

## Cochran, Patricia (DCOZ)

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**From:** Leigh McCue <leigh@vesseldynamics.com>  
**Sent:** Monday, July 12, 2021 12:16 PM  
**To:** DCOZ - BZA Submissions (DCOZ)  
**Subject:** BZA Application No. 20472: The River School

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### Comments in Support

Much has been said about what a great program River School is, though the naysayers are quick to comment that all schools have a lofty mission. River School is not like all schools, nor is it like other private schools. River's very unique mission draws families like mine to the District. We moved from Virginia, where we had to fight for the support services our deaf child is entitled to under ADA and IDEA. Ultimately we made the decision to move to DC in large part to send our child to River School. The time we had been spending driving all over town for speech therapy, pursuing educational options, frequent audiology appointments, arguing with state agencies for needed supports, etc... have been replaced with time spent as a family, as all those services became available under a single unified umbrella at River School.

I've seen in forums some of the opposition pointing to Gallaudet's educational system, wondering why River isn't simply part of the programs at Kendall Demonstration Elementary School (KDES) and Model Secondary School for the Deaf (MSSD). I do not know how much familiarity you have with deaf education, so a nutshell summary, in case you do not have a background in this, is as follows. KDES and MSSD are wonderful programs, and frankly we also moved to DC so that we would have these as a plan b for our child. Those programs are strongly American Sign Language (ASL) focused, and while we do use ASL quite a bit at home, our daughter prefers an educational environment where she can participate fully with both hearing and deaf peers - an inclusive environment made possible by River School. Indeed, as she graduated from River this past year, we specifically asked her if she wanted to consider KDES for her next school, and she stated that she'd prefer to continue with speaking and listening as her primary form of educational delivery. It is worth noting that I have also reached out to our local DC public school a handful of times over the years to see what sorts of supports they'd be able to provide a deaf child - I never received a response. My husband and I both went to public schools for K-12. My core instinct is to utilize and support the public school system. But it is well-established that ADA and IDEA are underfunded mandates. River School delivers on those mandates for deaf and hard of hearing children when public schools cannot.

I've been saddened the last couple years watching the NW DC arguments about the trolley trail, the Lab School property lease, and now River School growth. Seeing neighborhood signs advocating against making the trolley trail ADA accessible and opposing special needs kids' schools seems to indicate that NW DC residents do not want special needs kids around (and it particularly saddens me that some of the first things these new readers read are yard signs opposing their schools or right to access). Indeed, the tone is pretty transparent in much of the messaging in ANC meetings and web forums where opponent's comments indicate that River would be a great school for a different neighborhood. I moved to the neighborhood for the school. Please support inclusivity and River School's community of deaf and hard of hearing children.

Respectfully,  
Leigh McCue-Weil  
5405 Sherier PI NW  
Washington, DC 20016  
202-684-0062

Board of Zoning Adjustment  
District of Columbia  
CASE NO.20472  
EXHIBIT NO.43

[leigh@vesseldynamics.com](mailto:leigh@vesseldynamics.com)