

March 4, 2021



The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker,
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Republican Leader,
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
Minority Leader,
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Charles Schumer
Majority Leader,
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Speaker Pelosi, Leaders Schumer, McCarthy, and McConnell:

In response to the recent insurrection at the U.S. Capitol, the Capitol Police have proposed building permanent walling or fencing around the entire Capitol Complex. The American Society of Landscape Architects (ASLA) respectfully opposes this proposal or any other measure that would cut off the Capitol Complex from the people and create a fortress-like environment. Instead, ASLA urges you to work with landscape architects who have expertise in the delicate balancing of security and openness of a space.

Temporary and ad-hoc barriers put up during an emergency can often become permanent. We must not allow the U.S. Capitol to remain behind fences and razor wire a moment longer. Fortifying an important public civic space like the Capitol Complex can change the behavior of those working within it, as well as those who visit it and those who look to it as a symbol of our nation's democracy. The Capitol, the congressional office buildings, and even the parklike setting should continue to send a message to Americans and to the world that our federal government is of and for the people. As Rep. Eleanor Holmes Norton (DC) said in the *Congressional Record* on February 11, 2021, "The openness of the Capitol and our democracy is our strength, not a security weakness that needs to be rooted out. Any further consideration of permanent fencing is desperate, distasteful, and disrespectful of our history and institutions."

The U.S. Capitol Grounds were designed by world-famous landscape architect Frederick Law Olmsted. The preeminent landscape architect of his time, Olmsted designed many parks, expositions, and public spaces across the nation and the world. Olmsted's design of the U.S. Capitol Grounds, which began in 1874, has remained largely unchanged until the excavation for the Capitol Visitors Center in the early 2000s—the West Front and terraces are still mostly intact as originally designed. Like

many of Olmsted's works, the Capitol Grounds were designed to be both a respite from the bustle of city life and a seamlessly integrated piece of the city's fabric. The Capitol Grounds were also created to allow the people access to their representative government in an orderly way.

Landscape architects have expertise in site-security design that is unobtrusive yet effective. Additionally, many landscape architects are trained in adapting historic landscapes such as the Capitol's West Front to make the space more secure while also adhering to the original designs and intents as much as possible. One example just west of the Capitol is the grounds of the Washington Monument. Safeguarded in 2005 in response to the 9/11 attacks, the grounds of the Washington Monument were protected with security, access, aesthetics, and the historical nature of the site all in mind. For decades, landscape architects have led the design of many government buildings and sites to be secure yet accessible. This includes U.S. embassies abroad, federal courthouses and office buildings, post offices, state and local government buildings, and countless parks and civic spaces such as the 2008 redevelopment of the Capitol's East Front and the Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial in West Potomac Park.

In keeping with its original goals and the history of American civic spaces, the U.S. Capitol grounds must remain open and accessible to all. Fortifying the Capitol Complex is not the answer to creating a more secure and safe space for legislating and performing the business of the people. Should it be deemed necessary to alter the site around the Capitol Complex, landscape architects are able to employ the best design techniques for securing and protecting the site in an unobtrusive and welcoming way.

ASLA and its members would be honored to work with Congress and the Architect of the Capitol to ensure that any future security plans for the Capitol Grounds (and complex as a whole) are in keeping with the spirit in which they were originally designed. I hope that you will include ASLA in any future discussions about site security plans for the Capitol Grounds. Please do not hesitate to reach out to me or my team for additional information, resources, or to put you in touch with landscape architects who are experts on security design. You can follow up with ASLA Federal Government Affairs Manager Daniel Hart at dhart@asla.org or 202-216-2372.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Torey Carter-Conneen". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Torey Carter-Conneen
CEO

About ASLA:

Founded in 1899, the American Society of Landscape Architects (ASLA) is the national professional association representing landscape architects. ASLA has nearly 15,000 members and 49 chapters, representing all 50 states and the District of Columbia. Landscape architects analyze, plan, design, manage, and nurture the built and natural environments. The diversity and scale of work in landscape architecture is vast, and the mix of skills and expertise required make landscape architects uniquely qualified to create well-planned livable communities, leading the way in creating neighborhood master plans, managing stormwater, designing cutting-edge parks and other outdoor spaces, planning complex multimodal transportation corridors, and more.

CC: Chairs Rosa DeLauro, Tim Ryan, Zoe Lofgren,
Chairs Patrick Leahy, Jack Reed, Amy Klobuchar
Ranking Members Kay Granger, Jamie Herrera Beutler, Rodney Davis
Ranking Members Roy Blunt, Mike Braun
Vice Chair Richard Shelby
Representative Eleanor Holmes Norton
Architect of the Capitol Brett Blanton