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OLMSTED  
PARKS

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First Lady Michelle Obama  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.  
Washington, DC 20500

January 23, 2015

RE: The Obama Presidential Library and Chicago Parks

Dear Mrs. Obama:

On behalf of the National Association for Olmsted Parks we are writing to strongly protest the proposed appropriation of public parkland as the site for the Obama Presidential Library.

The National Association for Olmsted Parks, a coalition of design and preservation professionals, park managers and municipal officials, scholars and citizen activists, is dedicated to educate, protect and advocate for the nation's invaluable legacy of parks and landscapes designed by the Olmsted firm, which shaped urban and suburban communities across the country.

Washington Park, designed by Frederick Law Olmsted, America's premier landscape architect and his partner Calvert Vaux, and listed in the National Register of Historic Places, is an irreplaceable and character-defining component of the nation's cultural heritage. This parkland, and its neighbor, Jackson Park, were conceived of as democratic landscapes, designed to provide access to beneficial fresh air, recreational opportunities and encounters with nature for all the citizens in a crowded industrial city. They continue to provide that essential function for the underserved populations in their surrounding communities.

While your Presidential Library will certainly be an asset for Chicago and particularly for this South Side neighborhood, setting such a precedent--the appropriation of public parkland for such a specialized privatized use--seems unworthy of the principles that you have espoused in your long career of public service. Rather, siting the Library on the available nearby land will stimulate improvements across the entire area, including the long-overdue park maintenance, ensuring that these historic Parks continue to serve their intended purpose of providing healthful, safe and revitalizing open space for the public.

We urge you to choose a more fitting site for your Presidential Library, one that honors your record of democratic public service. Rather appropriating a vital, historic public park let your Library honor the best of American planning and landscape history by adding to our legacy of well-designed public parkland.

Most Respectfully

Ethan Carr  
Chair, National Association for Olmsted Parks

Copies: The Honorable Rahm Emanuel, Mayor, City of Chicago  
Cassandra J. Francis, President and CEO, Friends of the Parks, City of Chicago