RUSSELL B. STEVENSON, JR.
1612 RIGGS PLACE, N.W.
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20009
202-483-6495

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May 15, 2002

Board of Zoning Adjustment
441 4th Street, N.W.
Suite 210-S
Washington, DC 20001

Re: Application Number 16823, Humberto Gonzalez, 1720 16th Street, NW

Ladies and Gentlemen:

For over thirty years my wife and I have owned and resided in a single family dwelling at 1612 Riggs Place, N.W. Our home is located just across Riggs Place, and not more than 100 feet from, 1720 16th Street, N.W., the property for which Mr. Gonzalez is requesting a variance. Because of the proximity of my house to the property in question, I request party status to oppose the request for a variance. I will participate on my own behalf, and not through counsel.

The 1600 block of Riggs Place is a quiet, residential street. It is only one block long, ending at 16th Street on one side (there is only an alley between 15th and 16th Streets), and at 17th Street, where Riggs is interrupted. As a result there is very little through traffic, and the street has retained a purely residential character, consisting mostly of three-story townhouses. Many remain single family residences, and some have been converted into two- or three-unit apartments. The people who live on the block are a lively and diverse group – young and old; professionals, working people, and students; long-time residents and those just spending a year or two. Some years ago, the Washingtonian Magazine published an article in which it was listed as one of the "Ten Best Blocks in Washington." All of us who live there, especially those, like me and my family, who are long-time residents, are anxious that it remain one of the best blocks on which to live in the city.

The structure at 1720 16th Street is a lovely and unusual, historic building, which was built by, and originally was the home of, a Justice of the Supreme Court. For most of the last thirty years, the house was occupied by Count Basil Tutorsky, a Russian emigré who escaped from the Bolshevik Revolution, and his wife. Count Tutorsky was a talented pianist, and used his home as a music school for many years. My two daughters took piano classes there. Because of his long association with the house, it became known in our neighorhood as the "Tutorsky Mansion." For convenience, I will refer to it as such in this letter.

Although it is a beautiful building, the Tutorsky Mansion is probably too large to serve as a single family residence in today's economy. Few families would be able to afford such a magnificent dwelling. Accordingly, I was not displeased to learn that the Mansion would be converted to a small bed and breakfast. It is a suitable use, and would prevent the lovely old structure from being cut up into condominiums or apartments. Moreover, although six

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guest rooms would add modestly to congestion in the neighborhood, it seems a reasonable tradeoff for preserving the building in something close to its original form.

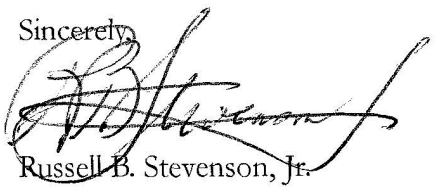
What Mr. Gonzalez now proposes, however, is altogether different. It not in keeping with the character of the neighborhood. On-street parking in our area has been scarce for years, and has become increasingly so of late. It is already nearly impossible during most times of the day to find a place to park a car on the street. Even those fortunate enough, as my family are, to have a garage for their cars, find it increasingly awkward to invite guests to visit us, knowing that they will almost certainly find it difficult to park.

The number of cars that would be attracted by a twelve-bedroom bed and breakfast would severely aggravate an already borderline parking situation. This would be aggravated by the delivery and other vehicles necessary to service such a substantial commercial establishment. Even worse is the proposal to permit group or social functions to be held in the Mansion. I do not know how many people it would accommodate at a function such as those proposed, but the building is certainly large enough to hold several dozen. Residents of the neighborhood and their visitors find it difficult enough to park as it is. They would be severely inconvenienced by having to compete for parking spaces with large numbers of participants in social functions at the Mansion.

I can testify from experience how serious a problem for the neighborhood that can be. The building behind my house, at the corner of 16th and R Streets, is now occupied by the National Council of Negro Women. They are good neighbors. That was not always the case, however. For some years, the building was the home of a social club, which had large and sometimes noisy functions on most weekend, and some weeknight, evenings. During those times, it was nearly impossible to park within several blocks of my house. Unfortunately, guests at those functions regularly parked in the alley behind my house, blocking garages and occupying private parking spaces owned by local residents. For nearly a year, my wife and I were reluctant to take our car out of our garage on Friday or Saturday evening for fear of arriving home to find our garage blocked and nowhere to park on the street. There is every reason to believe that out-of-town visitors, being strangers to the neighborhood like some of the members of the social club, would also fail to respect the residential character of our neighborhood, and would not only occupy legal parking spaces that should be available to the people who live here, but would block alleys, garages, and private parking spaces.

In sum, I urge the Board to find that the proposed variance would have a substantial and unfavorable impact on the character of a well-established residential neighborhood and to deny the application.

Sincerely,



Russell B. Stevenson, Jr.