ROCK CREEK
CONSERVANCY

Rock Creek Conservancy exists to restore Rock Creek and its parklands as a natural oasis for all people to appreciate and protect.

Congressmember Eleanor Holmes Norton
2136 Rayburn HOB
Washington DC 20515

March 16, 2021
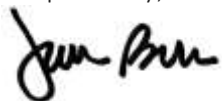
Congressmember Norton,

Thank you for your recent letter to the National Park Service requesting a change of name for the Rock Creek Park resources that honor Melvin Hazen. Rock Creek Conservancy supports changing these designations.

Melvin Hazen, as a commissioner of the District, was instrumental in the displacement of the residents of Reno to make space for what is now Fort Reno Park. Hazen's language may have been coded, but his actions leveraged the structural racism built into the policies that allowed for the displacement and segregation of communities throughout Washington, DC.

Rock Creek Conservancy supports a change in name of the creek, trail, and park to recognize one of the individuals who have played a role in the history of Rock Creek Park but whose story are less well known. These include figures like Hattie Sewall, whose ability to operate a teahouse at Peirce Mill was not renewed in 1921 following complaints that it attracted too many Black people; Elizabeth Proctor Thomas, who was never compensated for the land she owned when it was taken to create Fort Stevens; and Thornton Lewis, the president of the Reno Home and School Association and vice president of the Reno Citizens' Association, through which he and neighbors argued against segregation. Other names should be solicited from any descendants of the residents of Reno. Another excellent choice would be Georgia Ellerd, the first Black person and first woman to be superintendent of Rock Creek Park.

Rock Creek Park is a place that can and should bring people together; leaving this name on park resources serves to divide. We understand that, following the Commemorative Works Act (40 US Code Chapter 89), Congressional legislation is required to name (or rename) National Park Service resources to honor an individual, so we ask that you introduce legislation for this purpose.

Respectfully,

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