3309 Highland Place NW
Washington DC 20008-3234
October 15, 2002

Mr. Geoffrey Griffis, Chair
District of Columbia Board of Zoning Adjustment
441 4th Street NW, Suite 210
Washington DC 20001

RECEIVED
D.C. OFFICE OF ZONING
2002 DEC -9 PM 4:10

Dear Mr. Griffis:

I write to support the plans for improvement proposed by the National Child Research Center.

When my wife and I moved to Washington in 1968, our younger daughter became a student at NCRC; now our granddaughter is a student. We have been impressed by and grateful for the excellent teaching the school has offered. But this connection does not outweigh other considerations. Having lived in Highland Place longer than most present residents, we are deeply committed to preserving the neighborhood character of our little piece of Cleveland Park, which must be virtually without equal anywhere in the country for its charm and eccentricity and its splendid architecture. But even here change has taken place: new structures have been built, and the larger setting has become more complex and hurried, causing some of the inner cohesiveness to be lost.

The plans that NCRC has advanced seem to me well within acceptable limits of the neighborhood growth and change. Anyone who has ever visited the school is aware of the serious limitations imposed on its educational mission by a house that has been adapted piecemeal over the years—the cramped and illogical arrangement of interior space, inadequate provision for staff and for meetings, the inability to mount programs and activities essential to modern educational practice at the pre-school level—and even older expectations, like indoor playing space for bad weather. The plans seem not only to fulfill these desirable ends but to do so sensitively and with respect to the school's surroundings.

One objection that I have heard is that the school is proposing "to build a campus." The school already has a campus, but one that is not only inadequate but shabby. The refurbishing of present buildings will improve the appearance of the whole. The proposed new building is, to judge from architects' renderings, handled with sensitivity to the distinctive character of the area and will markedly improve the appearance of the school property fronting on Ordway Street, now at best nondescript. The playground space, available for much of the time for use by neighborhood children, will remain virtually unchanged

The largest concern of some neighbors is the legitimate question of traffic generated by the school now and by a possible, very small increase in enrollment. I have traversed all of Highland Place and Newark Street, by car and on foot, for more than thirty years, in

BZA
Case No. 16970
Exhibit No. 54

Board of Zoning Adjustment
District of Columbia
CASE NO.16970
EXHIBIT NO.54

the past ten years almost daily and at every hour of the day. There once was regrettable lack of discipline among parents dropping off and parking, but that seems to have been brought under control by the school's guidelines and by careful staff supervision. This control should continue, and indeed neighbors would be right to insist that, after these changes, no future increases in buildings or enrollment should occur.

The lines of cars for about half an hour when children are dropped off and picked up are orderly and present minimal obstruction to free movement of other cars or pedestrians, moving vans excepted. Our block of Highland Place, the first one east of 34th Street, has much foot traffic to and from the school—evidence of the neighborhood setting. The occasional shortage of parking space is owing just as much to the multiplication of the cars of residents and the presence of workmen as to the school.

The greatest traffic problem appears to be the wait to enter 34th Street from Newark when parents and guardians are leaving the school in the afternoon. I cannot remember ever having seen a line of more than five cars at that intersection at that time, but it is true that cars must sometimes wait for several minutes to cross or turn into the main street. We have watched the steady increase in traffic on 34th Street year by year since our arrival here; that it is particularly heavy when the schoolday ends is incontrovertible. But that time-specific load is also owing to many larger schools, not just to NCRC, which is analogous to a small and intermittent creek flowing into a much larger, turbulent Potomac. Some of us have agitated for years for the installation of a traffic light at Newark Street, where the view of oncoming traffic from the south is partially obscured, and which has been the scene of many accidents. Such a light would not only improve safety but quickly relieve the afternoon "traffic jam."

NCRC has been a good neighbor, and its distinction as an institution has brought credit to Cleveland Park. The changes proposed will increase both the distinction and the credit, and I strongly urge your approving the school's application.

Yours sincerely,

Robert K. Webb