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March 13, 2010

Greetings Mayor Euille, Vice Mayor Donley, and members of City Council,

My name is Marianne Hetzer. I appreciate the opportunity to offer my perspective as a resident of the City, a TC Williams and Leadership Alexandria graduate, a parent and an active volunteer. For the past several months, I have been a member of the School Based Health Care Initiative Planning Group and I'm speaking on behalf of the Planning Group this morning.

Alexandria is poised to make history as the first jurisdiction in Virginia to make comprehensive physical and mental health services available to adolescents where they spend the most time -- within a school building. There are now 1,700 School Based Health Centers (SBCH) in the United States\* though, sadly, none in Virginia. Legislation is pending in Congress\*\* that would authorize a grant-based program to operate and implement SBHCs. And SBHCs are defined and recognized as authorized providers in the State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP), as of February 2009.

The planning process for a SBHC in Alexandria began last year when representatives from the Alexandria Health Department, ACPS, Inova Health System, Alexandria PTA Council and Alexandria Department of Mental Health, Mental Retardation and Substance Abuse collaborated to create a vision, mission and strategic plan for Alexandria's own SBHC, at TC Williams High School. The process was made simpler because many of the services associated with SBHCs are already provided by the doctor, nurses and counselors at the Adolescent Health Center on Braddock Road. These services include treatment of minor illness, immunizations, and physicals for sports and other activities as well as mental health and substance abuse counseling, and reproductive health services in accordance with state law. With assistance from administrators at TC Williams, we identified a location within the new, state-of-the-art high school to accommodate a larger, more modern, more accessible facility than the shabby, 21-year-old 20X40 foot trailer behind Bradlee Shopping Center. Because the Health Center is part of the Alexandria Health Department, its services are available to all adolescents in the City between the ages of 12 and 19. The proposed location within TC Williams is uniquely positioned to allow access from both inside and outside the building without compromising security or confidentiality.

The relocation of the Adolescent Health Center to TC Williams will facilitate sharing of City resources, avoid duplication of services, and create possibilities for additional services at no additional cost. TC Williams' school nurse, Nancy Runton, is enthusiastic about the opportunity to work more closely with City and Health Department providers, collaborating with them in caring for the City's youth, many of whom are seen both in the clinic at TC and the Health Center. The location within TC Williams affords the opportunity to serve at least twice as many youth because of easier accessibility before, during and after the school day.

Additional services and programs may be offered because of the availability of space in the school outside of school hours for counseling groups, seminars and workshops.

Other indicators that the SBHC is a move in the right direction have come from students and parents. The Planning Group recently undertook a survey of students at TC Williams' King Street campus. About 40% of students reported having used the services of the Health Center on Braddock Road and 80% of students reported that they would use the services of a Wellness Center located inside the school building. Commonly reported barriers to using the current facility include difficulty leaving school for appointments and difficulty getting home or back to school after appointments. Overwhelmingly, students reported their two greatest health concerns to be unplanned pregnancy and substance abuse. Also this week, the President of the Alexandria PTA Council asked each school PTA President to offer or decline support for the SBHC at TC Williams for the purpose of gaining consensus. Eleven of the 16 Presidents offered support and none declined support.

It is a pleasure to advocate for an initiative that is not only socially and educationally progressive but also shows careful stewardship of existing resources. The Teen Wellness Center at TC will have a positive impact on Alexandria by enabling adolescents to succeed physically, emotionally, socially and academically.

Thank you for your consideration.

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*\*according to the WK Kellogg Foundation which sponsors the School Based Health Care Policy Program*

*\*\* The School-Based Health Clinic Establishment Act of 2007 (S. 600/H.R. 4230)*