

Cheryl O'Neill and Matthew Bell
3619 Everett Street NW
Washington, DC 20008

February 15, 2022

Re: BZA Application No. 20643: Maret School Athletic Fields Project

Dear Board of Zoning Adjustment,

We are writing in strong support of the Episcopal Center for Children. Our daughter Catherine Bell attended the school from her tenth until her thirteenth year, from 2012 to 2015. Like many of the students at Episcopal, Catherine suffered from a host of learning disabilities and behavioral issues, for her largely due to the onset of a mental illness when she was nine years old.

The Episcopal Center for Children (ECC) remains the bright spot in Catherine's secondary education. Social settings and academic demands presented enormous challenges for Catherine, exacerbating the symptoms of her illness and challenging her ability to access formal education. ECC alone among the schools she attended provided the support and therapeutic environment that allowed her to overcome many of those challenges and learn, not only about academics but also about the coping skills and self-knowledge needed to deal with the challenges of her illness.

ECC's unique ability to educate children like Catherine was in part due to the school's home-like setting, with its dining room from which Catherine gained polite table manners that continue to this day, and offices whose cozy comfort helped establish the ease and trust for difficult therapy sessions, and beautiful backyard. More importantly, it was due to the talent, skill and diligence of its extraordinary staff of teachers, therapists, doctors, nurses, interns and administrators, who time and again went the extra mile to care for a child with distressing and challenging behaviors.

When school is not a pleasant environment but a place that triggers your worst fears and your worst behaviors, it is very difficult to want to go there let alone like being there. School was such a place for Catherine, and it was through the ECC staff, with their insight and evident love and care for her that Catherine overcame those fears and was able make gains academically, socially and in maturity. The school, as well as cherished staff members, especially John Pleasant her therapist, continue to hold a dear place in her heart. Often, when we are in the car and nearby, we get a quiet request from her: "Can we drive by ECC?" It continues to provide her solace.

After aging out of the program, Catherine attended school first in Baltimore, Maryland and then in Annandale, Virginia. Both required long bus rides, as much as two hours every day. This placed enormous additional burdens on Catherine, further compromising an already challenged school

Board of Zoning Adjustment
District of Columbia
CASE NO.20643
EXHIBIT NO.175

experience. There is a paucity of available school options for children like Catherine, and it is a tragedy, especially as the District aims for greater inclusivity, that there is no longer a nonpublic option within its boundaries. Children like Catherine, and the city as a whole, will benefit from the re-opening of ECC's doors. We wholeheartedly support any and all efforts to make that happen.

Sincerely,

Cheryl O'Neill and Matthew Bell