BZA Testimony – Susan Benton
October 28, 2003
Regarding: Burke School Expansion Request

My name is Susan Benton. My family and I live at 2926 Upton Street, N.W.

In my professional life, I work with cities all over the United States.

I know cities. And, I understand the need for good schools in a City.

I also know the importance of a neighborhood and its key role as the economic foundation for a city.

Two years, my neighbors, and I spent hours meeting with one another and testifying before you regarding Burke's expansion. We are here again.

Honestly, it gives us no pleasure to oppose a school. We are parents, we are grandparents, we are aunts and uncles.

And, we are neighbors – from apartment buildings, from duplexes, townhouses, and single residential homes that feel overwhelmed and disregarded by our neighbor – The Burke School.

Co-existing within a small geographical area requires neighbors to be consistent and mindful of one another's needs and concerns. Another element of being a good neighbor means adhering to agreements.

Our neighborhood has always been concerned about the size of Burke relative to the scale of the neighborhood.

Several years ago to gain approval for a building expansion, Burke agreed to a cap on the number of students, faculty and staff.

They have not honored that agreement.

When they decided to ignore that agreement – they did not feel a negative impact. Their enrollment increase meant an increase in tuitions and an expansion of curriculum and programs. All to the good for the school.

The negative fall out was passed on to the neighborhood – without discussion and seemingly without concern for our well-being.

Here is what we got: over-crowded streets, cars blocking traffic, sidewalks used for gym classes, and a school administration that disingenuously portrayed the formation of representative neighborhood group.

BZA
Case No. 17022
Exhibit No. 180

Board of Zoning Adjustment
District of Columbia
CASE NO. 17022
EXHIBIT NO. 180

And, here is what we have now:

A building proposal that leaves the need for variances open.

A sureness that the traffic volume will increase.

A compliance plan that requires neighbors to act as monitors and policemen.

And, fundamental to my opposition to the school – it's record as a very bad neighbor.

In the past and to the present time, the school makes independent decisions that are not in compliance with City law, and have no regard for the neighborhood.

Please choose to support the viability of the Van Ness, Upton, Tilden and surrounding streets neighborhood.