**SALUTATION IN LETTER**

To whom it may concern,

I write to you today to highlight what I think is a significant omission in the NCPC's framing of the federal interest in the height limit in the District of Columbia. Specifically, the report neglects to analyze the effect of the height limit on the government as the region's major employer and its effect on federal personnel costs and federal employee cost of living.

Employee cost of living has a significant effect upon federal spending; every federal employee in the Washington metropolitan area receives a locality bonus to their salary of 24.22% as of 20XX. Further, every federal employee is eligible to receive a transportation subsidy to cover the cost of their commute up to $240 in 20XX; the further they have to travel, the more they receive. Concerning military personnel stationed in the Washington metropolitan area, an O1, that is a second lieutenant in the Army, receives a monthly housing allowance of $1875, an O4, or a major in the Army, is paid $2982 for housing (those are the figures for personnel without dependents). So the government does incur significant costs related to housing in the District and its surroundings.

While the report does consider the federal government's needs in terms of office space within DC, to be complete the report should analyze the extent to which the height limit drives up the cost of living for federal civilian and military personnel, forcing the government to pay higher salaries, and incur greater costs to transport its employees farther, to and from places where they can find housing they can afford.

Further, the report should consider non-monetary factors related to housing that affect employee performance and agency operations. Among these would be the length of commute times for federal workers. Other things being equal, many workers would prefer a shorter commute to a longer one. Also, rapidly rising costs in many DC neighborhoods are making them unaffordable to federal workers, causing them to feel unwelcome in the nation’s capital, diminishing their sense of pride in their work.

The distance federal employees must travel to work also affects federal emergency dismissals. Many workers who live far from their offices and are dependent on cars for commuting will need to take additional leave to get home in case of significant snowfall. In the case of the notorious snowstorm in January of 20XX, one of my coworkers who lives in suburban Virginia did not get home until nearly midnight; by contrast, I took the Metro back to my apartment in the district and was home in twenty minutes. In the case of the earthquake later that year, some of my coworkers

could not get their cars out of the agency garage and had to form emergency carpools back to suburban Maryland. For me, even though the Metro was limited to 15 mph and the bus system was paralyzed by heavy car traffic, I could simply walk home to my apartment in Columbia Heights.

While the report maintains there is at least some federal interest in maintaining the limit throughout the District, beyond the “topographic bowl” of the L’Enfant city, its neglect to consider the government's interest as an employer blinds it to a significant countervailing interest in substantially increasing the amount of housing in the District.

The three-year freeze in cost of living and locality adjustments to federal pay has significantly diminished the effective compensation of federal employees. Meanwhile, the District's reputation as a stable job market in the recession has brought an influx of new residents into a housing market seriously constrained by the height limit (among other policies), driving up housing costs and further reducing effective federal wages.

The effect of furloughs due to budget sequestration has cut into federal employee compensation even more. A significant increase in affordable housing in the District would broaden housing choices for federal workers, improving quality of life and even slowing the increase in cost of living which would be a gain to real income even if nominal income remained the same. It should be pointed out that simply by incentivizing greater private development in the District these benefits could be achieved without cost to the taxpayer.

The draft report seems to start with the premise of changing as little as possible, but it overlooks the potential benefit to the government in encouraging significant change.

While there is a reasonable federal interest in preserving the aesthetic integrity of the city, this interest should be evaluated in light of other priorities of the government. Put simply, personnel issues are as much an operational concern as physical infrastructure and they are affected by development policies in DC. As the recent government shutdown highlighted: without employees, federal agencies are just empty buildings.

Modifying the height limit will make it possible for a greater percentage of federal workers to live close to their jobs, reducing commute times, mitigating the impact of increasingly limited agency budgets, improving the collective morale of the federal workforce, and helping to create a more thriving city.

Sincerely,