Testimony of
Constance J. Washington, Site Director
Boys Town of Washington
Before the Board of Zoning Adjustment

Application No. 16531
February 23, 2000

Good morning, members of the Board. I am Connie Washington, Site Director for Boys Town of Washington, D.C. Currently, Boys Town of Washington operates four programs on site. Our two community based programs are, Therapeutic Foster Care and Common Sense Parenting. We also operate two types of group residential services, a short term home with capacity up to 20 youth and a long term home with permission for capacity up to 15 youth. I am appearing before you today to testify in support of Boys Town's application for approval to construct four youth residential homes for up to 24 children and the conversion of the existing home into administrative use at 4801 Sargent Road, N. E. These homes will be for no more than 6 youth each, which will increase our authority from 15 to 24.

The proposed addition to the residential facilities will also be a part of Boys Town USA – a network of non-profit, non-denominational, non-sectarian, residential programs operating in 9 states nation-wide. Boys Town USA is the family and community-based extension of Father Flanagan's Boys Town, founded in 1917 in Omaha, Nebraska to help troubled boys. The program was expanded in 1979 to admit girls. The Nebraska campus is the "home campus". Boys Town USA is the satellite program. The long-term residential component of Boys town USA is designed to help abused and neglected children put their lives back together again through a program of responsibility, nurturing and love.

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Father Flanagan's philosophy – that there are no bad boys, just bad environment – is the core of the Boys Town long-term residential program. Father Flanagan's mission of changing the way America cares for her at-risk children is still our mission today. Our task is to protect and provide hope and healing for children who are troubled, frightened and alone with no one to love them.

Accordingly, Boys Town commits substantial financial and staff resources towards the creation of a structured, secure, home-like atmosphere to facilitate a change in the thinking, life style and behavior of youths of both sexes. Almost all of the children in Boys Town programs are from dysfunctional families and have experienced significant emotional traumas. Individualized treatment, designed to change behavior by teaching appropriate skills, is provided in a family style setting.

Boys Town seeks authorization to establish four long-term residential homes for up to 24 abused and neglected children on our Sargent Road site. The four homes will be an expansion of our existing residential program. All of the Boys Town programs at the Sargent Road site serve the wards of the District of Columbia. Since the inception of our residential program in March of 1996, the one residential home has operated at full capacity . Although we were initially approved for up to 15 youth, our program has remained at six youth because of the nature of our program structure and because of the physical space restriction. The primary criteria for admission will continue to be the sincere desire of a child to turn his or her life around . Youth between the ages of 10 to 17 years who want help and who are functioning in the normal range of intelligence are eligible. Referrals will continue to

be taken from government agencies, including the Department of Human Service; therapists; parents and concerned relatives and school personnel. Based on the current patterns, we expect that the average age of admission will be 14 years and expected length of stay is at least 18 months.

Upon admission into the long-term program, Boys Town's rules are explained and an individualized treatment program is designed. Positive behaviors are emphasized – privileges are tied to performance. A child may continue to participate in the program as long as the rules are observed and there is progress towards meeting treatment goals. The ultimate goal is to develop skills that will allow the child to be reunited with his or her family, if possible, or to live independently or pursue a college education or a trade by the age of 18.

The physical environment of the long-term residential facility or "family home' in the District of Columbia will continue to mirror a stable, middle-class home in design, decor and atmosphere. Food, clothing and other essentials will be purchased in the community in the same manner that such goods and services are purchased by other families. Meals will be prepared and served family-style. Housekeeping will be a family responsibility.

The primary staff in the "family home" is a trained married couple, called "family teachers", who will reside in the home and function as parents. As such, the family teachers provide for the physical and emotional needs of children in their care. Boys Town conducts rigorous interviews of prospective family teachers to ensure that

their marriage is [redacted]d and to ensure that they have natu[redacted] parenting skills, an abundance of patience and a willingness and ability to learn Boys Town child-care treatment methods. With the additional homes, Boys Town will be looking to hire local couples as Family Teachers. Once selected, family teachers must successfully complete an intensive training program. The family teachers will be assisted by full-time and part-time assistant family teachers, a program coordinator and the site director, who will oversee the operation for the program. The staff to youth ratio for the long-term residential facility will be 1 to 2.

There continues to be a definite need for the Boys Town programs in the District of Columbia. During 1990, 810 children were in homes where abuse was reported. In that same year, 8,414 children were in homes where neglect was reported. A large percentage of these children end up in foster care. As of September 1998, there were over 3,000 children in foster care. 964 were children that were in a shelter status, which means a decision had not been made on their permanency plan. More than 65 percent of the children who entered foster care in 1990 did so for reasons associated with abuse and neglect. Over the past year the local media has reported on the realities of the District's foster care system. Clearly, this is a system where Boys Town can assist with its programs.

Boys Town is committed to being a good neighbor. Over the past year, Boys Town hosted and/or participated in approximately 14 meetings with the community to discuss our tentative expansion plans. On June 2, 1999 Boys Town held a meeting with the community and our civil engineers to actively solicit their concerns. This

direct community [redacted]ut was used to develop plans to add[redacted]s their concerns. Some of the concerns such as noise and tree overgrowth have been addressed. Other concerns such as water run off and equipment noise required a more extensive assessing for resolution and we are in the process of resolving them now.

Boys Town's commitment to working with the community has taken form and shape through the following activities:

- The site operates two community based programs Therapeutic Foster Care and Common Sense Parenting:
    - Therapeutic Foster Care utilizes homes in the community for placement of youth.
    - Common Sense Parenting Program offers classes on site and at other locations throughout the city. Additionally, this program has provided parenting materials to the D. C. Public Schools through their Parent Resource Centers.
- Our staff work cooperatively with the local school, often having daily contact.
- Our Family Teachers have served on local school committees.
- Our Boys Town residents give back to the community through their volunteer efforts with local homeless shelters and kitchens.
- Our youth worship regularly at neighborhood churches.
- The site has offered the North Michigan Park Civic Association the use of our conference room for meetings once their renovation begins.
- At the request of the 5th Precinct, when parking became an issue for our

neighboring church , the site allowed the worshippers to park on site.

- Some of the neighbors along Delafield Street routinely use the site's abutting property to supplement their street parking, to which we happily agree.
- Our Clinical staff regularly field calls and walk-ins from the local community and provide appropriate resources to assist them in dealing with concerns regarding their youth.
- Our staff supports local businesses and eateries.

Boys Town is a committed EEOC employer and hires its staff locally. Our staff is currently comprised of 100% local residents. The staff is representative of the population served at Boys Town of Washington.

During its 83-year existence, Boys Town has developed a program that can be a small, yet vital link in the network of services that responds to the needs of our abused and neglected children. We sincerely hope that this Board approves this application to allow Boys Town to provide this critical service to the District's children.

Thank you for your consideration. I would be pleased to answer any questions that you might have.