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May 10, 2006

Carol J. Mitten
Chairman
DC Zoning Commission
441 4th Street, NW
Suite 210 South
Washington, DC 20001

ZONING COMMISSION
District of Columbia

CASE NO. 06-06 FAX
EXHIBIT NO. 20

Dear Chairman Mitten:

My name is Michelle L. Coley, I am a parent and Board member for the most prestigious public charter school system on the east coast; Friendship Public Charter School.

I am a fourth generation Washingtonian; all of my siblings and cousins were raised and graduated from the DCPS, in particular I attended the old and graduated from the new Dunbar High School as an honor roll student; I am extremely proud of that fact. Dunbar helped me to become a young woman with poise and to have pride in who I was and to display that in what I did regardless of what it was even when I graduated as a pregnant teenager, which was not something that made my parents proud.

My siblings and cousins went to some of the best schools in the area. During that time there were no lotteries or mandatory restrictions on where you could go to school; your parents sent you to the schools that were the best for your education; developed rapport with teachers, parents and counselors and formed strong PTAs.

We had outstanding schools; concerned and caring teachers and no-nonsense principals that loved their children and their parents. There were obstacles but the "village" if you will allow that term, came together and made things happen whether it was related to the surrounding schools or to the children in the neighborhood; it got done!

I had an example by which to raise my child and I quickly learned what it was going to take to make sure he had the stability that I had growing up in Washington, DC with a solid base to stand on. My parents taught and I listened but they were there when I needed them. My first son went to public schools in Washington, DC; like my parents did for me, we sent him to the best schools that we could find within the city that would give him the best education within the DCPS and we made that happen for him; he graduated from Wilson High School and went on to college. We were very proud of that because we knew that we could find good public schools for him to attend and get what he needed to grow and learn and we did find that; he remained an out of boundary student for his entire academic career in DCPS. That was ok with us!

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As a baby boomer, I understand that we are living in a very stressful, scary and vulnerable time when our parents and our children need us to learn and understand them as well as continue to teach the proper etiquettes and respect and most of all teach and give love and to show others love. Well for those of us that do understand that and for those of us that are able to do that is a wonderful thing but there are those of us that have not been taught and cannot do that because we don't know how so we look towards the schools; the teachers, counselors and principals and clergy in many instances to help us with that. With so many distractions and ills for some of us that is all we have; that is all the love that a great many of our children and parents receive. They look for it and grab it up fiercely wherever they can get it from because they have to work and/or go to school but nevertheless are looking for a way to make things happen for themselves and their children, as they should.

As you all know the business of educating these days is different to put it mildly and we need to find ways to help each other with education and find ways to keep our children safe and learning. We have to find ways to continue to teach them how to love and how to respect and take care of each other and one day to take care of us. As much as I was a proponent of NOT sending our second son to a Public Charter School because we all graduated from DCPS, I found that we could not in good conscious send our son to a school just to be combative about a process or *something new* that we did not understand because it was about his education not about loyalty to a school system that was not as reliable as it once was. It was hard but we did what we thought we *HAD* to do to get him a first rate education or the best that we could find because, you see, DCPS was failing us and we did not know what to do about that other than to put him somewhere else after first grade.

We have a supplementing force that can fill the gaps that are very visible in our school system; that force is the Public Charter School System. They are forging a way for us to continue to educate our children. It is a sad that the school system that I was so proud of is falling apart but it is a fact and a true one; if we are going to continue to help our children succeed it cannot be about loyalty; or putting in new rules and regulations to create academic hardships or restrictive processes to block what we don't understand *BUT* can visually see is helping our youngsters and giving the parents confidence again about education and learning and building rapport with teachers, counselors and principals.

Politicking is not the answer to this problem; we are. We have to have enough vision and awareness to see that if we work together we can fix the DCPS but we have to allow what is available and working to assist our families as they move forward with their children. All of the charter schools do not work but the ones that don't work fade away and the ones that do stand strong and continue to make improvements and changes for *OUR* children; all of *OUR* children because, you see, it is about the children.

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What we have are schools where parents can make a choice; we have schools within the DCPS that are working and others that are struggling to find a way to stay afloat which is good but we also have Public Charter Schools that can fill the gaps and work along with the DCPS to help give parents a choice, as well as, build strong competition to be better at what they do and to rebuild what they have created. Without the DCPS as a model to begin with there would be no Public Charter Schools but that is not a bad thing; it is a good thing; it has become one of the answers to education.

We need Public Charter Schools just like we need the DCPS but we have to make good decisions about how we are going to fix what we have and what rules that we are putting in place that is going to create hardships. We have areas that need and deserve good, reliable, functioning, clean, safe schools; why would we want to deter that? Why would we want to make it difficult for our parents and our children? Is that the best that we can do? Is that how we show them love and how we show them responsibility by not working together to refurbish old closed schools that have become eyesores and hang outs for drug dealers and others because we want to keep something new that could be good for them out of the neighborhood? Aren't we hurting the children and the parents? We really need to take an honest look at that and be true to our children; it is about our children. If it is important enough to send our children on their way when they are able to take care of themselves isn't it important enough to do the best that we can for them when they are youngsters to find and give them the resources so that they can be productive adults? If a Public Charter School system can help with that why not allow them the opportunity to educate? We cannot in good faith put rules and regs in place that could conceivably stop an organization from succeeding when it just might help our children. We cannot continue to have schools like Anacostia High, which have some of the brightest students in the city, to be the model because we can't seem to fix it.

Come on folks we can do better than that and I hope that we will because the *village* is a little different but it still should have the same purpose when it comes to raising a child, wouldn't you agree?

Sincerely,

Michelle L. Coley
Parent Representative
Friendship Public Charter School System

Cc: Anthony Hood, Vice Chair
Gregory Jeffries, Commissioner
Kevin Hildebrand, Commissioner
John Parsons, Commissioner

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**Friendship Public
Charter School, Inc.**

Fax

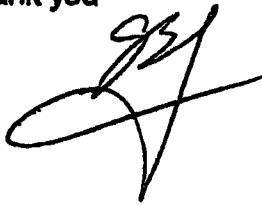
To: Sharon Schellin
Zoning Commission
From: Barry Lofton, Community Resource
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Fax: 202-727-6072 Pages: 2 / 4
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Thank you



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