August 28, 2000

Government of the District of Columbia
Board of Zoning Adjustment
441 4th Street, NW, Suite 210
Washington, DC 20001

Re: **Request for Area Variance**
Arabic Baptist Mission
4605 Massachusetts Ave. NW
Washington, DC 20016

We would like to request an Area Variance on behalf of the Arabic Baptist Mission. The church proposes to build an addition on the front of their existing structure which will consist of two stories above grade and a basement level. This addition is an extension of the three existing levels. The additions will include an elevator shaft and equipment enclosure on the side of the building. The church requires the addition to accommodate their growth and their desire to provide an accessible worship area to the community.

Due to the unusual configuration of the southeast corner of the property (see plan north) the addition would encroach upon a side yard set-back requirement that is created by a utility easement that cuts diagonally across the front of our property. The nature in which the easement adjoins our property, turns a significant portion of the property's street frontage into side yard by definition. This additional side yard condition is required to maintain a set-back which will further restrict the usable frontage of this property.

Without an Area Variance, the property can not adequately provide for a much-needed addition. This is the reason that the request for an Area Variance is being made.

The church is located in a residential neighborhood that is currently zoned R1-B. The building restrictions in this zoning classification are as follows:

Set back requirements – Front yard = 0 feet
Rear yard = 25 feet
Side yards = 8 feet

Height restrictions – Three-stories or 40 feet

Maximum lot coverage is 60%

The existing church is a three-level, brick structure of 5,832 square feet with a footprint of 1,944 square feet (35% lot coverage). The manner in which the church is situated on the site leaves only two options for expansion.

BZA
Case No. 16644
Exhibit No. 3

Board of Zoning Adjustment
District of Columbia
CASE NO.16644
EXHIBIT NO.3

The church sits right on the 25 foot rear yard set back (north side) and right on the 8 foot side yard set back (west side). The east side (side yard) is 16 feet away from the property line, but a good portion of this area is dedicated to a fire stair and egress clearance. The south side property line (front yard) is 21 feet away from the existing building. This effectively leaves the south side (front) as the only viable option for expansion.

The existing lot is 5,607 square feet. The front property line along Massachusetts Avenue is not as long as most of the homes in the surrounding neighborhood due to the unusual configuration of the southeast corner of the lot. The property line at that corner angles away from the street and the front property line at approximately 45 degrees, thus eliminating street frontage. This angled portion of the property is considered side yard and an eight-foot building set back is required. The southeast corner of the church is currently only 6.4 feet away from this angled portion of the property line, thus already imposing upon the established set back requirement.

The proposed elevator and elevator equipment room would be located on the east side (side yard) and would be situated in a manner that would allow the existing exterior fire escape and egress clearances to remain.

In order to make the addition a usable size, the proposed addition on the south side (front yard) of the church would be as wide as the existing structure (36'-0"). The diagonal side yard created by the easement would effectively reduce the width of the addition to 23' making the addition to small to meet the needs of the church.

The church membership has grown since its founding in the early 1960's and the building needs to accommodate that growth in several areas.

The first area, is the need for additional worship space contiguous with the existing sanctuary. The attendance to church functions has increased necessitating more seating, audio equipment and musical instrument areas. The church will need to provide the required egress for the expanded worship hall, which will be a new enclosed stair at the front of the building. An elevator is also proposed for the east side of the building, which will provide access to the worship hall for the disabled.

The second, is the need for accessible toilet rooms. The existing toilet rooms do not make reasonable accommodation for the disabled. To provide these new facilities additional area is required, which will displace existing function areas that are necessary to the churches operation.

The third growth area is to increase the teaching space. This is used primarily for youth programs. The current areas do not meet the needs of the church in that there is inadequate space to satisfy the activities of the children.

The church will incur financial hardship if the application for Area Variance is not approved. If the church can not make the much-needed addition then they will be left with a property that can not meet their needs. The church will not be able to accommodate the worship needs of the community and in particular those of the disabled.

The lack of adequate seating, teaching space, toilet facilities and access for the disabled will result in a drop of membership and general attendance. If this church can not meet the needs of the families that attend here then they will leave. This drop in attendance will greatly impact the donations and the financial giving that is critical to its ministry within the community and also to meeting the financial obligations of this church.

We believe that the approval of this area variance will **not** be of substantial detriment to the surrounding neighborhood or the public good. The church has been a part of this neighborhood since the 1960's and is part of the community fabric. The addition to the front of the church will improve the appearance of the building and will be sensitive to the architecture and scale of the neighborhood.

No additional traffic is anticipated, in that the addition is primarily to meet its current needs.

If the Area Variance is granted it would not be inconsistent with the general intent and purpose of the Zoning Regulations. The easement which has been described previously, is an undeveloped area. An Area Variance to permit the addition to impose upon the set-back requirement should have little or no impact as this easement shall remain undeveloped. In addition, if the southern corner of the property were shaped similar to the other adjacent properties, the proposed addition would comply with the zoning regulations that are currently set forth.

Sincerely,

Brian McClosky
Owner's Agent