

TESTIMONY OF
REV. NOLAN WILLIAMS, JR.
FOR
D.C. ZONING COMMISSION HEARING
IN SUPPORT OF
GEORGETOWN UNIVERSITY 2010 CAMPUS PLAN

Good evening, Mr. Chairman and Members of the Zoning Commission. Thank you for the opportunity to speak this evening. My name is Reverend Nolan Williams, Jr. and I am here tonight to express my support for Georgetown University's campus plan. I would like to share with you how Georgetown University has been a good neighbor and a good friend to Washington, D.C. over the years.

First, allow me to share a bit about myself. Then I will discuss the ways in which I have seen Georgetown University support and strengthen Washington, D.C.

I am CEO of NEWorks Productions, a Washington, DC-based company that presents inspirational arts programming in partnership with major arts, humanitarian, religious and educational institutions. From 1995-2010, I served on the staff of the Metropolitan Baptist Church. Established in 1863, Metropolitan is one of our city's great and historic congregations. It was during my tenure as Minister of Music at Metropolitan that I first became connected with Georgetown University through their outreach to the wider metropolitan community. The University made direct contact with our congregation seeking to foster relationship. I would later come to see that this outreach is reflective of the University's ongoing commitment to our community. Georgetown repeatedly seeks out partnerships with Washington, D.C. groups, programs and institutions in order to inspire, strengthen and support this city and the people of this city. I am here today to bear witness to this commitment and to share especially about one example of the University's work in our city.

In 2002, Georgetown's President John DeGioia envisioned a city-wide celebration of the life and legacy of one of our country's great heroes, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. President DeGioia's goal was to celebrate Dr. King's dream of unity by creating a moment of celebration that would be inclusive of the entire Washington community, and one that would be a gift back to the Washington community. The result of that vision has been Georgetown University's annual sponsorship of "Let Freedom Ring," a musical celebration of Dr. King's legacy staged in the Concert Hall of the Kennedy Center that has arguably become one of the largest and most prestigious King celebrations nationwide. Each year, at University expense, tickets to this remarkable event are given out *free* to residents throughout the city and region. It has been my honor to serve as Music Director of the "Let Freedom Ring" celebration for the past eight years.

As part of this celebration and in order to promote the values of service and social justice, President DeGioia presents the John Thompson Legacy of a Dream Award to an individual or an organization whose contributions to community service or social justice reflect the values and ideals of Dr. King. In this way, individuals are able to see the continued work of Dr. King and

ZONING COMMISSION
District of Columbia
CASE NO. 10-32
EXHIBIT NO. 181

are challenged to participate in the work of serving, creating unity, and promoting justice. Past recipients include:

- **Dikembe Mutombo**
- **Marian Wright Edelman of the Children's Defense Fund**
- **Congresswoman Eleanor Holmes Norton (D-DC)**
- **the Organization of African First Ladies against HIV/AIDS**
- **Mrs. Rosa Parks** (posthumous)
- **Colin and Alma Powell**
- **the Honorable William H. Gray III**, president and CEO of the United Negro College Fund
- and the award's namesake, **Coach John Thompson**, Coach of Georgetown University's Men's Basketball program from 1972-1999.

Georgetown University also traditionally invites an acclaimed musical artist to perform at the annual "Let Freedom Ring" Celebration. Past celebrity artists have included:

- **Roberta Flack**
- **Jessye Norman**
- **Aaron Neville**
- **Yolanda Adams**
- **Brian McKnight**
- **Denyce Graves**, who performed along with the National Symphony Orchestra
- **Aretha Franklin**
- **India.Arie**
- and **Patti LaBelle**

Through this program, Georgetown truly brings our community together inviting individuals from all walks of life to commemorate Dr. King's Birthday and enjoy *free* performances by some of the leading musical artists of our time. Another highlight of this program is the featuring of a local artist as a guest soloist, promoting the creativity and talent that we have right here in Washington, D.C.

Georgetown's commitment to bringing our community together around the celebration of Dr. King extends well beyond the day of this celebration. The University literally commits months of planning and tremendous resources toward this annual observance. A supreme example of this is the work the University has commissioned me to do since 2005 in organizing a community choir for this celebration. This choir – The Let Freedom Ring Celebration Choir – is comprised of students, staff and faculty of the Georgetown community along with participants drawn from churches throughout the broader Washington community. Beginning in the fall of each academic year, and continuing over the course of four months, community members are invited to the campus and Georgetown students, staff and faculty are invited into the community with rehearsals that take place on the university campus and at an historical Washington, D.C. church.

We actively seek to create a community amongst our choir members through these practices, but also through shared dinners at the host churches. These dinners foster incredible personal

relationships between the university members and persons from the wider community choir. They also expose participants to some local history as pastors and members of our host churches are invited to speak about the church's individual history and its importance to the history of Washington, D.C. In this way, choir members, both from the university and from the broader community, gain a sense of the larger history that we come together to celebrate each year and that we continue to be a part of.

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Zoning Commission, over the past several years, I have seen and can testify to Georgetown University's commitment to Washington, D.C. and to the positive impact that the University makes in our community. I am profoundly appreciative of the community-building work they do and am honored to be a part of it. I firmly believe that our great city benefits by having such a caring organization go beyond its gates, committing its time and resources to be a good neighbor.