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April 8, 2002

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

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

Dear Chairman Griffis and Members of the Board:

I am writing to offer my support of the proposed use of 4925 MacArthur Boulevard by St. Patrick's Episcopal Day School.

My husband and I have been residents of the city for more than 20 years. When we bought our home in Cleveland Park, we made a conscience decision to begin and raise our family in the city. At the time, we recognized that there was a strong likelihood that we would feel it necessary to send our children to a private school. That decision was not based upon the neighborhood elementary school, which we thought was fine, but because of the real limitations that we saw at the middle school level. Our son is now a sixth grade student at St. Patrick's.

When we began the secondary school search process for our son this year, we found the choices in the District to be very limited and the competition frightening. There simply are far fewer spaces than there are qualified applicants. This is particularly true at the 7th grade level, where there is a critical shortage of available space because so many parents decide to remove their children from the D.C. public school system after the 6th grade. At that point, many D.C. parents are faced with the reality that their only choice is to send their children to schools outside of the city. We decided that we wanted our son to attend school in the community where we live. Accordingly, we applied to the few D.C. schools that were available and appropriate for our son, with the knowledge that St. Patrick's small 7th and 8th grade program would allow him to continue going to school in the city if he was not accepted. Our son, despite a strong academic record, glowing teacher recommendations, and high test scores has not been accepted to another school in the District. If the St. Patrick's option had not been available, not only would the application process have been terrifying, we would have found no choice but to apply to the suburban schools. The city needs to meet this critical shortage of middle school spaces or risk losing families to other communities. We hope that this is not a decision that we will have to make when we begin looking for 9th grade options in two years.

BZA
Case No. 16852
Exhibit No. 82
Board of Zoning Adjustment
District of Columbia
CASE NO.16852
EXHIBIT NO.82

I am familiar with the proposed site for St. Patrick's middle school. I attended the meeting at the Palisades Citizen Association meeting on April 2nd at which the directly effected community voted overwhelmingly in favor of the proposed use. I, like others in the audience, listened carefully as the members of the community discussed the pros and cons of the proposal. Like the vast majority of the other members of the audience, I concluded that every legitimate concern of the community regarding the proposed use of the site had been addressed. The school has been extremely responsive to the community concerns and has proposed a number of conditions on the property's use to address the homeowners' concerns regarding traffic, noise, trash pick up, the extent of the childrens' outside activities, and other building use. As a St. Patrick's parent, I can assure you that these conditions will be met. For example, our contract with St. Patrick's for next year requires that we fully comply with the carpool restrictions (including the use of a drop-off site and shuttle bus from the Whitehaven campus) to limit the impact on traffic. Noncompliance results in the child's dismissal. The St. Patrick's children are taught respect, kindness, and responsibility. They will be good neighbors and a true asset to the community.

In addition, I was struck at the meeting by the discussion by the community members that unlike other possible uses for the property, the proposed use is the only one that is assured to preserve the beautiful Victorian house and the surrounding green space. It would be a shame to see the property sold to a developer who would tear down that beautiful home to make room for multiple residences. The use proposed by St. Patrick's will preserve the neighborhood treasure.

Accordingly, I agree with the decision of the Palisades Community Association that having the school on the proposed site will be of tremendous benefit to the neighborhood and the District. The school will serve a critical need in the community, and, with its predominately daytime educational use, there will no discernable negative impact to the immediately surrounding homeowners. For these reasons, I urge you to approve the St. Patrick's application.

Sincerely,

Patricia J. Sweeney