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Testimony of Congresswoman Eleanor Holmes Norton
Committee on Natural Resources
Subcommittee on Federal Lands

Hearing on H.R. 7976, the Civil War Defenses of Washington National Historical Park Act
July 9, 2024

I thank Chairman Tiffany and Ranking Member Neguse for holding this hearing and allowing me to testify on H.R. 7976, the Civil War Defenses of Washington National Historical Park Act.

The Civil War Defenses of Washington, including forts, unarmed batteries and rifle trenches, created a ring of protection for the nation's capital during the Civil War. This bill would recognize and preserve the Defenses of Washington located in the District of Columbia, Virginia and Maryland by redesignating the 22 Defenses of Washington currently under National Park Service jurisdiction as a national historical park, and allowing other sites associated with the Defenses of Washington that are owned by D.C. or a unit of state governments to be affiliated with the national historical park through cooperative agreements. This bill would also require the Secretary of the Interior to facilitate the history of the Civil War, including the history of the Defenses of Washington and the Shenandoah Valley Campaign of 1864, being assembled, arrayed and conveyed for the benefit of the public.

The Defenses of Washington were constructed at the beginning of the war, in 1861, as a ring of protection for the nation's capital and for President Abraham Lincoln. By the end of the war, these defenses included 68 forts, 93 unarmed batteries, 807 mounted cannons, 13 miles of rifle trenches and 32 miles of military roads. The major test of the Defenses of Washington came with the Shenandoah Valley Campaign of 1864, when Confederate Lieutenant General Jubal Early, directed by General Robert E. Lee, sought to attack the nation's capital from the north, causing Union forces threatening to attack Richmond, the capital of the Confederacy, to be withdrawn. General Early was delayed by Union Major General Lew Wallace at the Battle of Monocacy on July 9, 1864, and was stopped at the northern edge of Washington at the Battle of Fort Stevens on July 11-12, 1864. The Shenandoah Valley Campaign ended when Union

Lieutenant General Philip Sheridan defeated General Early at the Battle of Cedar Creek, Virginia on October 19, 1864.

Nearly all the individual forts in the Defenses of Washington—on both sides of the Potomac and Anacostia rivers—were involved in stopping General Early’s attack, and the Battle of Fort Stevens was the second and last attempt by the Confederate Army to attack Washington.

Taken together, these battles were pivotal to the outcome of the war and the freedom and democracy that the war represented for this country. It is therefore fitting that we recognize the Defenses of Washington by redesignating them as a national historical park.

Again, thank you for holding this hearing and allowing me to testify. I look forward to working with you to pass this bill.