STATEMENT OF GALE BARRON BLACK
Tuesday, July 26, 2005
Before the Board of Zoning Adjustment
In Support of the STA Development Plan

Good Morning,

Thank you for the opportunity to present testimony in support of the St. Albans Development Plan.

My name is Gale Barron Black. I am Native Washingtonian and a parent of two children who were both educated on the close. I am also a member of the Task Force that is updating the city's comprehensive plan. I serve as the Ward 4 representative, appointed by Council Member Fenty. I reside in Crestwood, which is a community adjacent to Woodley Park. Crestwood is just to the north and east of Rock Creek Park. I also am the President of the Crestwood Citizens Association. I am here today to share my experience as a parent, whose son, Samuel Ng, recently graduated from St. Albans.

I believe that St. Albans serves as a unique community resource. This private institution provides a much needed educational benefit that extends beyond its borders and beyond the in-school curriculum. My son was recently touted as being a "Rennaissance Man." Sam was exposed to a number of areas while at St. Albans, academics, sports, the arts, drama, math competitions, and many extra-curricula events because the school was able to offer these opportunities to him. He became a well-rounded scholar and an athelete because of the wide array of offerings to which he was exposed at the school. Some of these events occurred on the weekends and these events sometimes included others who did not attend the school during the day.

I understand that the school makes its facilities available, as they can, for non-school events. I support this use; and again, my son benefitted. I think it is encouraging that St. Albans does allow the use of its facilities to supplement the limited supply in DC. The policies of St. Albans really serve as a model for other schools.

As an African-American Washingtonian and member of the STA greater community, I want to see St. Albans supported - - if for no other reason than the quality of education and experiences that are available to so many. When I look through the school directory, I see many DC zip codes listed, like 20011, 20012, 20002, 20007, 20016 and 20008.

I really belive that part of the reason that the school is successful and able to deliver that high level of education is because it was able to make the educational decisions that it deemed appropriate, without undue interference. The school should not be impacted by outside influences, no matter how well intentioned. By this I mean, I can truly understand how the neighboring community feels, but I think that this requires a balancing of competing needs. Yes, there should be some give-and take, but I would hate to see the quality of the education negatively impacted.

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I can also tell you from my own personal experience that the school has been taking steps to minimize the impact of the parking demands. Not every one lives close enough to walk to the school. My son often wanted to drive to school, but I would remind him of the school's policy that discourage the young men from driving to school.

Like most parents, we choose this private institution because it offered what we could not find elsewhere. I support anything that will allow the St. Albans experience to be even more accessible to other qualified students. I ask that you give my testimony serious consideration - - and from the perspective of the city as a whole.

It may not be wise for the neighborhood to dictate or interfere in the plans of the school. Too much is at stake. I can't help but recall that my own ANC 4A recently tackled a similar issue in Shepherd Park. In that case, the ANC was considering the plans being offered by Walter Reed Medical Center. The Center had the support of the community and the ANC was merely voicing some understandable concerns. We were all a bit surprised to hear that Walter Reed may be relocating out of DC. That's a major employer.

DC is trying to meet the challenge of providing a quality education to prepare our youth to take the jobs here in DC. This institution is doing much to aid in this sort of private public partnership. Sometimes, we have to look at these things through the lens of what's best for the city as a whole. I support the St. Albans plans and I respectfully ask that you approve it.

Thank you for allowing me to offer this testimony and I ask that it be made a part of the record.