WOODROW WILSON SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL
Crew Boosters
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Testimony in Support of Georgetown University's Request to Build a Boathouse

Case #02-30

Presented by Betsy Hart, Co-President, Woodrow Wilson High School Crew Boosters Club

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My name is Betsy Hart. I am the Co-President of the Woodrow Wilson High School Crew Boosters Club, the parents group that supports the only Washington, DC public high school crew. On behalf of the Wilson Boosters Club – and the many students that benefit from our program – I strongly support Georgetown University's request to build the planned boathouse on the Potomac River

While tonight's discussion will focus on the Georgetown boathouse, your decision will have enormous ramifications for all rowers that use the Potomac.

To explain why, I need to tell you something about crew – and the enormous and positive impact it makes on the lives of our high school students.

Crew is a sport that is becoming increasingly popular with young people. When my daughter joined the Wilson team four years ago, there were 40 rowers. This year, we have more than doubled the program, with 86 culturally diverse young men and women on the varsity and novice squads.

Crew is a physically-demanding sport. It requires enormous dedication, a healthy life style, tremendous commitment and a team effort.

Several mornings a week these 14- to 18-year old rowers meet at Thompson's Boat Center at 5:45 am for practice. On other days, they leave immediately after school and practice until 6:45 pm before

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returning home to complete their homework. They spend many hours during the pre-season building their stamina on indoor rowing machines and jogging up and down the "Exorcist" steps between Prospect and M Streets in Georgetown.

Generally speaking, these students are focused, excellent managers of their time, and expert team players. And they are outstanding students with an average team Grade Point Average of 3.7.

The crew program instills in the rowers a tremendous appreciation for the beauty of the river and a unique understanding of the importance of the environment. Rowing programs make a wonderful non-motorized use of our river and the scholastic squads that use the Potomac feel responsible for keeping it clean and safe.

So if rowing is such a wonderful sport, why is it in jeopardy? Simply put, the lack of space is squeezing high school rowing – and it will get worse without the new Georgetown boathouse.

Today, Wilson keeps its eight boats at the Thompson's Boat Center, the publicly owned boathouse owned by the National Park Service. Thompson's accommodates Georgetown University, George Washington University, 12 area high schools, several rowing clubs, and over 100 single scullers and kayakers. Potomac Boat Club and the Washington Canoe Club have been full for many years. Thompson's has become so overcrowded that – for the past decade – Wilson and most of the high schools using it have been forced to store their boats outdoors in a fenced-in compound.

Wilson rents eight racks at Thompson's, some in the boathouse and some in the compound. We need additional racks to accommodate the 86 rowers – but none are available. When we bought a new shell last year, we were forced to sell one of our older – but perfectly fine – boats just to make space for the new one. Next year, we might have to turn away deserving students as there is not enough space on the Potomac River for us to keep our boats.

In just two years from now, that compound will disappear, when the Swedish Embassy – which owns the land – builds on that site. When that land is taken, many of the 800 high school rowers using Thompson's – including students at Wilson High School – could lose the opportunity to row on the Potomac.

Unlike basketball or soccer – where athletes can practice almost anywhere – a rower must have a seat in a boat to learn and improve their rowing skills.

We strongly support the construction of the Georgetown boathouse, which will relieve the congestion at Thompson's, allowing the very important high school programs to grow – not only at Wilson but at other area schools in Washington, Maryland, and in Northern Virginia.

This new Georgetown rowing facility will be a boon for all rowers. Not only did Georgetown University crew play a major part in helping to start the Wilson Crew in 1985 but our coaches and students are particularly excited about the use of the indoor rowing tank to strengthen their rowing skills off-season and make them even more competitive against well financed private schools.

Rowing is an important sport – and I believe it is in the public interest to devote land for a new Georgetown facility for this purpose.

We support the plan because it will increase opportunities for rowers of all ages to begin or to continue this sport. Some 4000 scholastic rowers – including students from Wilson and local high schools – competed last weekend at the Stotesbury Cup Regatta in Philadelphia. It was an extremely positive experience – and the construction of the Georgetown boathouse will allow more local students to participate in the sport.

Without this new boathouse, the crew program at Wilson will be in jeopardy. At best, it will not grow. At worst, it will shrink and perhaps disappear. And that would be an enormous tragedy.