

**Testimony of The New York Academy of Medicine to
New York City Public Design Commission**

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Good afternoon. My name is Kathleen O'Donnell, and I am a Senior Vice President at The New York Academy of Medicine. On behalf of the Academy, I would like to thank the members of this commission for the opportunity to testify before you today on the matter of the J. Marion Sims statue located on 5th Avenue at 103rd Street on the edge of Central Park.

Established in 1847, the Academy continues to address the health challenges facing New York City and people living in cities worldwide with a critical focus on health equity to ensure that all people have the same opportunity for a long and healthy life. It is through this lens that we submitted our appeal for removal of the statue to Mayor de Blasio and the Mayoral Advisory Commission on City Art, Monuments & Markers.

We are pleased to have added our voice to so many others in the East Harlem community—where the statue, and the Academy are located.

The facts are well documented regarding Dr. Sims' practice of performing surgical experiments on enslaved women without anesthesia and without consent. While his actions led to advances in gynecology and obstetrics, this practice is not acceptable, and any defense of it is wrong.

Dr. Sims' practice is but one of many regrettable examples that have happened throughout history in the name of innovation and advancement in medicine and science. As health professionals and as a society, we must be continually vigilant to ensure they never happen again.

While these actions need to be acknowledged and accounted for in the history books, we should reserve public honors such as statues and markers for those in health and medicine who have made achievements without infringing on the civil and human rights of others.

In the official report of the Advisory Commission, the location of the statue—which is directly across 5th Avenue from the Academy—was noted as a location with strong symbolic presence and a place of honor. We concur with the many local and national voices suggesting a monument in this location should represent and acknowledge the contributions made by those who are unsung in the history of medicine and health, such as the women on whom Dr. Sims conducted his surgical experiments.

The Advisory Commission's recommendation to move the statue to Green-Wood Cemetery in Brooklyn where Dr. Sims is buried, is only a first step and does not obviate the need to publically acknowledge his egregious misuse of power.

We hope that the Mayor's inclusive process to date leading to the recommendation to remove the statue will continue to allow for voices to be heard on how to publically acknowledge Dr. Sims' actions as well as to inform the statue's replacement in East Harlem. In the coming months, the Academy looks forward to working with our East Harlem neighbors on race and health public programming, and undoubtedly the issue of the Sims statue and its replacement will be discussed.

Thank you for your consideration of this critical matter. Your decisions affect more than a statue placement. They are a signal of the importance of social justice.