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February 2, 2002

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

Re: BZA application #16970

Dear Mr. Griffis:

We are parents of children that either currently attend or recently attended NCRC. We are also city residents that are concerned about what we perceive to be a small group of self-entitled people using a variety of self-serving statements and scare tactics to foment opinion against the school and its modest plans for the future.

In various statements, neighbors opposed to the school's plans have made references to wanting to keep more outsiders away from the Cleveland Park enclave. In one letter that the opposition sent to our parent body last spring (unethically using the school's directory) the author warned parents at the school of the negative implications of having more students coming into Cleveland Park from the outside. The code words used in the correspondence were those known to any familiar with the campaign tactics of opponents to civil rights and desegregation. It is of little surprise then that NCRC school's director received many calls from upset parents who felt the neighbor was exclusionary in his letter, or worse. As to scare tactics, it also is not surprising, given the tone of this letter and its wide dispersal, that people of a variety of racial, ethnic and religious backgrounds that come to the school would find it offensive to be videotaped and monitored on a routine basis by neighbors for the past year. What exactly are they trying to prove and to whom?

Most recently, in public statements to the Historic Preservation Review Board hearing January 23, 2003, the historian, Ms. Kathy Wood, hired by those opposing the renovations, continued the exclusionary rhetoric, she stated that:

> The National Child Research Center as a neighborhood nursery school complements John Sherman's vision of the Cleveland Park as a cohesive community with amenities enhancing the quality of life of resident familes and individuals.
>
> NCRC, as an institution promoting confereces and drawing participant and students, all who arrive from outside the area, does not coincide with John Sherman's vision.

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Of course, these neighbors argue that their primary concern is traffic. They long for the "good old days" when the school was filled primarily with children from streets immediately surrounding the school. In fact, NCRC has never been just a neighborhood school. For 75 years, well prior to the creation of the Historic District, NCRC has been dedicated to the development of young children. Indeed, it is central to the school's mission that the benefit of an NCRC experience not be limited solely to Cleveland Park children. The school's attempts to diversify in all ways have brought to NCRC both typically developing children and those with special needs from all parts of Washington and the school is very proud of that.

The school has undergone various efforts over the years to be inclusive of the broader urban environment of Washington, DC and the world. From its inception, NCRC's student body was ethnically diverse. In the 1930s, Japanese diplomats sent their children to the school. Also in the

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1930s, the school provided training for public school teachers, including African-American teachers. In 1965, NCRC received a grant from the Schaefer Project to provide a summer Headstart program at the school that served disadvantaged children. And, NCRC received support from the Donner Foundation for scholarships for inner-city boys to attend the school. Furthermore, NCRC was an early member of the Black Student Fund founded in 1964, and is currently a member of the Black and Latino Student Funds.

Last fall NCRC hosted a one day conference on early childhood education entitled, Building Scaffolding for the Future. The school successfully raised funds from private foundations for this conference so that it could host interested DC area public school faculty as well as its own teaching staff. NCRC received numerous calls and letters of support from the attendees on the quality, depth and usefullness of the conference for early childhood educators. Shervin Malekzadeh, an early childhood teacher at Bancroft Elementary School in Mount Pleasant, wrote a letter to the Nortwest Current supporting the school's outreach to the broader community:

> Sharing its expertise in early childhood education is very much related to the function of the National Child Research Center. As a teacher in a school that serves mainly lower-income and immigrant students, I feel encouraged that the National Child Research Center is reaching beyond its typical student population. The improvement in our community comes only when we consider the needs of all its members.
>
> The District of Columbia has limited resources for continuing teacher education. The fact that those attending could benefit from the expertise found at this nationally recognized preschool - without having to leave the city - is a wonderful thing for us and the children we work with.
> ***The Northwest Current,*** January 15, 2003

There are some truths. NCRC is a great school. There is a lot of traffic in Washington. People don't like change. School expansion is often seen as inconvenient and even trouble to anyone not immediately benefiting from the expansion. On the other hand, it should not be the case that students, parents and staff of a long-standing and worthwhile institution should come to feel unwelcome in its surrounding neighborhood. The school is striving to implement its strategic goals, including the goal of providing a safe, secure, supportive and nurturing environment for a diverse student body that is reflective of the city and society at large. We believe this is a goal worthy of community support.

Sincerely,

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Children's Studio School

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