

Testimony in Support of Case Number (06-17)

Good evening. My name is Whitney Watriss. I live at 3318 14th Street, N.E., in Ward 5.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify this evening.

I want to share with you one of my experiences as a host parent to foreign exchange students attending the School without Walls. These students come to spend a year in the United States to improve their English and learn about this country. Before coming, the students I host asked about the school they would be attending. I told them that Walls is one of the best high schools in the country. Academically, it is exceptional, with highly qualified and committed teachers. The school offers a rich academic program and uses the city as a classroom. It offers a wide range of sports and extra-curricular activities. The students are wonderful, and come from all over the city and from many cultures.

And then I had to tell the exchange students about the school building in which this wonderful program is housed. I had to forewarn them that they might have to move their desks to avoid water leaking through the roof—or falling plaster. In the winter, they might have to wear their coats in some classrooms because the windows aren't well-sealed and the heating is ineffective. But at the beginning and end of the school year, the classrooms might get so hot as to make it virtually impossible to study. If the exchange students take a science class, they will have to go to the University of the District of Columbia for their lab work, as Walls has no laboratories. There is no cafeteria or common room in which to eat lunch, but fortunately the students are allowed to eat in some classrooms. There is no real music room. If an event involves the entire school,

they have to go to space that George Washington University kindly provides. And so forth.

So one of the first things they learn about the United States is that schools in the Nation's Capital, even the superior ones, are, plain and simple, physical dumps. This is not the message that I, as a resident of Washington, DC and an American citizen, like having to communicate to students from abroad, let alone the rest of this country.

I urge you to remedy this deplorable and embarrassing situation. Please approve the public-private partnership that will allow Walls students finally to have the school facility they so clearly deserve in the Nation's Capital.

Thank you.