DRAFT – October 27, 2003

Testimony of Sharon B. Raimo, Executive Director and Kathleen Padian, Director of Development on behalf of St. Coletta of Greater Washington in Support of Zoning Commission Application Number 03-21; November 3, 2003

Background of Organization

St. Coletta of Greater Washington is a 501C(3) not for profit corporation. Though St. Coletta began under the auspices of the Catholic Diocese of Arlington, it is not now affiliated with any religious organization.Non-sectarian status was granted by the Commonwealth of Virginia in 1996. We retain the name of St. Coletta, our patron saint in recognition of her struggle for reform and in keeping with our history and our philosophy which is built on a reverence for the immeasurable value of the individual human spirit.

For over forty-five years individuals with mental retardation and autism and their families have counted on St. Coletta to provide them with our special blend of educational, therapeutic and vocational services. In truth we are much more than a school and adult program, we become an extended family to those we serve. At St. Coletta we reject the traditional ideal of school where there are teachers and learners in favor of the idea that we are all learning together. We strive to think of ourselves as a community. We believe that this identity as a community of equals is important for all of us. It is important for people with mental handicaps because they are always relegated to an inferior position. They are the ones cared for, the ones in need; we are the caregivers, the generous ones. It is important for us to think of ourselves as equal to those we serve so that we do not miss the important give and take that is at the heart of every truly human relationship. Our commitment to these ideals is firmly rooted in the St. Coletta philosophy and system of service.

You may frequently hear the buzzword of "inclusion" when referring to special education. At St. Coletta we believe in inclusion in the broadest sense of the word. We believe in including people based on their strengths therefore we reject the idea that inclusion only refers to placing disabled individuals in school programs. For the cognitively disabled being in an academic setting means being relegated to a position based on their weaknesses. At St. Coletta we are committed to the inclusion of those we serve in the larger community based on their strengths. That means being included in the worlds of work and leisure where we can interact with others on a more equal footing.

St. Coletta's program is ever evolving to meet the individual needs of each child. At St. Coletta the curriculum is the child and the study of the child as learner is continual and constant. Great emphasis is placed on learning in the natural environment through theme based, experience rich, hands-on lessons. We believe in and put into practice the theories of Piaget, Montessori, Dewey and Gardner. We learn about things by doing them together.

ZONING COMMISSION
District of Columbia
Case 03-21
Exhibit 26
ZONING COMMISSION
District of Columbia
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EXHIBIT NO.26

History and Current Programs and Activities

In 1959 Hazel and Joseph Hagarty were at a loss to find a school that would accept their daughter Kathy, a child with Down Syndrome who was also physically disabled. Hazel had been turned away by the local public school and so she approached her pastor at St. Charles Barromeo Catholic Church who agreed, with the permission of the bishop of the Diocese of Arlington, to give her space in the local parish school to start a program for the mentally retarded. Hazel had been trained as a teacher of the blind and she resolutely set about to find a way to educate children like her daughter.

Over the intervening years St. Coletta has expanded its facilities and refined its programs. In 1996, facing yet one more move due to lack of space and a growing waiting list, the Board of Trustees and administration made the decision to finance the purchase of a permanent facility. The ideal space would be metro-accessible and in a neighborhood that allowed the students to become a part of the community. The space chosen was located in Alexandria – the first time in over thirty-five years that the school would not be in Arlington. The citizens of Alexandria knew little of about who we were yet they welcomed the students with open arms and hearts. The St. Coletta campus has grown to include three facilities in Alexandria. Our students and adult clients are well known for their community service projects, for working in a number of local businesses. Our students can be seen playing in parks and at local recreation centers. St. Coletta staff members participate on local Boards and commissions and patronize dozens of local stores and restaurants on a daily basis.

In 1997 St. Coletta became a provider of Medicaid Waver services for adults with retardation, autism and multiple disabilities. These services include day support and supported employment opportunities.

Who we serve

St. Coletta of Greater Washington currently operates three facilities in Alexandria serving 165 students and 26 adult clients – supported by 180 staff members including 15 special education teachers and 80 paraprofessionals. These programs provide educational and therapeutic services for a population that would be coded multiply disabled. All of our students and adults, whether autistic or mentally retarded, function within the retarded range and most have secondary disabling conditions such as: hearing impairments, speech/language impairments, orthopedic impairments, cerebral palsy, seizure disorder or other health impairments. Nearly 20% of those served use wheelchairs. Many children and adults are non-verbal and use some type of voice output devise or picture communication system to express themselves. Some children use feeding tubes for nourishment while others breathe through tracheotomies. The level of disabilities found at the school requires our intensive staff to student ratio.

The focus of our mission is to provide these children and adults with all the tools they need to become as independent as possible. We aim to nurture talents and build self-esteem while encouraging our students and clients with opportunities for choice. This movement toward self-determination, usually thought to be unrealistic for people with cognitive disabilities, is nevertheless, a basic human right. At St. Coletta, we strive to provide all the supports –

educational, therapeutic, medical, and emotional – our students need to achieve the highest level of independence possible. For some this could mean having their own apartment and maintaining long-term employment. For others basic life skills, such as brushing their teeth or dressing and eating independently are enormous accomplishments. Each small success is celebrated together as a community.

Our current population is composed of 80% of minority students, and roughly 25% of our living in foster care, group homes or with extended family members. Many have endured abuse, abandonment or the death of parents. Many of our families rely on public assistance as their primary source of income, and sometimes, our students come to school improperly medicated, sick, hungry, tired, malnourished, in pain, or emotionally distraught. St. Coletta becomes often the place they call home – the place they celebrate birthdays and holidays, and the only place they find unconditional love, respect and empowerment

The school can best be described as an independent, non-sectarian, non-profit organization which forges partnerships with local school districts in order to best serve persons with cognitive disabilities in their communities. St. Coletta accepts students ONLY by referral from Montgomery, Prince George and Charles counties in Maryland and Alexandria and the city of Manassas, Arlington, Fairfax and Loudon counties in Virginia. In the District of Columbia students are received from court proceedings, settlement agreements and Hearing Officer's Determinations. In other words, students join the program only when the public jurisdiction has determined that the student's needs cannot be met in a less restrictive setting in the public schools. According to Public Law 94-142 and the IDEA school systems must provide children with disabilities with a free, appropriate, public education (FAPE) within the system or the local education agency must contract for those services in a private placement such as St. Coletta.

Funding

The annual tuition is paid for each child by the local jurisdiction and is based on the actual cost of direct care. This tuition includes speech/language therapy, behavior services, music therapy, and adaptive physical education, nursing services, assistive technology services, social work services, hot lunch and snack. Occupational and physical therapy services and one to once attendant services are billed on an hourly basis per the amount prescribed for each child through the annual IEP. Our adult program costs vary by jurisdiction and are billable to Medicaid.

The quality of St. Coletta's program can be attested to by the frequent monitoring visits paid by the contracting jurisdictions. The State of Maryland assesses the program every three years and the State of Virginia every three with an additional visit at the mid-point of the cycle. St. Coletta is also a member of the Virginia Association of Individual Special Education Facilities (VAISEF), and independent association with standards more stringent than the Commonwealth.

Expansion to the District of Columbia

People with mental retardation and autism and their families in the Greater Washington area value the services provided by St. Coletta and the demand for our services has grown

exponentially. Our enrollment is nearly ten times what it was in 1993 and, in the seven years since purchasing our first building in Alexandria, we have quadrupled in size. St. Coletta continues to maintain a waiting list for admission for both the school and adult day support programs.

- **67% of current enrollment is from the District of Columbia**
- **90% of our families from the District qualify for free or reduced lunch**
- **25% of our students are in the foster care system**
- **We maintain a waiting list with an average of 50 students**

St. Coletta has always been mindful of the fact that the majority of the students and half of all the adults referred to us for service are from the District of Columbia. We have long felt the necessity of locating a program closer to the people that we serve. For the past five years we have been focused on identifying an appropriate site from which to provide services in the District of Columbia. We seriously considered property on Pennsylvania Avenue and 12th Street S.E. and at 3rd and H Streets N.E. For a variety of reasons neither of these sites was suitable

St. Coletta is a recognized innovator in special education providing all therapeutic services in an integrated model with a team approach. St. Coletta serves students and adults with challenging behaviors enabling them to continue to live within the community rather than in residential/institutional settings.

Teachers, therapists, job coaches and educational assistants work together on a daily basis to provide a cohesive approach for each child, with consistent expectations and goals. Every child at St. Coletta receives the therapies and services he or she needs regardless of the cost. Our student to staff ratio is approximately 2:1, and over half of our students have a "1:1" educational assistant that works with him or her all day, every day through the school year. We employ 6 speech/language therapists, 5 occupational therapists, 4 physical therapists, 2 social workers, an assistive technologist, an autism resource specialist, 2 behavior change specialists, an adaptive physical education instructor, a music therapist and 2 registered nurses. By having full-time therapists on staff, students' needs are addressed at any time throughout the day and the therapists' expertise is integrated with the educational curriculum.

Our students' progress is assessed internally and externally through their Individualized Education Plans (IEP). Teachers, therapists, families and caseworkers meet each fall to determine goals, objectives and needed services for each child. Throughout the year, teachers and therapists continuously evaluate students, and communicate progress through a "communication notebook" that travels with each child everyday. Teachers record their student successes and parents are able to keep in touch with staff either to reflect on their child's growth, or express any concerns they might have. Each child is formally assessed again each spring and the evaluation is shared with all stakeholders. Home school communication and parental involvement are essential ingredients for student success. For this reason alone, St. Coletta's location in the District is crucial for the students and families we serve.

Benefits of locating on Reservation 13

Two years ago District of Columbia officials who had heard about our search for property approached us and offered to help us locate a facility in the city. On the advice of the Office of Economic Development, we looked at some abandoned public school buildings and at the St. Elizabeth Hospital campus. All the possibilities involved the renovation of buildings that contained asbestos and lead and that were completely inaccessible to the disabled. It was decided that such retrofitting was too costly and that it would be preferable to build from the ground up. In the spring of 2001, Councilmember Sharon Ambrose suggested we consider a site in Ward 6 that had been occupied by the old jail. This tract of land is on the corner of 19th St. and Independence Avenue in the southeast quadrant of the city. The site is part of a 67- acre parcel known as Reservation 13 that, until recently, had been home to DC General Hospital. After visiting the site and expressing interest, we discovered through a title search that the Federal Government owns the land. Subsequently, the Mayor asked that GSA initiate a transfer of jurisdiction. Pursuant to their request, use of the entire 67 acres was transferred to the District for no compensation in November 2002.

St. Coletta has been criticized because the community was not aware of these proceedings. The land in question was not the property of the District and there is no mechanism for public input on a transfer of federal jurisdiction. It should be noted, however, that it was because of St. Coletta's interest in and pursuit of a portion of this property that the District acquired jurisdiction over the entire parcel.

Concern over what would end up on the rest of the parcel prompted the City Council to require that a public master planning process take place for all of Reservation 13. It is unfortunate that at the very first community meeting in January of 2002, the map of the Reservation was presented as a blank slate. Thus, even though numerous D.C. and federal officials from both the executive and legislative branches had for many months known of St. Coletta's interest in a ground lease for the land at 19th and Independence and had indicated to us their support for our plans, our proposed use of the site was not disclosed to the public and the first logical opportunity. This was, in hindsight, an error on the part of the Office of Planning. The Office of Planning had already formed a 'stakeholders committee' to help guide the public planning process and St. Coletta was invited to take part at that time. At the next public meeting pertaining to the master plan for Reservation 13, the Office of Planning disclosed St. Coletta's plans – this was perceived by many as a 'back door deal' with no opportunity for public input. As you can appreciate, some people who were participating in the process felt blindsided, upset or angry.

Notwithstanding this unfortunate beginning, St. Coletta has participated in every aspect of the planning process from the community charette to meetings with the ANC, the City Council, the Office of Planning and the Department of Transportation. This process has been very public and has given opponents numerous opportunities to voice their objections. It has also given St. Coloetta valuable community input on its plans. As discussed later, we have not only listened to the public but we have made many significant revisions to our plans to accommodate many legitimate neighborhood concerns.

Last spring the City Council voted to accept the Master Plan for Reservation 13. Shortly after that, on May 14, 2003, St. Coletta officials testified before the Sub-committee on Asian-Pacific Islander and Latino Affairs, Human Rights and Property Management in support of a ground lease with the city for four acres of land. Opponents had yet another chance to be heard during this hearing. St. Coletta addressed concerns of Councilmembers and the community and as a result all property south of Burke Street was stricken from the lease. In June the council voted to award St. Coletta the amended ground lease for approximately four acres of land for 99 years at the cost of $1 per year. The vote for approval was an overwhelming eleven in favor and two opposed. The terms of this lease have been characterized by opponents as a "sweetheart deal" when, in truth, it is not unusual for a non-profit to receive such a lease in exchange for providing much needed services to the community.

According to the terms of the lease St. Coletta has the use of less than four acres of land that will provide the basic footprint of the building along with the outdoor classroom spaces. The configuration of the outdoor spaces was driven by the metro easement on 19th Street plus access for buses, for 99 years. St. Coletta has temporary use of a parking lot to the east of the building site until such time as the proposed 20th Street is built. When the construction of 20th Street commences the city is obligated under the terms of the lease to provide St. Coletta with 100 parking spaces. These spaces can be in either structured or surface parking as long as it is a safe and reasonable distance from the school.

Plans for the Site and Proposed Facility

St. Coletta plans to use the four acre site to build a school and adult day program for 250 individuals most of whom reside in the District of Columbia After an intensive search for the right person to join us in this effort, St. Coletta was thrilled to secure the services of internationally acclaimed architect, Michael Graves. The facility will be approximately 99,000 square feet of space that is designed in accordance with our philosophy and approach to education. The overall space is centered around an interior village green that will become the center of our community. A series of "houses" and studio spaces surround the central core. The houses, where students will spend most of their day, will also group the students or adult clients by age. The houses will contain classrooms, therapy spaces, kitchens, bathrooms, offices and conference rooms. In between each house are studio spaces to be used for art, music, weaving physical therapy, horticulture and a sensory integration room. The building is organized around a 9,000 sq./foot "village green" and boasts a 2,500 square foot community room with a full service kitchen, a gymnasium, a hydrotherapy room and a health clinic. You will hear more about the building design from architect John Diebboll, a principal from Michael Graves and Associates who has been working with us on this project for two years. St. Coletta plans for this building to become a national model in providing services for the severely disabled and we are committed to creating it from the ground up.

Because the Metro runs under 19th Street at this site, St. Coletta could not build on the first 50 feet of this property. The required easement allows us to utilize this space for a series of outdoor classrooms designed by Susan Goltsman of MIG a landscape design firm from California. Ms. Goltsman was chosen to design the outdoor spaces because of her reputation as an expert in designing accessible outdoor environments for children. The outdoor classrooms are repeated on

the rear of the building where we will also have a kitchen garden and a greenhouse for growing plants and vegetables year-round. Currently there is a thirty-foot change in grade on the back of this site. Ms. Goltsman proposed taking advantage of this area by bringing a portion of it up to grade and routing the buses through the parking lot. This plan both insures that buses will never be parked on residential streets and protects our students while getting on and off the buses each day.

St. Coletta plans to take advantage of the metro accessibility at this site. More than 50% of our current staff members in Alexandria use the metro station that is 4 blocks from our facility – supported by Metrocheck provided to the employees. We anticipate that this number will be even higher at our D.C. location. Our students are travel-trained as a regular part of the vocational training program and we are thrilled that the elevator access to the Stadium/Armory Metro station is directly outside of our site.

The building design features some much needed community amenities. Local groups are invited to use the facility after school hours and on weekends. St. Coletta is offering the use of the gymnasium for athletic games and practices, the community room and full service kitchen for large meetings, trainings or other activities, and a series of conference rooms or the studios for smaller meetings. Larger events for hundreds of guests will be accommodated in the village green. We also hope to form a partnership with a local hospital so that our health clinic can be open a few days every month to serve the medical and dental needs of the cognitively disabled people in the larger DC community. We estimate the total cost of this facility to be around $20 million dollars. This amount will be raised and/or financed by St. Coletta and it represents a major investment in the neighborhood and the city. More importantly, it signals a new day for children and adults with severe cognitive and multiple disabilities in the Nation's Capital.

Our Partnership with the District of Columbia

Throughout the process of securing property and planning for expansion, St. Coletta has worked closely with city officials in the office of the mayor, the city council and the public schools. We remain committed to providing a quality educational, therapeutic and vocational program to as many District residents as the school system and Office of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities will refer to us. As a condition of our lease, the District will have the right of first refusal on all available spaces in this new facility.

We are also committed to providing training and staff development to teachers, therapists and aides employed by DCPS. We are, in fact, beginning a pilot training module this year, which will be offered to DC teachers at a reduced cost. We envision offering student teaching experiences and clinical experiences to teachers and therapists from local colleges and universities. We also plan to offer parent trainings that we hope can be expanded to include members of the wider community.

In addition we hope to work with Eastern High School, our nearest public school neighbor, on a career opportunity and training program. This would involve having staff from St. Coletta give presentations to students at Eastern highlighting for them the opportunities for employment

available in the fields of Speech, Occupational and Physical Therapy, School Nursing, Social Work and Counseling, Job Coaching and Transition Services. We will also hope to offer a job training program for individual attendants. Students interested in pursuing these careers will be invited to participate in an internship program at St. Coletta where they will shadow staff members to get a feel for what each job entails. Students having attended this program, who upon graduation wish to be hired as individual attendants, will be given preference.

Public Outreach, Community Participation and Responsiveness to Public Agencies

The two years leading up to this moment have included numerous community meetings and invitations for our future neighbors to visit us in Alexandria to learn about our organization. The community members selected by Ward Six Council member Sharon Ambrose to serve on the stakeholders planning committee for Reservation 13, were invited to spend a morning at the school to see first hand what the program could offer to the children of the District. This group included Ken Jarboe, the then-chairman of the local ANC. St. Coletta representatives were active participants in the series of a three-day community charette for the planning of Reservation 13 in March of 2002. We attended the three-days of meetings, distributed information about the project and gave a detailed presentation about the plans for the new facility.

St. Coletta has been before ANC 6B on several occasions at both the planning and zoning committee and the full commission meetings. In between meetings we have stayed in contact with several members of that commission. In addition, St. Coletta hosted two open community meetings. The first was held at RFK Stadium on May 5, 2003 where our design team, and a representative of DCPS Department of Special Education presented plans and listened to concerns. The second meeting was held on June 18, 2003 and began with a site walk with the architect and landscape architect who were brought in from out of town for the specific purpose of addressing community concerns and to answer questions. At this second meeting we were able to respond to many of the concerns that had been raised at the first meeting. St. Coletta also responded in writing to over 100 questions that members of the community emailed to us. These responses were also posted on our website along with renderings of the building.

Over the past two years we have had numerous meetings with the Office of Planning and more recently with DDOT and with the consultants hired to help the City with the grading and infrastructure plans for the rest of Reservation 13. St. Coletta's architects have adjusted the design on several occasions to comply with requests from city planners and from the ANC – a list of the most significant changes is attached to this testimony. St. Coletta presented our plans to the zoning committee of the Capitol Hill Restoration Society. St. Coletta officials testified before the City Council's sub-committee on Human Rights, Latino Affairs and Property Management in May. Last spring individual council members were visited and their input on the project was welcomed.

In all of these forums St. Coletta listened to and documented community concerns. Plans were changed based on those concerns including dropping from the lease all property south of Burke Street. In short, St. Coletta has made an enormous effort and gone to considerable expense to

accommodate the concerns of public officials and governing bodies as well as individual community members.

Consistency with the Master Plan

Throughout the discussions surrounding design, the architects, landscape designers and civil engineers have kept the Master Plan for Reservation 13 as their focus. The building was designed around the plan for the future extension of Burke Street along the Southern edge of our leased property and the creation of 20th Street from the mid-point of the Armory through the existing parking lot. The South end of the building was redesigned so that it projected a "front door" rather than a "back door" feeling to address the proximity to the Metro Station and to the proposed extension of Burke Street. This change included modifying windows, doors and the entire façade of the building so that there would be considerable curb appeal once Burke Street went through the property. The plans for the existing parking lot have been made with the idea that 20th Street will eventually be built there. The landscape plans include a double row of trees along both 19th Street and Independence Avenue as required by the Master Plan. The architect moved the entire location of the building to bring it closer to Independence Avenue because the master plan calls for the creation of a 'street wall' of buildings. It is in the best interest of St. Coletta and the neighborhood as a whole that the Master Plan be carried to fruition.

Application for a Planned Unit Development

Because Reservation 13 has always been under federal control the site is currently not zoned. When the transfer of jurisdiction was accepted by the D.C. Council and in order to retain some control over design and uses it was determined that a Planned Unit Development would be a requirement for anyone locating on the site. In addition, the Office of Planning suggested that through the PUD process St. Coletta could move forward with our zoning application in spite of the fact that the base zoning for the entire Reservation would not be completed for months. St. Coletta is applying for both a map amendment for SP-1 zoning which was suggested by the Office of Planning and for a PUD without needing any the exceptions from height or density requirements usually associated with such an application. In fact St. Coletta's project could also exist as a matter of right in an R-4 zone.

As required by PUD regulations we are offering a number of benefits and amenities to the community as required by PUD regulations. The first and most important of these is the service that St. Coletta will provide to the children and adults of Washington D.C. who suffer from severe disabilities. Currently one hundred and four of our students reside in the District of Columbia. They are students who, because of the severity of their disabilities, cannot be adequately educated or served in a public school setting. Washington D.C. Public Schools have two special education centers for children with severe disabilities -- Sharpe Health and Mamie D. Lee School. These schools are located in two aging public school buildings designed for regular education students. A recent independent survey indicated that 400 students in the D.C. Public School system were waiting either for evaluation or placement in special education programs.

In addition to the public schools, there are a few other private providers of educational program for autistic and mentally retarded children – Ivymount, The Phillips School, National Children's

Center and the Kennedy Institute. Representatives from each of these schools have visited us in Alexandria to learn more about our model programs. None of these programs provide continual care for ages four through adulthood. We have found that this continuity of service is critical for children and adults who thrive on stability and have a very difficult time accepting change. The range of therapies offered at St. Coletta, the community–based instruction, the vocational and transition program and our Family Outreach Initiative, far exceeds the programs offered other by other local service providers.

In addition to this most obvious benefit St. Coletta is offering to the community the use of a full court gymnasium, a 2,500 square foot community room with catering kitchen and a 9,000 sq./ft village green. These amenities will be available for use by bono fide community groups after school hours and on weekends. In order to ascertain interested groups St. Coletta has formed a community advisory committee composed of individuals from ANC 6B, the Capitol Hill Group Ministry, DC Special Olympics, CHAMPS, Bay St. Neighborhood, Sports on the Hill as well as a representative from the office of Sharon Ambrose. This group has met twice thus far, once on September 29, 2003 and again on October 27, 2003.

Community Opposition

While St. Coletta is pleased to have the support of the Capitol Hill Restoration Society as well as the considerable support of the City Council and the Office of Planning and the office of the Mayor, we have been disappointed at the lack of leadership, courage and foresight shown by ANC 6B. Despite our numerous appearances before this body they have consistently chosen to ignore the benefits that will clearly flow from this project to the most neglected and underserved of our citizens. They have chosen instead to take up the cry of a few malcontents whose main displeasure revolves around their mistaken impression that these very needy children do not merit this "choice" piece of property. There is also a ridiculous notion circulating among the chat rooms and on-line newsletters of Capitol Hill that St. Coletta, a relatively small non-profit, has hidden coffers of cash that would cover the cost of building city streets and providing other infrastructure for the Reservation 13 plan. This project is not a money making proposition but a charitable one. We are not building a shopping mall or office building; we are helping children. In contrast to the misguided thinking of the ANC, the stark reality is that St. Coletta is building a facility that will cost $20 million of which only $10 million has been raised to date. This means that the school will either have to raise a lot more money from public and private sources or take on considerable debt that will take years to repay. Most likely it will be a combination of both.

As previously stated, St. Coletta is focused on inclusion of individuals with disabilities in the larger community. A large part of our mission is to share our experience and talents with our neighbors by going out to participated in job sites or leisure activities or by bringing community members in to participate in the daily activities of St. Coletta. Our students and staff members have much to offer the Capitol Hill neighborhood and we hope that those who are opposed to this project will learn what Alexandrians already know – that bringing St. Coletta into your community benefits not only those we serve, but everyone surrounding us as well.

In closing, the entire St. Coletta community is grateful for this opportunity to expand our services into the Nation's Capital. We understood when we took on this project that there would

be bumps in the road. In spite of these obstacles we remain eager to extend our programs to include more children, adults and families while providing a model for a better way of serving persons with disabilities in our city.

Thank you for this opportunity to appear before you and explain our plans. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.