



**TESTIMONY OF MURIEL BOWSER,
MAYOR OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA**

**Before the Committee on Energy and Natural
Resources,
Subcommittee on National Parks**

Angus S. King, Jr., Chairman

Steve Daines, Ranking Member

**H.R. 4984, D.C. Robert F. Kennedy Memorial
Stadium Campus Revitalization Act**

May 15, 2024

H.R. 4984 D.C. Robert F. Kennedy Memorial Stadium Campus Revitalization Act

Date: Wednesday, May 15, 2024

Chairman King and members of the Subcommittee on National Parks, I, Muriel Bowser, duly elected Mayor of the District of Columbia, submit this statement on behalf of nearly 700,000 residents. As Mayor, I am responsible for the economic growth and stability of the District, as well as the health and well-being of our residents. Importantly, I have learned in this role that recreation, and the facilities where recreation happens, contribute greatly to the overall wellness of our community.

With this understanding, and on behalf of the nearly 700,000 residents who call Washington, DC home, as well as the 21million annual visitors to the District, I humbly request the passage of H.R. 4984, the D.C. Robert F. Kennedy Memorial Stadium Campus Revitalization Act. The RFK Memorial Stadium Campus has always been in the possession and control of the District, both when the District was a Federal agency and as a municipality.

H.R. 4984 originated in the U.S. House of Representatives introduced by Chairman James Comer of the House Oversight and Accountability Committee and our Congresswoman, Eleanor Holmes Norton. For more than 30 years,

Congresswoman Norton has worked with Congress on legislation to make the nation's capital a more dynamic place to live, work, and visit. This monumental legislation has the potential to transform and expand both recreational and economic opportunities in the District of Columbia for our residents, our region, and the visitors who come to our city each year.

Washington, DC has a rich tradition of recreation and sport. We are proud that for three consecutive years Washington, DC has been ranked the number one big city park system in the nation by the Trust for Public Land through its annual ParkScore Index, which ranks the 100 most populous U.S. cities and is considered the gold standard for park evaluation.

This very honorable distinction recognizes that we have federal parks and local recreation amenities that complement one another – a system that is the result of a strong, trusting, and longstanding partnership between the District and the National Park Service. Look no further than the revitalization of Franklin Park in downtown. This once-underutilized greenspace that, over the years, had fallen into disrepair has now become a hub of activity for residents, downtown office workers, and tourists alike. In addition to having beautiful spaces and a playground for children, the park frequently hosts movie nights, festivals, concerts, and more. The

transformation of Franklin Park was only made possible through a Cooperative Management Agreement executed between the District and NPS.

This partnership is not new. The DC Stadium Act of 1957 is the foundational example of the early trust NPS placed in the District. Of course, to many DC residents, the RFK site is synonymous with the glory years of the Washington football franchise now known as the Commanders. It was also the home of the Washington Senators and enabled the return of Major League Baseball to the District with the Washington Nationals. DC United also called the site home during their early years and it was there that the team won multiple Major League Soccer titles. Beyond professional sports, RFK hosted countless high-school and college athletic competitions. As a native Washingtonian, I personally enjoyed the winning spirit at RFK.

Today, however, the winning spirit along the Anacostia River banks can only be found on a handful of youth soccer fields, surrounded by eroding parking lots and lacking any significant investments. Despite investments in these fields and nearby trails, most of the 190-acre campus sits empty day in and day out. Instead of connecting our community, or serving as a grand entryway on the east side of our monumental core, it is a mostly desolate sea of asphalt.

We can do better. The District can transform and activate the RFK campus so that it becomes a world-class destination for families, residents, visitors, and athletes, while also better connecting our beautiful waterfront and the neighborhoods along its banks. This revitalization will complement investments already underway, including investments in the 20-mile Anacostia Riverwalk Trail, led by the District's Department of Transportation; investments in The Fields at RFK, managed by Events DC; and investments in an environmental programming on Kingman and Heritage Islands, under the stewardship of the DC Department of Energy and Environment. We envision increased access to organized recreation and leisure activities such as cycling and kayaking, and more outdoor space for cultural activations. We also see the potential for economic development, which could include housing and professional sports.

From the perspective of youth sports, we envision the RFK campus becoming a premier destination for youth athletic competition. From basketball to cheerleading to boxing to ice skating and track and field, the District is home to many young athletes at the top of their sport. Unfortunately, without a centralized home or training facility, our athletes routinely travel outside of DC to compete in the highest-level tournaments and events. My vision is for Washington, DC to host those events. That way we can not only showcase our local talent, but more

families, coaches, and organizations will see DC as a launching pad for America's athletes.

The amenities at this type of sports complex could include:

- Olympic swimming pool
- Gymnastics training facility
- Indoor track and multipurpose field
- Boxing training facility
- Climbing center and obstacle course
- Health and Fitness Club
- Indoor bowling alley
- Indoor skating rink
- Learning & creativity center for children
- Amphitheatre
- Indoor/outdoor café
- Outdoor and Indoor basketball and tennis courts

The expansive potential for uses at the RFK campus is why I included seed funding in my budget to build a DC Department of Parks and Recreation Sports Complex.

I unequivocally seek the passage of this legislation. However, to become a reality, the work of this Committee and, indeed, this Senate is essential.

Today, the RFK site is at a legal stalemate bound by a nearly 70-year-old lease that expires in 14 years. This stalemate prevents the comprehensive development necessary to revitalize the site. The District has a proven history of activating NPS land to premier conditions that are consistent with a world-class capital city. We did it at Franklin Park, we've transformed federal spaces across DC, including at the Wharf, the St. Elizabeths East campus, at Walter Reed, and, given the opportunity, we will do it at RFK.

Please urge your colleagues in the Senate to support expeditious passage of this legislation. Thank you.