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Via electronic mail c/o ecash@dccouncil.us, Committee of the Whole Director

To: Chairman Phil Mendelson
Council of the District of Columbia
Washington, DC

Testimony by Trudy Huskamp Peterson, Before the Committee of the Whole (Chairman Phil Mendelson), on DC Archives, Monday, March 7, 2016

I write out of deep concern for the archives of the District of Columbia. As a longtime resident of Ward 6, a former Acting Archivist of the United States, and the current chair of the International Council on Archives' Human Rights Working Group, I have watched with dismay as the archives of Washington, D.C., the capitol city of this great country, has fallen further and further behind the archival systems in other capitol cities around the world. With the steps that the Council has promised—to repair roof at the current inadequate archives facility and to build a new city archives--I am heartened but not entirely sanguine about the prospects.

As the Friends of the D.C. Archives argues, the city needs to (1) repair the Naylor Court structure; (2) build a new city archives; and (3) undertake a comprehensive program of management for the records of the city, from the electronic documents of the Mayor's office and the videos of City Council hearings to the records of schools and police and fire departments and all public services. This cannot happen overnight, but constant, steady progress must be made.

Let me focus on a new facility. The Hartman-Cox study, which is the best information we have at present, suggests that the total records storage requirement for the new archives is just over 500,000 cubic feet, but that DOES NOT INCLUDE the records of the police and fire departments or the schools. To give you some sense of what that means, a football field is 160 feet wide and 360 feet long (including the end zones), or a total of 57,600 square feet. The storage needed for the known and projected records of the District is at least 10 football fields covered to the depth of one foot. The city must see this as a major public structure, one that is architecturally distinguished and eminently usable, now and in the future. It is, after all, the face of the city that the public sees when it thinks of the history of the District of Columbia.

Archives, including the management of current records, support both the practical need of the government for efficiency, by using both its current records and those of past administrations, and the need of citizens to have access to the records of their government to protect their rights and know their history. These two justifications apply to both the paper records of the last century and the electronic records created today. City employees and citizens all need government archives: we are all the "I" in government archives.