Good morning. I am Danielle Burs, Counsel at the DC Appleseed Center for Law and Justice. Thank you for providing me with the opportunity to testify regarding the performance of the Department of Energy and the Environment (DOEE) over the past fiscal year. While these hearings are always important, it’s particularly timely to have this conversation as we kick off The Year of the Anacostia and look forward to publication of the critical documents for the Anacostia River Sediment Remediation Project.

DC Appleseed has long been involved in community-led efforts to restore the Anacostia, and make it a natural resource that District residents and visitors alike can enjoy. In the decades since our 1998 report on managing stormwater pollution in DC’s rivers, we’ve seen significant process in DOEE efforts to curb polluted runoff. And, as our 2011 report “A New Day for the Anacostia” describes, we’ve also seen meaningful efforts to reduce combined sewer overflows (CSOs) into the Anacostia, as well as the development of a plan to clean the toxic sediment that prevents the Anacostia from realizing its full potential. Currently, the Anacostia tunnel is complete and ready to be connected to the Blue Plains tunnel in March, which will reduce sewer overflows into the Anacostia River by 81 percent. The Year of the Anacostia, as supported by many of our partners in the community, is a great time to celebrate this progress, and jumpstart the work that remains.

DOEE is a critical partner in the remediation of toxic sediment in the Anacostia River. The agency continues to lead the remedial investigation and feasibility study process, working with National Park Service and community partners. We appreciate DOEE’s commitment to community involvement, which is underscored by the agency’s creation of a grant that will go to community groups so that they can get expert help understanding and commenting on technical documents. We
understand that DOEE has requested more time to complete a plan for sediment remediation, and that part of the proposed new timeline includes non-required public comment periods. While DC Appleseed and other stakeholders are eager to move on to implementation of the plan, we agree that it is important to include enough time for meaningful public input. It’s important to get the remediation plan right, striking a balance between moving as quickly as possible and with a thorough, responsible process. In consultation with experts, we have concluded that DOEE has been working expeditiously thus far, and expect the pace to continue or pick up as we enter a new fiscal year.

As a long-time advocate for the Anacostia River and member of the Anacostia Park and Community Collaborative, we are pleased that the Anacostia River is getting the attention it deserves as a community asset. In addition to cleaning the river and physically improving the surrounding parkland for residents, DOEE is taking steps toward permanent program infrastructure on Kingman Island. We are encouraged by the steps DOEE has recently taken towards establishing permanent program infrastructure on Kingman and Heritage Islands. In October 2017, DOEE published the Kingman Island & Heritage Island Planning & Feasibility Study. This study, requested by DC Council, was a collaboration between DOEE, the architecture firm, Hickok Cole Architects, and additional partners. The team developed a two-phase plan that would transform Kingman and Heritage Islands, also known as National Children’s Island, as an educational and recreational space for the District’s children and residents.

The first phase of this plan includes developing outdoor classroom and laboratory spaces, bathrooms, added walkways, as well as other needed infrastructural components. The study estimates that implementation of Phase I of the plan will cost $4 million. In January, Mayor Bowser announced her support of the educational campus at a press conference on Kingman Island, and pledged $4.7 million for “for educational and recreational improvements on the islands,” consistent with what was outlined in the Feasibility Study. For more than 50 years, plans to revitalize the islands into education and cultural spaces for residents and visitors alike have stagnated, so we are encouraged by the Department, the Council, and the Mayor’s recent focus on developing Kingman and Heritage Islands.
We urge the Council, the Transportation and Environment Committee, and DOEE to maintain the momentum around the development of the Kingman Island educational campus. Moving forward, we would like to see more specific plans and updates from the Department as development of the nature campus moves forward. Additional discussion about coordinating and encouraging programming associated with the development of the educational facilities will also be necessary; such work will require active engagement of the public, and we urge DOEE to continue public outreach efforts on the planning.

DOEE staff has been inclusive and responsive in our interactions over the past year, including the community in relevant meetings and sharing information via an email list. Gretchen Mikeska and, of course, Director Wells have been accessible and responsive. Working with them, the rest of the DOEE team, and community partners, we expect to see more needed programming, firm deadlines for progress in the toxic sediment remediation process, and focus and updates on goals to make Anacostia River and shoreline safer for recreation and fishing.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. I will be happy to answer any questions you may have.