My name is Susan Taylor. My family and I have lived at 3301 Highland Place, on the corner of Highland and the dead end section of 33rd Place, since 1993.

When we moved onto Highland Place, we were delighted with our new home, but we immediately began to notice traffic congestion and parking violations by people who we learned were NCRC parents, nannies, and staff. I called the school periodically about the problems, and once I had to get its help unblocking 33rd Place so I could get my mother to the airport. My husband and I even went to the expense of putting a driveway in our yard because often we were unable to find parking on Highland Place due to NCRC staff parking. I did not always complain even when drivers parked illegally or insulted me when I told them so.

In 1998, I saw a notice on NCRC's property about an application to change its special exception. I called the school and was told by the person answering the phone that the application was purely technical. The school was licensed for more children than its Certificate of Occupancy allowed. It simply wanted to change the Certificate of Occupancy to comply with DC regulations. Nothing would change.

My family got no formal notice of the hearings, but I spoke to several neighbors. We were all concerned about the traffic and parking problems generated by NCRC at that time. Several neighbors attended meetings and the BZA hearing and reported back to those of us who did not. They reported that NCRC said it was not planning any changes in enrollment, facility or operation. We neighbors felt assured that NCRC was not considering an expansion. We focused on the intolerable traffic conditions. As a result, several traffic-mitigating conditions were incorporated into the final BZA order approving the "technical" change. The BZA settled on an 8 year period during which the traffic conditions would be evaluated. The school represented to us, to the ANC and to the BZA that it would not expand. If we had thought that the school would use its Certificate of Occupancy as a basis to expand its enrollment, we would have opposed the school's application in 1998.

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Unfortunately, as you will see in a video presentation, the traffic-mitigation rules imposed by the BZA in 1998 have not helped. If anything, congestion, traffic and parking violations have gotten worse. Since the school announced its proposal for expansion, we frequently but inconsistently, see orange vested staff in the streets. And, as you have heard, they cannot control the drivers who insist on parking and driving illegally. Even when the school's traffic management works as planned, Highland Place turns into a single lane road for two-way traffic several times a day.

The reason the school has such a negative impact on traffic and parking is related much more to the amount of space available for cars then with the school's effort, or lack or effort, to mitigate the impact. The streets adjacent to the school are small, narrow, residential streets. The reason NCRC bound drivers constantly park illegally is because the supply of legal parking spaces is too small for the demand. The reason Highland Place becomes a dangerous single lane road for two-way traffic is because it is too narrow and short to handle the volume of cars and SUVs.

One year ago the school informed the neighborhood that it does intend to expand its operations, increase its enrollment and staff, and build approximately 10,000 additional square feet, doubling its facility. And, perhaps most surprisingly to the neighbors, it claims the right to place 120 children in its facility at any given time! And that it has no limit on its enrollment.

BZA
Case No. 16970
Exhibit No. 110
Board of Zoning Adjustment
District of Columbia
CASE NO.16970
EXHIBIT NO.110

When the school stated at the 1998 hearing, it sought "no new construction, no increase in enrollment and no change in operation," was it being dishonest? Or is it a case of, "that was then and this is now." I am prepared to believe that it was the latter. But what does that say about any commitment the school makes now? The neighborhood supported the school in 1998 because the school committed to no growth. Now the school has clearly said it is not bound by that commitment. Worse yet, it contends that the BZA order in 1998 provides the legal basis for increasing enrollment to as many students as it chooses.

NCRC has been a valued part of the neighborhood for 75 years. But during those 75 years, hundreds of students, faculty and administrators have come and gone. Clearly the current school leaders do not consider themselves bound by the commitments of their predecessors. How should neighbors cope with broken commitments?

Per the 1998 BZA Order, the school is supposed to have 28 staff. At the February 1 Cleveland Park Citizens Association meeting, the director said that they now have 39. No one contends that the school is authorized by its special exception to have that many. What does that say about the school's respect for this Board?

The crux of NCRC's adverse impact on the neighborhood lies in the total number of people in its daily population. But the population numbers quoted by the school change. In 1998, NCRC said it was an early childhood center for 120 children. When it announced its expansion plan last year, it had an enrollment of 168. Now the enrollment is 171. The only thing the school has been clear about is that it will not agree to hold its enrollment at 1998 or even 2002 levels.

When an institution operates as a special exception in a residential neighborhood, it has a disproportionate influence over the quality of life of its neighbors. The only way to maintain a supportive relationship is for both members of that community to act with honesty. The school has not honored its commitments. The school has not been forthcoming about its total population. We cannot rely on the representations or commitments made to us by NCRC.

The current population of students, faculty and visitors to this school produces intolerable adverse effects on its neighbors. The situation is not only unpleasant; it is dangerous. Please do not allow the school to make these problems worse. The neighborhood does not oppose the school's need to modernize. What we do oppose its use of renovation as a pretext for expansion.