Testimony of Richard Silverman

Before the National Capital Planning Commission

Project: New Monumental Arch (File Number 8778)

November 5, 2026

I am Richard Silverman. I am testifying on my own behalf, but I trust I am giving voice to the thousands upon thousands who served our nation and now lay silent in peaceful repose within the hallowed grounds of Arlington National Cemetery.

I leave it to others to explain the numerous legal, safety, aesthetic, and other reasons why this proposed arch should be voted down by the Commission. I am focusing my remarks on the personal toll this proposed edifice will have on those who come to visit here.

I come from a military family. My father was a career Army Master Sergeant. He was a disabled combat infantryman who fought in the Battle of the Bulge and the Korean War. I was a Captain in the U.S. Army serving on active duty in the Republic of Korea when I received a call that my father had passed away. I came home on a 30-day emergency leave to bury him at Arlington. At that time, 1969, he was the last serviceman buried in a largely empty section. I returned home a year later to a mass of gleaming white, simple headstones…row after row, after row.

On one visit, I was returning to my car when I noticed a gentleman sitting on a collapsible chair and leaning his cheek on the headstone in front of him. His entire body was quivering as he sobbed uncontrollably. I went over and gently placed my hand on his shoulder. I said nothing. I just wanted him to know he was not alone in his grief.

As I stood there, I noticed a bottle of Jack Daniels and two glasses placed on the grave. After a few moments passed, he explained that this annual visit was on his son's birthday. You see…it was out of that bottle that they proposed a toast to his son's future return as he prepared to deploy to Vietnam. They never got to share another drink. The bottle remained nearly full.

This father…this son…my father and countless others do not deserve for one moment to have a shadow cast upon their graves by this proposed arch. Nothing should intrude on the serenity of this hallowed place. Let those who come to visit those who died while serving their beloved nation pass by an unadorned, uninterrupted circle that serves as the entryway to Arlington National Cemetery. This should be an entryway of peace and respect with an unobstructed view of the American flag at half staff in front of the Curtis-Lee mansion. That flag signifies that other burials are taking place that day. Let it remain a serene entryway to this hallowed ground.

I urge this Commission, and especially those who are veterans, to exert their independence and do the right thing by not approving construction of this arch. In so doing, you are truly honoring our country's fallen heroes.