, and to call on whomever is empowered to make the decision (the Chancellor, the Mayor, the DC Council?) to announce that Woodrow Wilson's name WILL BE REMOVED, so that we can move on to the important work of selecting a more suitable name for the school. We should not wait until a new name has been selected to announce Wilson's removal. Nor should we wait until funding is identified for new signage. Creative use of duct tape and student artwork will be perfectly adequate short-term fixes. This is a moral as well as a political decision, and we need to take this step immediately. Every day that name remains on the building is an affront.

Sarah Morgan

Good Afternoon Chairman Mendelson and members of the council,

Hello, my name is Sarah Morgan I am a senior at Woodrow Wilson Senior High School. As a concerned Wilson student and activist, I would like to rename my high school, and, if we do rename the school, I expect the person we name it after to be a Black.

It is extremely obvious to me that Woodrow Wilson's presidential legacy is racism, especially for Black people in DC. These facts alone make the name of Wilson unacceptable. But, beyond this, his ideals and policies go directly against Tiger spirit, and what DCPS stands for. **The DCPS vision is that** every student feels "loved, challenged, and prepared to positively influence society and thrive in life." Their mission is to ensure that "every school guarantees students reach their full potential through rigorous and joyful learning experiences provided in a nurturing environment." This name does not show that DCPS is attempting to make me feel loved. I am a Black child, and I haven't been provided a nurturing environment, either. Not while I attend a school named after a man who would hate me, and actively my community.

His racism outweighs his positive attributes to America. His legacies in economics, in diplomacy, in whatever, are not his only legacies. What he did in those areas doesn't cancel out what he did to Black people in his own country. His economic legacy for Black people is ruining our prosperous community in Chevy Chase. And where was his diplomacy when it came to bridging the gap in race relations?

In June, I organized a peaceful protest so that we could fight to change Wilson's name. A week before, the DC History and Justice collective did the same. Over 100 Wilson students and alumni came and shared their dismay at the name of Woodrow Wilson Senior High School between these weeks.

At this protest, my friend and fellow activist Annalucia Parra Jordan said this, in reference to Woodrow Wilson: "His legacy is racism. He hurt Black people. And when you hurt Black people, nothing else that you do matters." Regardless of the good that was done, his name does not deserve to be on this school building, and especially in the neighborhood in which he forcefully pushed Black people out of to make room for the white suburbs. The irony is sick.

And, quite honestly, it's a terrible example for the students that attend. The message it sends to white Wilson students is: "Being racist is okay, as long as you make some good choices!" To Black kids, like myself, it's just blatant disrespect. To brown kids, it shows that DCPS clearly doesn't care about brown people.

It's not fair that his name is going to be memorialized on my diploma in 2021, if nothing changes. He would have hated to see me thrive, and even though there is a sliver of satisfaction there, in beating the odds he tried set against me, it's way more satisfying, to change the name and strip him of this memorial. It would be more satisfying to name Wilson after a Black person.

It's not fair to me that I have to graduate from a school named after a man the man actively tried to push the Black middle class out. It's not okay for this example to be held, it's a sign saying that gentrification, forceful, violent gentrification, is okay. He pushed Black communities that were here since slavery's end, successful Black communities, out of Tenleytown. He removed Black kids from schools here and then the federal office named it after him.

I'm not sure how much more obvious or straightforward it gets. It's clearly unethical to keep the name as it is, and in these times where we are actively pushing for racial justice and change institutionally, something as basic as renaming a school is the bare minimum.

Thank you for hearing my suggestions.

I know very few Black people who live in Tenley and Chevy Chase, and that's Wilson's doing. He pushed us out to create Fort Reno park, to create Lafayette Elementary, to create his white suburban daydream. Black people lived in these million-dollar houses before they were even million-dollar homes. I know one girl, who's Black, who's family was pushed out of Chevy Chase, and then pushed out of area after area. She graduated from Wilson, who's legacy was her personal pain.

**GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA  
DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA PUBLIC SCHOOLS (DCPS)**



Public Hearing  
on  
PR 23-892, the “Sense of the Council Woodrow Wilson High School Renaming  
Protocol Resolution of 2020”

Testimony of  
Shanita Burney  
Officer, Communications and Engagement

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

September 15, 2020  
Live via Zoom Video Conference Broadcast



Good afternoon, Chairperson Mendelson, members of the Committee of the Whole, and staff. I am Shanita Burney, the Communications and Engagement Officer for the District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS). At DCPS, I support our goal to listen to and engage with families and stakeholders to build trust, share information, and gather feedback with a focus on closing the opportunity gap.

Over the last six months, parents, families, and students have witnessed and been a part of a unique moment in history. In addition to adapting to new ways of communicating and learning, communities have responded to racial injustice as the world changed dramatically. At this pivotal moment in the fight to end racism and police brutality, I am proud to share that DCPS has responded to the call.

We have maintained our commitment to support students and families every step of the way. This spring, our team worked tirelessly to provide a quality learning experience and to reopen strong this fall. We have taken several important steps to support our community, such as:

- Launching Parent University, which features online learning tools focused on answering questions top of mind and providing families with additional resources;
- Creating a new universal Cornerstone, which allows students to reflect and learn about themselves, aspects of their identities, how their experiences shape their view of the world, and what it means to be global citizens in this unprecedented time; and
- Finally, to strengthen our equity work, during the summer of 2020, DCPS engaged teachers to serve as Race and Equity Fellows to audit all of the social studies and English/Language Arts curriculum and develop a digital version of the African American History and Culture course for students to engage on issues of race and equity.

DCPS appreciates Mayor Bowser's work to convene the District of Columbia Facilities and Commemorative Expressions Working Group (DC FACES), in response to calls from our community, which has taken the important first steps towards addressing the names of public buildings and spaces by completing a comprehensive review. DCPS agrees with Mayor Bowser, that the name of Wilson High School must change. Woodrow Wilson's racist legacy and policies of segregation acutely carried out against Black federal employees in the District and Black residents of Reno City, where the school now sits, make him an unseemly namesake for the school and does not reflect DCPS values of Students First, Equity, Excellence, Teamwork, Courage, and Joy.

At DCPS, where a majority of our school leaders and students, and nearly half of our teachers identify as Black, we are committed to fulfilling the efforts of social activism and ensuring that the names we call our schools reflect our values and commitment to diversity. I do want to take some time to highlight that Wilson HS is not unique among our schools. We welcome further partnership as we continue to evaluate the names of schools across all eight wards and whether they accurately reflect the District of Columbia's values. In doing so, DCPS will work to serve as an advocate for our students and families who are furthest from opportunity.

#### **DCPS' Approach to Renaming Existing Schools**

School names help to identify the school community, establish a legacy, and develop a sense of pride in the traditions of DCPS and our schools. School buildings create opportunities for students to engage and encounter holistic learning experiences and provide a space where students can feel both loved and challenged. Murals and shared communal spaces affirm school identity, honor a school's artistic and cultural heritage, support students, foster a sense of community, and fill students with pride. Since opening in 1936, the Ward 3 high school has consistently been one of Washington, DC's premier public high schools, with a student body from all over the city.



As we look to our next steps, our goal is to inspire future generations of students and affirm students' cultures and communities through our school naming process. Successful renamings bring together two strands of important work: engagement around a proposed new name and updating the school facility, as well as any school materials, to reflect the new name. Currently, there is no consensus on alternative names.

Community engagement will be the first critical step in our approach to renaming this Ward 3 high school. We appreciate the incredible work of the DC History and Justice Collective, which has already authentically engaged the community around removing Wilson's name from the Ward 3 high school. They have found broad support among stakeholders including current students and families, staff members, alumni, the Advisory Neighborhood Council (ANC), and the broader DC Community. For our next steps, we plan to solicit options for a new name, determine relative support, and propose a new name for this high school. This will involve surveys, engagement sessions, and historical research. Our goal is to have a final proposed name with broad input from the community this Winter.

On the facility side, there are many spaces within a school building that display the name, mascot, and colors; these architectural elements help to shape the school's identity. For this building, we estimate the total facility costs to be approximately \$1.2 million in capital funding which includes, athletic fields, banners, flooring, a marquee, public art, and signage, among other physical assets. Currently, DCPS' Capital Improvement Plan (CIP), as approved by the DC Council, does not include these investments.

As we look to the future, DCPS is fully committed to identifying an appropriate namesake that represents DCPS' mission and values and has made a significant impact on society to adequately mirror the rich legacy and activism of this school's community. To do this, we must also ensure there are adequate time and resources to maintain and build on the community's legacy.

### **Conclusion**

I appreciate the support of Mayor Bowser and the DC Council in this historic moment as we reflect on the joint responsibility that we share in creating safe, affirming, and empowering spaces for students and our communities. I do want to recognize that Wilson HS is just one of the 21 school buildings that the Mayor's DC FACES report identified as potentially in need of change. DCPS will work to ensure that the citywide renaming process moves forward equitably and works to empower the voices of diverse stakeholders.

It is our goal that students are equipped to be leaders and change agents who positively influence their schools, communities, and the world. The time to examine how we can commemorate public spaces to honor and uplift the legacy of the District of Columbia is now. Thank you for your partnership. I am happy to answer any questions you may have at this time.



1 **DRAFT COMMITTEE PRINT**  
2 Committee of the Whole  
3 October 6, 2020  
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8 **A PROPOSED RESOLUTION**  
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12 **IN THE COUNCIL OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA**  
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17 To declare the sense of the Council that the Council supports efforts to reconsider the name of  
18 Woodrow Wilson High School and, more broadly, the names of all public schools that  
19 DCPS should act quickly to update its school naming protocol; and to call on DCPS to  
20 convene community meetings to consider whether the name of Woodrow Wilson High  
21 School should be changed, and, if so, what name should be selected.  
22

23 **RESOLVED, BY THE COUNCIL OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA, That this**  
24 resolution may be cited as the “Sense of the Council Woodrow Wilson High School Renaming  
25 Protocol Resolution of 2020”.

26 **Sec. 2. The Council finds that:**

27 (1) On May 25, 2020, George Floyd, an African American, was murdered by  
28 Minneapolis police during an arrest. Within days, protests arose across the globe to demand an  
29 end to police violence against Black men and women, and to demand local and federal reforms  
30 to address racial injustices and inequities built into the functioning of our justice systems. These  
31 calls for reform, however, are not limited to our police departments, courts, and penal system.  
32 Jurisdictions have been called on to engage in a top-to-bottom, ongoing review of their laws,  
33 regulations, operations, and programs, to identify and address where these policies and practices  
34 have a disparate impact on persons of color.

35 (2) In addition to elevating the need to broadly assess existing policies and practices for  
36 any racially disparate impact, the recent protests have drawn attention to the buildings,  
37 monuments, and statues across the country that honor historical figures who benefited from or  
38 supported white supremacy and discrimination against persons of color. A number of  
39 jurisdictions have taken action to rename buildings and remove statues and monuments in  
40 recognition of the very real harm caused to persons and communities of color by honoring  
41 individuals who supported and enabled racial prejudice. Honoring such individuals also sends a  
42 harmful and wrong message to the broader community that racial discrimination is acceptable  
43 and even laudatory.

44 (3) In December 2017, the District of Columbia Public Schools (“DCPS”) promulgated a  
45 protocol for school naming that includes procedures for residents to petition DCPS to rename a  
46 particular school. According to the protocol, one key factor in DCPS’s decision to name a school  
47 after a particular person is whether the individual “[r]epresents the DCPS mission, vision, and  
48 values.” However, the protocol does not contemplate a proposal including information on why  
49 the legacy of an individual for whom a school building is currently named represents—or does  
50 not represent—the mission, vision, and values of DCPS.

51 (4) Woodrow Wilson High School is a DCPS secondary school located in the  
52 Tenleytown neighborhood of Ward 3. The high school’s catchment area is the largest of all  
53 DCPS schools, and includes portions of Wards 1, 2, 3, and 4. Even with such a large catchment  
54 area, the school’s student body includes students from all 8 wards; for school year 2018-2019,  
55 38% of Woodrow Wilson High School students were considered out-of-boundary. The school  
56 also boasts one of the most diverse student bodies in the District. For school year 2018-2019, the

57 school's student body was 31% Black, 21% Hispanic or Latino, 37% White, 6% Asian, 1%  
58 Native American or Alaskan Native, and 4% mixed-race.

59 (5) Woodrow Wilson High School is named after President Woodrow Wilson. President  
60 Wilson is most often remembered for his leadership during World War I and his role in the  
61 creation of the League of Nations. As president, however, Wilson instituted efforts to segregate  
62 government offices and engage in racially discriminatory hiring practices. Wilson and his  
63 administration oversaw the segregation, demotion, and firing of Black employees throughout the  
64 federal government for the sole reason that they were Black. This, in turn, facilitated destruction  
65 of the growing black middle class in the District of Columbia.

66 (6) For a number of years, advocates have petitioned DCPS to change the name of  
67 Woodrow Wilson High School and to honor another individual whose legacy reflects and  
68 celebrates the school's diversity and history. In addition, students, faculty, and staff have  
69 engaged in school-wide discussions about the changing of the school's name, including holding a  
70 community forum in 2019. Although advocates and members of the community have suggested a  
71 number of new names for the school, neither the advocates nor DCPS have come to consensus  
72 on a new name, nor initiated a formalized process to select or approve one.

73 (7) Under DCPS's school naming protocol, a proposal to rename a school must include  
74 not only the request to change the existing name, but also a specific recommendation for the new  
75 name. After receiving a complete proposal, DCPS will decide whether to move forward with the  
76 name change. Under the protocol, only then will DCPS begin community engagement, which  
77 may include direct communication with the school community, school surveys and petitions, and  
78 public meetings with the relevant Local School Advisory Team, ANC, and Community Civic  
79 Association.

80 (8) By requiring that a specific name be selected before the start of any community  
81 engagement, DCPS does not provide a formal opportunity for the community to propose or  
82 consider additional potential new names for a school.

83 (9) In Spring 2020, DCPS initiated a review of its school naming protocol. During this  
84 review, which is ongoing, DCPS could update the protocol to provide for community  
85 engagement prior to selection of a particular name for consideration; such a change would help  
86 facilitate the high school and Tenleytown communities coming to consensus on a new name for  
87 the Wilson High School. However, it is unclear how long review of the protocol will take, and  
88 advocates have raised concerns that it could be months before the new protocol is finalized,  
89 significantly delaying efforts to identify a new name for Woodrow Wilson High School.

90 Sec. 3. It is the sense of the Council that:

91 (1) The Council supports efforts to change the name of Woodrow Wilson High School  
92 and, more broadly, to consider whether other public schools in the District of Columbia should  
93 be renamed to remove honorifics no longer acceptable to today's community that comprises the  
94 District of Columbia.

95 (2) The name of a school should honor a person, event, or place for a clearly articulated  
96 reason, and should preferably be a source of inspiration for its students, or integrally relate to the  
97 history of the school.

98 (3) DCPS must act quickly to update its school naming protocol, which should enable  
99 procedures for DCPS to seek community input on potential new names prior to a specific name  
100 being proposed or otherwise selected, and include procedures that permit a proposal to provide  
101 information on how the current name of a school does not represent community values or fulfill a  
102 valuable purpose such as being inspirational.

103           (4) DCPS should immediately convene virtual community meetings, at least one each  
104 with the school’s Local School Advisory Team, ANC 3E, and the Tenleytown Neighbors  
105 Association, to consider whether the name of Woodrow Wilson High School should be changed,  
106 and, if so, what name should be selected; and, following those meetings, DCPS should provide  
107 the Council with a summary of the discussion, including any recommendations made.

108           Sec. 4. The Council shall transmit a copy of this resolution, upon its adoption, to the  
109 Mayor, the Deputy Mayor for Education, the Chancellor of the District of Columbia Public  
110 Schools, the principal of Woodrow Wilson High School, and the Chairpersons of ANC 3E, the  
111 Tenleytown Neighbors Association, and the Woodrow Wilson High School Local School  
112 Advisory Team.

113           Sec. 5. This resolution shall take effect immediately upon the first date of publication in  
114 the District of Columbia Register.