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Vice President, General Counsel

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Mr. Geoffrey H. Griffis
Chair, Board of Zoning Adjustment
441 – 4th Street, N.W.
Suite 210 (S)
Washington, DC 20001

Reference Case# 16970 – Special Exception Approval for the Continuation of a Child Development Center located at 3209 Highland Place, NW Lot 30 Square 2072

Dear Mr. Griffis,

I am writing this letter to express my support for the request for a special exception to zoning regulations filed by the National Child Research Center ("NCRC") pursuant to its plans to renovate and expand its pre-school facilities. A hearing on this motion is scheduled at the Board of Zoning Adjustment for Wednesday, February 11.

Let me note at the outset that I am the Grandmother of a former NCRC student, and I have great familiarity with and personal affection for the institution and staff. The two years that my granddaughter spent at the school were invaluable to her personal and intellectual development. But my feelings concerning the school go beyond my own personal gratitude for its impact on her life and into my sense of the critical role that the school has played, and hopefully will continue to play, in the lives of families throughout our community.

For 75 years NCRC has provided an extraordinary, and indeed I would say unique, educational opportunity for pre-kindergarten age children. The teachers and staff follow a curricular plan that exposes children and their parents to a state of the art program in cognitive, emotional and motor skills development. Small teacher to student ratios, and full and part-time resource specialists, allow for the kind of one to one attention that is critical in effective education, particular during a child's formative years. Indeed, the current plans for renovation and expansion are the product of NCRC's dedication to excellence and a desire to continue to provide a first rate program, with even smaller class sizes and additional room for activities within that require additional classrooms and a relatively large indoor space. It is my sense that the school would have been overjoyed if it could have met the needs of its program in its current environs, but its sees the modest proposed additions as necessary to the continued pursuit of its mission of educating a broad cross-section of pre-school children in our community.

BZA
Case No. 16970
Exhibit No. 106

Board of Zoning Adjustment
District of Columbia
CASE NO.16970
EXHIBIT NO.106

It is equally critical to note that for decades, and since its founding three-quarters of a century ago, NCRC has been dedicated to making its unique educational opportunity open to everyone in our city. One of the most important unique features of the school is its commitment to including students with special educational and developmental needs into its program every year. Consequently, spaces in each incoming class, and in each

classroom, are reserved for children with learning disabilities, emotional and speech development issues, and many other challenges. In many cases the families of children with these special needs have literally no other option if they want their children to have a pre-school experience similar to those of other children. It is perhaps the greatest achievement of NCRC that it provides an option for these families, and does so in such an effective and enthusiastic manner.

It goes without saying that NCRC is equally committed to making its educational program open to families from all racial, religious, and economic backgrounds and from all neighborhoods in this city. The admissions staff makes a great effort and takes great care to reach out to educators and community leaders throughout the area in an ongoing attempt to inform as many people as possible of what the school has to offer, and that to insure that each classroom expresses the wealth of diversity that we are blessed with in the Washington D.C. area. Another factor that has necessitated the proposed expansion has been the school's commitment to find more space for its program without reducing its enrollment numbers, as such a reduction would likely impact its diversity goals dramatically.

The public opposition to NCRC's planned expansion, expressed by what appears to be a fervent minority of its immediate neighbors, appears to be based on one of two perspectives, either, one, that the school should not be allowed to continue to provide its unique educational opportunity (and should be reduced to a kind of glorified day care center for a much smaller population of students), or two, that the school should provide its valuable services only to those families living in the Cleveland Park neighborhood (neighbors have recently filed papers that suggest that the school should commit to having 50% of its student body come from homes within ½ mile of its facility!).

I think that it is critical that both of these ideas be quite soundly and unequivocally rejected. Notwithstanding the opinions of some members of the Cleveland Park neighborhood, this is and should always be viewed as one, united, city with people living and working together, not in isolation from each other. We cannot live, as we did for far too many years, in a city where the best services and opportunities were available only to a few privileged residents, while the majority of the community remained on the outside looking in.

I came to this city in the early 60's, and I have worked all of my professional life to build a vibrant, healthy city which serves the needs of all of its residents. Previous administrations, and quite successfully the current administration of Mayor Williams, have sought to break down the kind of traditional artificial barriers which serve to

exclude too many Washingtonians from access to the best that this city and life here have to offer. NCRC and its program are invaluable assets to this city, to this entire city, and they should not be cloistered away for the benefit of a tiny privileged few, and they certainly should not be taken from our community in response to wishes of the same few who don't share the school's values of inclusion and ever expanding opportunity.

While the modest planned construction, which will be confined to the existing grounds of the school, will undoubtedly cause some disruption, and while the addition of a few new families raises some valid concerns for neighbors, all indications from neutral observers who have reviewed the plans and their likely affect is that there will not be a significant impact to the neighborhood as a result of either the construction or the modest increase in enrollment. Indeed, in response to some important and valid concerns expressed by its neighbors, NCRC has already voluntarily instituted traffic control initiatives which have seriously diminished the congestion problems which arise at the few high density times for drop off and pick up of students. These initiatives have been applauded by many (again, certainly not all) of the neighbors, and NCRC has committed itself to continue and expand their traffic control activities where necessary, and to do anything else to continue to be the kind of good neighbor that has made it a valued fixture on Highland Place for 75 years.

For these reasons – because NCRC provides a unique and invaluable resource for the entire Washington community and should be allowed to continue to do so, and because there will be no significant negative impact as a result of its plans – I express my support for NCRC's request for a zoning exception to enable them to renovate and expand their facility to allow them to continue their wonderful work.

Sincerely,

Marianne C. Niles

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MCI Center

FAX COVER SHEET

Date: 10 February 2003

Please deliver the following pages to:

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Firm: Board of Zoning Adjustment

Department:

Fax #: 727-6072

Number of pages transmitted including cover sheet: 4

Sent from:

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Comments:

** Please call (202) 628-3200 x immediately if you do not receive the complete transmission.

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