

Remarks of Greta H. Gordon

ACPS Public Hearing on Redistricting

December, 8, 2016

Good evening, Chairwoman Graf and Members of the School Board.

Thank you for the opportunity to address the Board this evening. My name is Greta Hebert Gordon and my family and I live at 507 Fontaine Street in the George Mason Elementary School District. My husband, Jim, and I have two daughters, Bailey, age 7, and Brighid, age 6, who currently attend first grade and kindergarten, respectively, at George Mason.

During these last few months, I've had the chance to talk or meet directly with most of you. I would like to thank you for making yourselves available to listen to the concerns of the families in Planning Block 73 (PB73). Many of you have heard my personal story – I was born and raised in the house in which my family and I now live. I walked to George Mason Elementary School as a child, where my father, Gerry Hebert, was PTA president; I graduated from George Mason, (Class of '89,) and I now walk my children to George Mason. In fact, my youngest daughter, Brighid, is in the same kindergarten classroom that I had when I was in kindergarten. Gosh, that's special. I didn't know how special that really was until I walked her to school that first day in September. A wave of wonderful memories of my own days at George Mason came flooding back. I am so lucky.

As you already know, Fontaine Street and George Mason Elementary School are both in the Jefferson Park neighborhood, and Fontaine Street children have been walking to the school since it was built some 80 years ago. Our neighborhood is the George Mason neighborhood.

George Mason Elementary School is a safe, short walk of only 2 blocks for our children. My family and the other families of PB73 have worked tirelessly these last months to make sure that our children can continue to attend their neighborhood school. We understand, appreciate and support the efforts of ACPS to make sure that every student in the system is afforded the best

opportunity possible for a quality education. And we certainly realize that there will be some pain. As Ms. Gentry commented at our house last Sunday, “no one wants to change schools,” and I can appreciate that. However, in this circumstance, it simply defies logic to shift our children to any school other than George Mason.

Moving our children elsewhere violates the overarching goal of redistricting and many of the criteria with regard to student safety and transportation. Because our neighborhood boundary lines are Braddock Road and Russell Road, any change will require 100% busing for our children. Buses cannot drive down Fontaine Street, and anywhere a bus stop might be considered is going to be farther than walking the two blocks to George Mason. We have argued ceaselessly that there simply is no viable alternative for the families and children of PB73. The process has been stressful, anxious and often frustrating.

I am pleased the Redistricting Review Committee voted last night to advance two maps that keep Fontaine Street and PB73 in the George Mason district. It is encouraging to know that we are heard, that our efforts have not been in vain. The process is far from complete, but I want to take this opportunity to thank you for listening. Thank you for understanding that Fontaine Street should remain in the George Mason Elementary School District, as it always has been.

As we approach the end of this process, I strongly urge the Review Committee and consultants to keep Fontaine Street and PB 73 in the George Mason Elementary School District. I ask that the School Board to keep Fontaine Street and Planning Block 73 in mind when the final vote on a map is made.

I thank you all for your time this evening, and your service to our great city.