



February 18, 2026

Rodney Mims Cook, Jr. Chairman
Commission of Fine Arts
401 F Street, NW, Suite 312
Washington, DC 20002

RE: CFA 19/FEB/26-1 - White House Complex, 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW, Washington, DC. East Wing modernization and ballroom addition. Concept.

Dear Chairman Cook and Members of the Commission:

The DC Preservation League (DCPL) is a nonprofit organization in Washington dedicated to preserving and protecting the District of Columbia's historic resources. Founded in 1971 as Don't Tear It Down to save the Old Post Office building on Pennsylvania Avenue from demolition, the organization has long sought to ensure that proposed new development and the adaptive reuse of the city's historic buildings do not compromise the character of this great city.

DCPL is writing to express its serious concerns and strong opposition to the current mass and proportions of the newly designed East Wing addition to the White House. While the current Administration has emphasized the need for modernization and functionality in this important venue, the current design departs from the principles of historic preservation, which dictate that new additions to historic buildings should be deferential to avoid overwhelming or diminishing the significance of the primary structure.

The scale of the new ballroom raises significant concerns as it dwarfs the Executive Residence. The original spaces within the White House were designed to convey a sense of proportion and intimacy, which are integral to the building's charm and historical significance. In contrast, the enlarged East Wing addition feels disproportionately large and impersonal, detracting from the welcoming atmosphere that has characterized presidential events for centuries. This stark shift in design reflects a troubling trend towards grandiosity, prioritizing spectacle over the subtleties of American heritage.

Questions also remain regarding the proposed east colonnade's attachment to the Executive Residence. There is currently no demolition plan in place, leaving it unclear whether access to the proposed second floor of the colonnade would be through the existing central door or by enlarging it to engulf and remove the historic windows and pediments to the south.

The proposed changes raise important questions about the stewardship of such a symbolic building. Preserving the integrity of the White House is not merely about maintaining its physical structure; it's about honoring the stories, traditions, and historical narratives that reside within its walls. By compromising these values for the sake of expansion, we risk erasing the very essence of what makes the White House a symbol of American history.

DCPL acknowledges the need for facilities that meet modern requirements, but we believe that such decisions must be approached with the utmost respect for history and context. The new addition, in its current form, not only violates established norms of historic preservation by overshadowing the historic structure but also risks diluting the rich heritage the White House represents.

For more than fifty years, DCPL has served as the leading voice for the preservation of the city's architectural heritage and has the expertise and responsibility to identify adverse impacts to historic resources. Based on that expertise, we conclude unequivocally that the current proposal would harm the integrity, character, and setting of the White House Complex and President's Park.

DCPL strongly urges the Commission to reject this proposal in its current form and require the applicant to return with a substantially revised design that is fully compatible with and demonstrably deferential to the Executive Residence.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Rebecca Miller". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Rebecca Miller
Executive Director
DC Preservation League