Thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak.

My name is Elissa Cohen. I am a DC parent. I grew up in the District and returned here to raise a family because I believed that it was a city of neighborhoods and community and a good place to grow childhood memories.

My husband and I have four children, who attend different schools in the District of Columbia. Our oldest daughter, who has learning disabilities, attends the Lab School of Washington; our son, who has learning disabilities, attends the Jewish Primary Day School; and our two youngest children attend Lafayette Elementary, a DCPS school.

I would primarily like to speak on the issue of what Jewish Primary Day School means to our community, but first I would like to add a comment on the issue of traffic. Everyday I fear for the safety of the children who attend the public school in my neighborhood. The street in front of the school is a chaotic scene every morning and afternoon and is a clear threat to our children's safety. There is no traffic control plan and no effective supervision.

In contrast, all the private schools that my children have attended have well supervised and controlled traffic patterns, as is the current case at JPDS. Traffic is kept orderly, moving, and the children's safety is foremost. I am sure that JPDS will be a good neighbor in this regard.

As I have said, I thought that the District would be a good place to raise children. Unfortunately, that depends on what kind of children you have. If you have children with learning disabilities, you quickly find that your resources for assistance are primarily private institutions. Yes, changes at DCPS are underway. I have served on a Local School Restructuring Team for the past two years, however, and can attest to the fact that these changes will take some time to implement.

In the meantime, what schools are available for our children? I removed my son, Sam, from the public school, from which he would come home daily announcing that he was "stupid" and "nobody likes me." The public school did not care enough or know how to help this child, who is smart and sweet and learning disabled. After being at JPDS a short time, he came home one day and said, "You know, I <u>am</u> smart." JPDS has provided a mainstreamed environment for my child where he is learning, and he is valued as a member of the community. Private schools have provided and will continue to provide for some time to come, appropriate educational environments for learning disabled children that the public schools have failed to provide.

Boiled down then, the message that I am hearing, is that if you are a learning disabled child in the District of Columbia: We don't want you in our schools and we don't want you in our neighborhoods either.

As a society we can measure ourselves in many ways. How much per capita income, how many households, how many cars we own. My hope is that we would measure ourselves by how inclusive and caring we are as a community. There is no better evidence of this than how we treat our children. Our children are our future. When we fail to support the schools that strive for excellence, the schools that care, schools that feel responsible for the safety and well being of our children, we are depriving our communities and our children of a future. The boundaries of this community do not end at Western Avenue or at 16th Street. The families of Sheperd Park share the same needs, the same goals, and the same concerns as the families of AU Park or Chevy Chase. We want to keep our children safe and we want them to get a good education. And while they are young, we want to keep them close to home.

BZA
CASE No. 16556
EXHIBIT No. 323

Board of Zoning Adjustment
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