3149 Newark Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20008
June 11, 2003

Mr. Geoffrey Griffis
Board of Zoning Adjustment
441 4th Street, N.E.
Suite 201
Washington, D.C. 20001

Mr. Andrew Altman
Director, Office of Planning
801 North Capitol Street, N.E.
Suite 4000
Washington, D.C. 20002

Kathy Patterson
Ward 3 Councilmember
The District Building
1350 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20004

D.C. OFFICE OF ZONING
2003 JUN 12 PM 3:23

Re: Case 16970

Gentlemen and Ms. Patterson:

We are writing to set forth our strong opposition to the expansion plans announced by NCRC and to urge you to deny the special exception and/or variance sought by the nursery school to expand its facilities.

We believe that schools can and should be located in residential areas. This city can only attract and retain families with children if its neighborhoods contain desirable schools. Schools cannot be grouped together and located on a far distant highway. Families routinely want to send their children, especially their preschool children, to nearby schools, and often purchases houses because of their proximity to such schools. In short, the calculus of residential city life must include the operation of schools in neighborhoods.

But for this calculus to work, both the residents and the school must act responsibly towards each other. In our view, NCRC has failed entirely to honor its part of the equation, and its unilateral and uncompromising actions threaten to significantly disrupt and adversely impact the residential neighborhood in which it operates.

NCRC makes its request to enlarge its facilities with "unclean hands". It has not been candid with the neighbors or the BZA about its actual enrollment, and its current

BZA
Case No. 16970
Exhibit No. 196

Board of Zoning Adjustment
District of Columbia
CASE NO.16970
EXHIBIT NO.196

student population of 168, spread over three daily sessions, significantly exceeds the cap it proposed in 1998. NCRC's substantial over-enrollment of students has exacted a large price on the neighborhood in terms of traffic flow and congestion. Further, NCRC's cavalier approach to honoring enrollment caps that it proposed and the BZA approved suggests that it will fail to honor any future enrollment caps, and that its unspoken intent driving the enlargement of facilities is to further increase school enrollment.

To date, NCRC has failed to respond to existing neighborhood concerns about traffic burden. Parents of its schoolchildren race down Newark Street and around Highland Place, in plain disregard of the residential speed limit. A large number of these drivers – drinking large coffees while on their cell phones – fail to heed the posted stop signs, and express annoyance at pedestrians and other drivers. Other parents park illegally and walk their children to school. During school celebrations, the parked cars of NCRC parents fill the streets, and deprive residents of any street parking. Since the neighborhood articulated its concerns, NCRC has filled neighborhood mailboxes with chatty newsletters about the School's intent to address these concerns but has taken no affirmative actions that do anything to reduce the significant traffic burden.

Indeed, the only action that NCRC has endorsed is an action anathema to the neighborhood—making Highland Place a one-way street. That alternative serves only the interests of NCRC. It fails to serve the interests of the neighbors on that street, or on the surrounding streets, and will surely not improve the driving habits of the parent community of NCRC. NCRC appears to have become a commuter preschool. Judging from the Maryland and Virginia license plates of car pool vehicles, its student cohort is drawn significantly from neighborhoods outside of walking distance from NCRC.

Finally, we believe it is very significant that NCRC has declined to participate in mediation to try to resolve this issue. It was steadfast in its refusal to agree to a firm enrollment cap – one of the preconditions suggested by the mediator – even though the Cleveland Park neighbors were willing to agree to all of the preconditions. Absent a commitment to cap enrollment, NCRC's expansion plans can only be seen as a first step toward additional enrollment growth in an already overcrowded neighborhood.

As we said earlier, our residential neighborhoods need schools like NCRC. But schools like NCRC can succeed only with the support of their neighbors. Our family is one such neighbor. Our school age children walk their puppy on sidewalks surrounding the school, ride their bicycles on the narrow and winding residential streets, and hike up and down the hill to Connecticut Avenue. The safety of our children is as important to us as is the education of preschool children (many of whom do not reside in the neighborhood) to NCRC. This delicate balance between residents and schools can only be achieved by compromise. But NCRC's strategy is one of no compromise, as evidenced both by NCRC's actions and by the public statements of its parents leading the expansion effort. We believe strongly that this policy should not be rewarded. Surely the burden of NCRC's expansion should not be borne on the backs of its residential neighbors when it largely ignores our concerns.

We strongly urge you to deny the special exemption and/or variance sought by NCRC and to require NCRC to honor the enrollment caps to which it agreed several years ago.

Sincerely,

Laura Wertheimer and Andrew Pincus