



COUNCIL OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
OFFICE OF COUNCILMEMBER BROOKE PINTO
THE JOHN A. WILSON BUILDING
1350 PENNSYLVANIA AVENUE, N.W., SUITE 106
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20004

February 28, 2023

Nyasha Smith, Secretary
Council of the District of Columbia
1350 Pennsylvania Avenue N.W.
Washington, DC 20004

Dear Secretary Smith,

Today, I introduced the “William Dorsey Swann Street Designation Act of 2023.” This legislation would officially designate Swann Street N.W., between 14th Street N.W. and 19th Street N.W., in honor of William Dorsey Swann (c. 1858-1925). Swann, self-referred to as “The Queen of Drag,” was a Black, Queer Washingtonian, and former enslaved person who was an early pioneer in LGBTQQIA+ rights. Chairman Phil Mendelson and Councilmembers Brianne K. Nadeau, Charles Allen, Robert C. White, Jr., Janeese Lewis George, Kenyan R. McDuffie, Vincent C. Gray, Matthew Frumin, Anita Bonds, and Zachary Parker co-introduced the bill.

Beginning in the 1880s, William Dorsey Swann ran a group known as the “House of Swann” and organized balls, largely attended by Queer, formerly enslaved men who would gather to dance and cross-dress. William Dorsey Swann was persecuted by the authorities and arrested multiple times for “impersonating a woman” and “keeping a disorderly house,” and was the first American activist to lead an LGBTQQIA+ resistance group. Swann eventually sought a pardon from President Grover Cleveland, becoming the first American on record to pursue legal action in defense of LGBTQQIA+ rights.

According to the January 24, 1912, Congressional Record for the U.S. Senate, Swann Street N.W. was named for Thomas Swann, former Mayor of Baltimore, Governor of Maryland, and enslaver. Officially designating this street in honor of native Washingtonian and trail-blazing LGBTQQIA+ rights activist William Dorsey Swann is an opportunity to ensure that our streets honor those who embody the District’s values of social equality and human dignity. The location of Swann Street N.W. provides a physical and symbolic representation of the District’s Black Queer community, sitting both within the Strivers’ Section Historic District, a historic Black neighborhood, and the Dupont Circle neighborhood, the historic epicenter of DC’s LGBTQQIA+ community. The street would maintain the current street nomenclature and signage as “Swann Street.”

Should you have any questions about this legislation, please contact my Legislative Counsel, Kristin Ewing, at kewing@dccouncil.gov.

Thank you,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "BE PINTO".

Brooke Pinto

1 

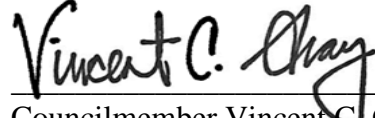
2 Chairman Phil Mendelson

3
4 

5
6 Councilmember Charles Allen

7
8 

9
10 Councilmember Janeese Lewis George

11 

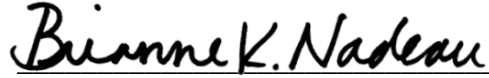
12
13 Councilmember Vincent C. Gray

14
15 

16
17 Councilmember Anita Bonds

18 

19 Councilmember Brooke Pinto

20 

21 Councilmember Brianne K. Nadeau

22 

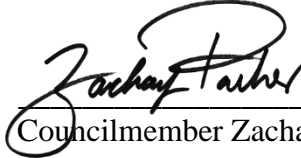
23 Councilmember Robert C. White, Jr.

24 

25 Councilmember Kenyan R. McDuffie

26 

27 Councilmember Matthew Frumin

28 

29 Councilmember Zachary Parker

30 A BILL

31 _____

32 IN THE COUNCIL OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

33
34 To officially designate Swann Street, N.W., between 14th Street, N.W. and 19th Street, N.W., as
35 Swann Street in honor of William Dorsey Swann.

36 BE IT ENACTED BY THE COUNCIL OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA, That this
37 act may be cited as the “William Dorsey Swann Street Designation Act of 2023”.

38 Sec. 2. Pursuant to sections 401 and 421(j), and notwithstanding section 421(f) of the
39 Street and Alley Closing and Acquisition Procedures Act of 1982, effective March 10, 1983
40 (D.C. Law 4-201; D.C. Official Code §§ 9-204.01, 9-204.21(j), and 9-204.21(f)), the Council

41 officially designates Swann Street, N.W., between 14th Street, N.W., and 19th Street, N.W., as
42 “Swann Street” in honor of William Dorsey Swann.

43 Sec. 3. Fiscal impact statement.

44 The Council adopts the fiscal impact statement in the committee report as the fiscal
45 impact statement required by section 4a of the General Legislative Procedures Act of 1975,
46 approved October 16, 2006 (120 Stat. 2038; D.C. Official Code § 1-301.47a).

47 Sec. 4. Effective date.

48 This act shall take effect following approval by the Mayor (or in the event of veto by the
49 Mayor, action by the Council to override the veto), a 30-day period of congressional review as
50 provided in section 602(c)(1) of the District of Columbia Home Rule Act, approved December
51 24, 1973 (87 Stat. 813; D.C. Official Code § 1-206.02(c)(1)), and publication in the District of
52 Columbia Register.