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Geoffrey Griffis, Chairman
Board of Zoning Adjustment
441 4th Street NW, 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:

Over the past several months, I have followed the progress of St. Patrick's attempt to acquire the building at 4925 MacArthur Boulevard with special interest. My connection to the purchase is unique. I am a life-long resident of the District, a pre-kindergarten to 12th grade attendee of DC public schools (Janney, Deal, Wilson), and the current St. Patrick's Grade 7 humanities teacher and site director. With each letter and viewpoint printed in the Northwest Current, I have tried to maintain an open mind, paying close attention to the concerns of neighbors who hope to preserve their quality of life in their neighborhood. I balance my respect for neighborhood concerns with recognition of the legitimate need for more educational opportunities in the District. For me the decision is ultimately about my kids.

In its current configuration, St. Patrick's Grade 7 program is remarkable in that it contains only sixteen students. The thought that a school is actively seeking to create a small community of learners is impressive. Teaching in this setting, I know that I can get to every student through the day. This is a unique educational environment that maximizes its strengths to help its students thrive. The anticipated grade 7 and 8 program, which will serve a maximum of sixty students (a cap that is held at the 4925 MacArthur site even with the potential temporary addition of Grade 9 in the future), will maintain this environment.

The current Grade 7 class represents a diverse group with a range of strengths, but they all share enthusiastic, positive, and caring personalities. They are well aware of the public debate going on over the property, and even though they do not see all of the issues surrounding a school at 4925 MacArthur, they do know that they hope to be good neighbors wherever they end up. As the din of the debate grew over the past few months, these students came in to school asking why people viewed their presence as a problem. I emphasized that the process that was taking place was necessary, important, and good, and that understanding the neighbor's concerns would only lead to a better long-term relationship with the community. Still, they asked why people would object to a school nearby, especially one that hoped to nurture positive relationships with its neighbors. One even went so far as to suggest that we should host a barbeque for those living nearby so that they could see that my students "are not bad."

What my students do not fully appreciate is that concern over school expansion is nothing new. I clearly remember growing up one block from Harry's Field, an open space that used to sit behind the Safeway on Davenport Street and River Road in A.U. Park. When Georgetown Day School purchased the property for its new high school in 1986, the neighborhood was concerned. Fears of parking problems, traffic, trash, parties, drinking, and smoking were voiced at neighborhood meetings. Georgetown Day

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eventually ended up building their school on the property and I can say with confidence that the impact was minimal. In fact, when I return to my parent's house and pass the GDS playing field, the occasional sounds I hear are exactly what I hope to hear in a residential neighborhood: the sounds of happy, productive young people engaged in healthy activities. I have no doubt that these are the same kinds of sounds that my students will bring to the Palisades.

It is clear that there are legitimate concerns regarding St Patrick's hope to locate at 4925 MacArthur Boulevard. As the process of voicing concerns progressed and the school tried to address each one, it also became clear that the primary problem for the neighbors is that a school wants to move into the property, not traffic jams, trash removal, or any of the other associated problems that St. Patrick's has tried to remove from the table. In my mind a school is not a problem; it is a gain. The sound of bright, caring, and interested young people engaged in learning and growing is wonderful. Ultimately, the decision about the location of St. Patrick's Grade 7 and 8 program is about my kids; conscientious, decent, good kids who are eager to show the community that their presence is, in fact, a gift.

Sincerely,

Dan Spector

Dan Spector, St. Patrick's Grade 7 Humanities teacher and site director