

Committee on Workforce Development and Government Operations

Carol Schwartz, Chairperson

Public Roundtable on PR 17-0011: "Secretary of the District of Columbia Stephanie D. Scott Confirmation Resolution of 2007"

January 22, 2007

OPENING STATEMENT OF STEPHANIE D. SCOTT

Good afternoon Councilmember Schwartz, members of the committee, staff, and guests. My name is Stephanie Diane Scott, and I am the Acting Secretary of the District of Columbia. I am honored to be serving the District in this capacity, and I am honored (though somewhat nervous) to be the first of Mayor Fenty's appointments to appear for confirmation.

I have attached to my testimony the letter I sent you last week, with answers to your "first four questions." This afternoon I will summarize my personal background, and then discuss the Office of the Secretary, and our priorities for the Office.

I have a Ph.D. in Environmental Psychology, from the City University of New York Graduate School. My dissertation research was a study of participation in three levels of community-based organizations at the neighborhood level in Brooklyn, NY. Professionally, I spent five years at the Urban Institute, before joining Mayor Fenty's then-Council staff, serving as Chief of Staff in his office and for his re-election campaign. For the past three years I edited the Ward 4 weekly newsletter and maintained his Ward 4 website. I live in the Ward 4 house I was raised in, having moved to the District from Brooklyn at age two, when my father, the Associated Press' first full-time African-American reporter, was

transferred to the Washington bureau. My husband and I bought the house from my mom in 1998, and she moved down to the waterfront in Ward 2, now Ward 6. We are now raising our two children there, and we are very proud that they are DC natives, and DC Public School students, in kindergarten and first grade at Shepherd Elementary.

When Mayor Fenty first discussed the position of Secretary with me, my first question was "What does the Secretary of the District do?" Not surprisingly, finding the answer became one of my tasks in the transition. Just about every current and former Council staffer I asked said "That's easy, you publish the Register every Friday." And despite all of my jokes about serving coffee and taking memos, there is far more to this job than publishing the DC Register, as you all know. I have been researching the Office of the Secretary and meeting with staff since November, and have begun to implement changes to the Office, as Mayor Fenty has directed.

The Office of the Secretary comprises five "divisions" as I call them, spread across three buildings. These five divisions provide support to the District Government and residents in two functional areas: document handling, and ambassadorial functions.

The Office of Documents and Administrative Issuances does in fact publish the Register every Friday, from their office at 441 4th Street NW. In addition, they publish the DC Municipal Register, they issue and track all of the Mayor's Orders, answer questions from the public, sell documents over the counter, and they have taken a major role in the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) appeals process. They have been able to do this for the past few years while understaffed and underfunded. One of their biggest concerns was the dearth of staff. The previous director left his position in October, 2006, leaving a staff of four to conduct all the work of the office, although he did continue to lend a hand with FOIA appeals. In October, Mayor Fenty asked me to find someone to take the Director's position, and I have done so. LaShonda Holloway is an attorney, as required, and she has worked in document handling for both Westlaw and Lexis/Nexis, and most recently

managed a legal document handling firm in Florida. She began work on January 8, 2007. In addition, I filled the long-vacant staff attorney position.

The top priorities for the Office of Documents and Administrative Issuances are to vastly increase online access to the DCMR (another request from Council staff), and to improve the process for counter sales so that staff will have more time to attend to their other duties.

If the Office of Documents is the place where many government documents get their start, the **Office of Public Records and DC Archives** is where these same documents end up. The Records Center, on Naylor Court, NW, holds most of the documents produced by the District that must be retained for a temporary period - usually about five years. The District Archives are maintained in large part out at the National Archives facility at Suitland, MD. In 2003, the Office of Public Records was the subject of a Washington Post article detailing the shameful condition of the building that houses such valuable artifacts as the original Last Will and Testaments of George Washington and Frederick Douglass, and the electric chair that was used at Lorton Penitentiary until 1957. Sadly, conditions at the DC Records Center have not improved much. After the Post article, a capital budget was finally approved by the Council, and plans are moving forward to make changes. However, the previous administration developed a plan that involves moving records around in three different buildings, and putting the Naylor Court building to a different use. I am meeting this week with the Office of Property Management to find out where that project is, and whether it makes fiscal sense to change the plan to one that is more user-friendly to researchers and other visitors.

Our top priority for the Office of Public Records is to develop and implement a capital project that is efficient and better showcases our archives. In fact, I would like to see the DC Archives located in a more accessible location that can become a destination attraction for visitors as well as residents.

The third division in the Office of the Secretary is the **Office of Notary Commissions and Authentications**. A four-person office on the 8th floor of 441 4th Street NW, this office is responsible for commissioning and monitoring all notaries operating in the District of Columbia, authenticating notaries' signatures for international trade or court cases, and accepting passport applications, which, I am told, is the only non-post office, non-federal agency to do so in the country. The Office of Notary Commissions and Authentications is currently in the midst of a contract with an outside vendor to scan and index all of their paper notary records, which will make the office more efficient by permitting computer searches of records, rather than the more tedious hand-searches that are conducted now.

The top priorities for the Office of Notaries are to determine the feasibility of having all automating processes be conducted by OCTO, rather than having to contract with an outside vendor, and to figure out a way to make the payment process simpler, so customers may use credit cards or even cash to pay for their services. Please also note that both of these issues (automation and payment) are faced by the Office of Documents, and a solution for one would mean a solution for the other office.

The three divisions already discussed comprise the bulk of the "document handling" function of the Office of the Secretary. This function is often ignored by residents and employees alike, but provides strong support for all DC government agencies, in that we provide the storage and retrieval of documents, and commission the notaries that help so many documents become "official." When these offices are fully staffed and running smoothly, no one hears about the Office of the Secretary. It is when there is a problem that we come to public notice. We prefer for our document handling side to remain in the background, smoothly supporting all government agencies.

The **Ceremonial Services** division is responsible for all Mayor's Proclamations, Congratulatory and Condolence letters, etc. This two-person team is here in the Wilson Building, and plays an important role in concert with the Mayor's Correspondence Unit.

Our top priority for this division is to work together to develop a new work process that will help this small unit manage the increased workflow better and become more efficient.

Our smallest division is the **Office of Protocol and International Affairs**, with one staffer, also here in the Wilson Building. This office manages relationships with all of the embassies, diplomats, and visiting delegations. I anticipate that this division will be quite busy this year as Mayor Fenty has pledged not to leave the country during his first year in office. Instead, we will invite international delegations to visit the Nation's Capital.

Last, but not least, is the **Executive Office of the Secretary**. Not a division per se, as we have a hand in everything, but we help to round out the Ambassadorial functions performed by Ceremonial Services and the Office of Protocol. This includes many information-sharing programs such as annual celebrations of **Martin Luther King, Jr. Day, DC Compensated Emancipation Day, and the Cherry Blossom Festival Poster Contest**. The executive office also manages the Secretary's role as chair of several committees, including the Escheated Estates Fund, the MLK Holiday commission, and the Emancipation Day commission among others.

The top priority for the Executive Office is to significantly increase the role of the Secretary in helping Mayor Fenty to fight for full voting representation in Congress. As I was researching the Office of the Secretary, attempting to answer the "what does the secretary do" question, I learned that most of the Secretaries of State for the 50 United States serve as the main information clearinghouse or civic boosters for their states. I will use the semi-annual conferences of the National Association of Secretaries of State to educate state officials about the lack of full democracy in the capital of the free world. My colleagues in states can help our cause by spreading the information about DC to the residents of their states. Given that a 2004 poll found that 82 percent of Americans did not know that District residents do not share the full democratic rights, this type of education and outreach may be crucial to gaining further support for our cause.

In closing, I would like to share a quick story. I have a copy of the CD that DC Vote created of Sweet Honey in the Rock singing their two songs "Voting Representation" and "Give the People Their Right to Vote," and would often play the two songs repeatedly in the car while taking my two children to and from daycare. When my daughter was two years old, she would request her favorite by saying "I want Voting Representation, Mama." And I would always reply "I wish I could give it to you, baby, but I can't." Well, I must say that I am very excited that becoming the Secretary of the District of Columbia finally gives me the chance to give my daughter Voting Representation for real.

Thank you for your time, I will be happy to answer any questions you have.