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Geoffrey Griffis, Chairman
Board of Zoning Adjustment
441 4th Street, Suite 210
Washington, DC 20001

Re: BZA Application No. 16852
St. Patrick's School-4925 MacArthur Blvd.

Dear Chairman Griffis and Members of the Board:

As a parent with young children, and as a resident bordering the Palisades community, I write to offer my support of the proposed use of 4925 MacArthur Boulevard by St. Patrick's School. Our family moved to this neighborhood specifically because of the ample open spaces, wooded parks and its eclectic population. We knew that we would be able to school our children in the neighborhood. While there are ample elementary options, there is a critical need for middle school options in the District of Columbia, and I am pleased that St. Patrick's is willing to try to meet that need. No one disputes that fact that DC needs more schools and it will certainly benefit from more schools like St. Patrick's – a school that respects the community and raises its students to be good citizens.

I am familiar with the proposed site for St. Patrick's middle school; in fact, today I took one more walk down MacArthur and up Ashby to make sure that I was supporting this zoning exception for the right reasons. MacArthur Boulevard is my Main Street, USA. As a native of a small town in North Carolina, it helps to make living in a big city less anonymous and more civil. I care deeply that this property remains in tact and that the open green space is preserved. I learned it took three and a half minutes to walk from the Palisades Public Library to the building at 4925 and just another minute and a half to cross over to Discovery Creek Children's Museum. If a school does not belong half way in between two such institutions, then where does a neighborhood school belong? The children's museum was originally the "little red school house". Apparently, this block was the site of one of the first schools in the area.

While this is a residential neighborhood, MacArthur Boulevard is also a four-lane thoroughfare used by residents of Virginia and Maryland, as well as the District. It was relatively quiet as I walked past the homes of the neighbors who are concerned about the noise a school would bring to their street. But I also recall often having been *inside* St. Patrick's looking for a child or a classroom and found it quieter still in the halls than on the sidewalk. I do not believe noise is a valid issue of concern. While I was originally skeptical and concerned about the traffic 60 people in the building might produce on Ashby Street, I am more than satisfied with the shuttle solutions St. Patrick's has offered.

I am also reminded of the response I received when I once complained to a friend, who is an environmental lawyer, about the number of high-rise buildings going up in Chevy Chase. He told me that this form of development was the right course. Building along corridors protects the open fields and the inner sanctum of quiet neighborhoods nestled away from commercial sites. St. Patrick's is not proposing a high-rise, but trying to fully occupy an existing building, and use it for an academic program. One block east or west of MacArthur, and I would not be able to support a school for the site. Neither would I support a high school or larger institution that would take over the entire block. However, it seems logical that this particular site, only a few blocks from a Safeway and a vast array of office and retail, is an appropriate place to put a two-grade school.

BZA
Case No. 16852
Exhibit No. 174

Board of Zoning Adjustment
District of Columbia
CASE NO.16852
EXHIBIT NO.174

In summary, I think that the proposed use is a benefit to the children of the District, particularly those of Palisades. I also think the school will be a wonderful addition to the neighborhood as evidenced by the thoughtfulness, good will and generous solutions that the leaders of St. Patrick's have extended to the neighbors in this process. I urge you to approve St. Patrick's application.

Sincerely,

Mrs. Howard W. Smith, III

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