

Testimony  
of  
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COO  
Community Academy Public Charter Schools  
before the  
DC Zoning Commission  
May 11, 2006

**ZONING COMMISSION**  
CASE No. 06-06  
**ZONING COMMISSION**  
EXHIBIT No. 25  
District of Columbia  
CASE NO.06-06  
EXHIBIT NO.33

Truthfully, CAPCS is well established and has been fortunate to secure the facilities it needed to expand, though not without difficulty. It is not likely to be significantly affected by this attempt to curb placement of charter schools in residential areas. Those most likely to be shut out are smaller charter schools, either those just starting out or boutique schools with a more narrow focus. Many serve the early childhood segment. So why am I here?

CAPCS is speaking out against these proposed zoning changes because it is deeply committed to the concept of charter schools. And what hinders some charter schools hinders all of us. We believe charter schools can work successfully within the larger publicly-funded school arena. Providing parents with more educational options can only benefit the city's children. With nearly one in four DC students currently enrolled in a charter school, it is fair to say that District parents agree.

Despite the steady growth in popularity of charter schools, there remains a hardened core of individuals who see charter schools as an outside threat to the traditional public schools and continue to work to thwart their development. These proposed zoning changes look suspiciously like a backdoor attempt to do just that.

We were pleased to see the proposed changes to the original setdown, particularly the revised definition of a public school to clearly include charter schools. However, the proposed regulations remain too restrictive, both philosophically and practically. Their effect will be to all but preclude smaller charter schools from securing suitable facilities in residential areas.

A primary purpose of a charter school is to provide an alternative to the traditional public school. This alternative nature can take many forms. There might be a focus on a particular area such as the arts or business. A school may serve only a limited age range, like early childhood. More narrowly focused charter schools are likely to be smaller and require less space. Residential areas are often the best source of potential sites for these charters. Parents, particularly of young children, see the quiet, less congested residential areas as providing a better environment for learning. They appreciate a neighborhood school.

This is not to suggest that there aren't challenges to having a school, any school, in a residential area. Traffic and parking are always a concern. Such difficulties can be worked out through regulation and negotiation. It's in its

own best interest for a charter school to be a good neighbor. We have found that reasonable solutions can be worked out by addressing concerns honestly and fairly

These zoning regulations would in effect eliminate the traditional “matter of right” for charter schools, potentially causing them to go through the BZA process to locate in a residential area. In practical terms, would any potential seller or lessor patiently wait for an application to wend its way through BZA in this hot real estate market? Charter schools are somewhat unique in that they have a narrow window of opportunity for opening. They must be ready to open in late August or wait an additional year. Timing is everything.

Charter schools have gained traction and are now an integral part of the District’s educational system. They’ve done it usually with only grudging support from the city and DCPS, particularly in the area of facilities and the access to excess DCPS space. Just when it appears that the city may start adopting a more sensible approach, we face this flanking attack. The strategy of charter school opponents seems to be: If we can’t beat them, we’ll confine them

We strongly urge you to reject these proposed regulations which only hinder the ability to provide District children with educational options that they deserve.

Thank you

Good Evening. I'm T Wendell Butler, COO of Community Academy Public Charter Schools (CAPCS) We are about to conclude our 8<sup>th</sup> year of operation, making CAPCS among the oldest DC Charter Schools We are also the second largest CAPCS serves approximately 1,000 students in grades pre-school through 8<sup>th</sup> on four campuses around the city. Our expansion over the years has made us keenly aware of the difficulties of securing appropriate facilities for a charter school It has also provided insights into the value of having a school be part of a neighborhood.

When famed bank robber Willie Sutton was asked why he robbed banks, his response was the epitome of clarity and logic "Because that's where the money is," he said. The same logic applies in considering why schools, including charter schools, should be located in residential areas. Because that's where the children are. Three of our campuses are located in residential areas Although CAPCS accepts – and enrolls – children from all parts of the city, we have found that the majority come from the area surrounding the school The school becomes an anchor for a neighborhood. It has been our experience that opening a school often acts as a catalyst for improvement in a neighborhood