

STATEMENT OF MEHMET KOCAK, APPELLANT
BZA CASE NO. 18027

January 12, 2010

Good afternoon Chairman Loud and Members of the Board. My name is Mehmet Kocak and I am the owner of Philly Pizza & Grill, Inc. Thank you for allowing me to speak to you today about my restaurant.

I have worked in local restaurants for more than ten years, but I am very proud that this is the first restaurant that I have owned. I have invested my life savings and borrowed a lot of money to open this restaurant. Based on the approved plans and permits issued by DCRA, I made extensive and expensive renovations to the basement, first and second floors of this 1825 building to convert it into a restaurant. These approved renovations cost at least \$220,000.00.

My restaurant opened in September 2008 and employs 7 or 8 people who depend on their jobs. I have put a lot of time, energy and care into making my restaurant a place where people of all ages and nationalities would like to eat on the premises. Having only been open for 16 months, I am still learning and improving. Despite its name "Philly Pizza", my restaurant offers a full menu all of which we cook fresh daily on the

premises, including fresh dough to make the pizzas. I have people come

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from all over the area to experience a real Turkish meal, including my Turkish gyros, which is unique in Georgetown. My restaurant is also known for its homemade ranch dressing.

I have always intended for people to dine-in in my restaurant and I have continued to make improvements in order to encourage people to do so. I enjoy meeting my customers and getting to know them. People dine in the restaurant at all hours of the day and night and we have a very diverse group of customers, including families, students and people who work at nearby Georgetown businesses. They compliment me on how fresh my food is and how clean my restaurant is. These things are very important to me. I recently hired an interior designer to help me make the restaurant as inviting as possible, in order to further increase my dine-in customers. I have purchased new tables, painted the walls and installed new fixtures, as you can see in these pictures. **[SHOW PICTURES]**

I have even hired my own security guards to stand outside and make sure people do not loiter and litter during late night weekend hours. I have also set up some trash cans outside on the street. Also, I take it upon myself to clean up trash on the streets after we close. I clean up all kinds of trash even trash that has nothing to do with my restaurant. Nobody required me to hire security or to take measures to cut down on trash outside. I do these

things because it is the responsible thing to do. Also, the better the area around my restaurant looks the more inviting it becomes for my customers.

I have seen pictures that were recently submitted into the record which do not accurately or fairly show the exterior of my restaurant for several reasons. September 26, 2009 was the Saturday night of Georgetown University's Homecoming weekend. Every eating establishment in the area had many more customers that weekend. Second, that evening one of our ovens was broken which made it very difficult to serve the extra customers. I remember this very well since I received a call that day on my honeymoon in Turkey telling me about this. The other set of pictures was taken on December 10, 2009, the day after classes ended at Georgetown which not surprisingly was another unusually busy time.

I am constantly trying to improve my restaurant. I do this because I care about my business, my reputation and my neighborhood. The first year of any restaurant is always a difficult and challenging period, but the success of my restaurant is increasing along with the number of eat in customers. I am proud of what we have been able to accomplish and I try to be a good neighbor.

I am surprised and can not understand how by following my building permits and certificates of occupancy, I may be forced to shut down my

restaurant. Before receiving the Notices to Revoke, no one from DCRA told me there was a problem or how I should correct that problem. They never asked me for more information or allowed me to respond. I was surprised and scared and had no choice but to hire a lawyer to save my restaurant.

I have the support from many area businesses who have signed letters on my behalf. I am presenting copies of those letters to the Board today.

I respectfully ask that you find that since I am operating a restaurant and not a fast food establishment, DCRA's Notice to Revoke my Certificate of Occupancy were issued in error. Thank you very much for your time and understanding.