

## Written Testimony

**Name:** Hannah Mermelstein

**Zip Code:** 19119

**Testimony:**

I am writing as an educator and as an SDP parent, in support of our students and teachers throughout the district, and specifically at Northeast High School, who are making connections between their own lives and those of people in Palestine. I want to specifically shout out Keziah Ridgeway, an amazing educator who is being targeted by people disingenuously and falsely claiming that she is antisemitic. As a Jew, I am particularly sensitive to people using accusations of antisemitism as a way to shut down discussion about Palestine. Please support free speech and support Keziah Ridgeway.

**Attachments (if provided):**



**Name:** Grady Lights

**Zip Code:** 19082

**Testimony:**

Please replace my comments submitted yesterday, which has a wrong birth year for Ghandi, with these. 🙏🙏 “Truth never damages a cause that is just.” – Ghandi (1869 - 1948). Teaching, learning; the facts & values they produce & preserve; the processes & personnel that make it all happen is “a cause that is just”. Public education, like legal testimony in court, is bound to truth, the WHOLE truth. In both settings, when partial, bad things happen: mis-education in one; injustice in the other. Consequently, public education & its administration must expand, not contract facts, evidence; protect & preserve this process, not persecute those who advocate or execute it. Therefore, surveilling & deciding to censor classroom discussion of BOTH sides of the Hamas-Israeli War calls for a sustained objection. Otherwise, the truths of Palestinians, as well as Israelis face discrimination. The public is miseducated, & peace is pushed that much farther away.

**Attachments (if provided):**

**Name:** Amy Chai

**Zip Code:** 19140

**Testimony:**

ONE SENTENCE TO READ ALOUD IN FULL: As reported in the Philadelphia Inquirer, teacher Keziah Ridgeway made public gun threats against Jews while it went unreported that teacher Norman MacQueen publicly told Jews to "watch ur necks", "kick rocks ad die" ad "this is a promise not a threat."

**Attachments (if provided):**

**Name:** Cassie Grey

**Zip Code:** 19148

**Testimony:**

Dear Board of Education, I'm submitting the following facts for the record because tonight's anticipated spoken testimony will attempt to obscure them: Northeast High School teacher Keziah Ridgeway made gun threats against Jews on her public social media accounts, as reported in the Philadelphia Inquirer. The district's social studies curriculum director Ismael Jimenez expressed support for these threats. Mitchell Elementary teacher Norman Shaw MacQueen told Jews on public social media accounts to "watch ur necks" "kick rocks and die" and "this is a promise not a threat." As the governing body responsible for the district, what will you be doing about these instances of SDP admin and teachers calling for violence against Jews on their public social media accounts? Thank you.

**Attachments (if provided):**

**Name:** Horaace Clouden

**Zip Code:** 19139

**Testimony:**

**Attachments (if provided):**

<https://drive.google.com/open?id=1KU2AZFRLtOk1InjVNvkKkKHi6ZpQ4e8l>

**Name:** Bassem Saad

**Zip Code:** 19147

**Testimony:**

equal rights, equal protection

**Attachments (if provided):**

<https://drive.google.com/open?id=1WDujBsjiWAapNkZQmZg12ZTke-7oDDEL>



**Name:** Chana (Jennifer) Helfand

**Zip Code:** 19072

**Testimony:**

Please see the attached document in support of Keziah Ridgeway

**Attachments (if provided):**

[https://drive.google.com/open?id=1LJcy46nSQoSqOzwFJPz1\\_stTptJ1F5Xq](https://drive.google.com/open?id=1LJcy46nSQoSqOzwFJPz1_stTptJ1F5Xq)

**Name:** Barbara Dowdall

**Zip Code:** 19144

**Testimony:**

Attached

**Attachments (if provided):**

<https://drive.google.com/open?id=1dI7yFco-knLOqanMyPJAYeXkBSA4MMBB>

**Name:** Jordan Kardasz

**Zip Code:** 19144

**Testimony:**

**Attachments (if provided):**

[https://drive.google.com/open?id=1rOBJ-ZuVzd26td3pxoVQriH\\_OZfjrwn](https://drive.google.com/open?id=1rOBJ-ZuVzd26td3pxoVQriH_OZfjrwn)

**Name:** Norman Shaw MacQueen

**Zip Code:** 19805

**Testimony:**

Concerns Over Censorship and Unfair Disciplinary Action from an SDP Educator

**Attachments (if provided):**

[https://drive.google.com/open?id=1\\_LubSMazHHcV\\_4A73xfCKLDYoFHfWz8t](https://drive.google.com/open?id=1_LubSMazHHcV_4A73xfCKLDYoFHfWz8t)

**Name:** Jordan Levy

**Zip Code:** 19143

**Testimony:**

I am the Communications Director for Councilmember Nicolas O'Rourke, submitting written testimony on his behalf

**Attachments (if provided):**

<https://drive.google.com/open?id=1eRnXskxof0s3bT5YFr1-ycOg747b7gcp>

**Name:** Harmony Thompson

**Zip Code:** 0

**Testimony:**

Good afternoon members of the Board and Superintendent Watlington, community members, students, and families. I am here to speak about and support my colleague, Keziah Ridgeway. I have taught with Mrs. Ridgeway for 8 years, and I know her to be dedicated and hard-working, fair and trustworthy, intelligent, compassionate, and an advocate for her students. This is in stark contrast to the false picture of her communicated in the media and by the Jewish Family Association. She is not aggressive or anti semitic, and she is not "indoctrinating impressionable students", she is teaching intelligent scholars! She has been targeted as part of a local and national campaign against educators who speak up against all injustice, but specifically the killing of Palestinian people, and current events in Gaza, The West Bank and Israel. Like many other social justice educators, she is being unfairly targeted and silenced. Mrs. Ridgeway teaches at the highest level (AP and IB courses), at Northeast High School, one of the best high schools in Philadelphia. If you ask her students about her, you will understand how beloved she is at our school. They respect her as their teacher and value her as an advisor and club leader. I am here to speak about the ways in which she exemplifies the academic mission of the School District. One of the Guiding Principles of the Social Studies Curriculum in our district is to "Understand the world by actively thinking about important global issues, forming unique opinions, and promoting fairness, understanding, and respect for different ideas and diverse cultures." This is exactly what Mrs. Ridgeway does in her classroom. Our students know there are huge issues facing our world today and they need to learn to think critically about those issues in real time. Last year she asked students to develop connections between the past and the present, between struggles of communities in different places and time periods around the globe. This is what we are hired to do as educators. We cannot shy away from a topic because it is complicated! We embrace nuance and complexity in our teaching. The Academic Standards in the Arts require that we teach students to "Compare uses of art in a variety of societal, cultural, and historical contexts and make connections to uses of art in contemporary and local contexts." VA:Cn11.1.IIa Again, this is what Mrs. Ridgeway does in her classroom. She encourages students to make connections with each other and among global communities. Northeast High School is an incredibly diverse school and that is a huge source of strength and pride for us. There are many Palestinian students, Muslim students, Black students, Arab students, and students who have come from communities in struggle. Mrs. Ridgeway is a pillar of our school community, and someone who reflects the identities of many of our students. Our students need her. And frankly, the school district needs to protect her from the discrimination and intimidation she has been experiencing because of doing her job! Thank you for your time, Harmony Thompson Art Teacher and SBTL @ Northeast High School

**Attachments (if provided):**

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**Name:** Katherine Riley

**Zip Code:** 19104

**Testimony:**

I am submitting written testimony in support of my colleague Keziah Ridgeway who was recently the target of a disingenuous article in the Philadelphia Inquirer (The Jewish Federation of Greater Philadelphia filed the complaint with the Philadelphia School District; Northeast High teacher Keziah Ridgeway said she's been the target of Islamophobic attacks) and the Jewish News Service (Philadelphia teacher 'reassigned offsite' while public school district investigates alleged Jew-hatred). Mrs. Ridgeway's achievements are numerous and any public discourse that accuses her of spreading hate are dubious at best. She is an anti-racist educator whose focus on equality and social justice inspires not only her students but fellow teachers like me. I have had the pleasure of working at Northeast with Mrs. Ridgeway for the last four years where my teaching load is exclusively senior level social studies courses. That means many of the students I teach are former students of hers. To call that a gift is a significant understatement. Students come to my class equipped with critical thinking skills, open-minds, and passion for justice inside and outside of the classroom. Many of her former students are now also classroom teachers, which is testament to her positive impact as an educator. She is a model teacher who deserves better than repeated attacks against her character.

**Attachments (if provided):**



**Name:** Amanda Zaid

**Zip Code:** 19147

**Testimony:**

Unfair treatment of NEHS teacher

**Attachments (if provided):**

<https://drive.google.com/open?id=1QB4FoF9pb7sU7MNFV2t1GtSwkynCXIka>



*Powelton Village Civic Association, Inc.*

*P.O. Box 7616 Philadelphia, PA. 19101*

Mr. Reginald L. Streater, Esq.  
President  
Board of Education  
Education Center, Suite 101  
440 N. Broad Street  
Philadelphia, PA 19130

August 23, 2024

Re: Support Letter, Request for Authorization to Extend KOZ, 3025 John F. Kennedy Blvd.

Dear President Streater and Philadelphia School Board Members:

Thank you for the opportunity to express our support for the request for authorization to extend the KOZ at all parcels associated with 3025 John F. Kennedy Blvd. The Powelton Village Civic Association (PVCA) has been working with Brandywine Realty Trust for almost 10 years to improve the quality of life in West Philadelphia. As part of a community benefits agreement, the Mantua Powelton Alliance was formed, enabling grants to schools serving our community, rental and foreclosure prevention assistance, and provided funding to offset the costs of PVCA's master plan. It is also providing significant support for affordable housing development in Mantua and Powelton.

Brandywine has approached their work with integrity, quality, respect and heart. They have built quality structures sensitive to global warming issues and community input. Brandywine's ability to continue to impact our community is tied directly to their ability to lease space in Schuylkill Yards. The KOZ incentive helps developers like Brandywine build on incredibly difficult sites, and the incentive is an absolute necessity to help companies decide to locate in redeveloping areas of Philadelphia. We therefore urge your approval to extend KOZ at all of their parcels associated with 3025 JFK Blvd.

Respectfully,

Michael Jones  
Co-chair, Zoning Committee  
Powelton Village Civic Association

Hello Philadelphia School Board Members,

My testimony pertains to students receiving special education services as it pertains to the facilities planning process. Many contractors and consultants do not understand how students with disabilities are placed in this district. They do not understand the reason a visually impaired student living in West Philadelphia travels to Lincoln High School in the Northeast is because the instructors for this population are at that school and across the country, these instructors are scarce. Or, they rarely understand those students living with sensory issues need more self-contained classes and cannot sit in a class of 33 students, thus the need for more classes in a building. Or, another building is full and therefore a class for students living with Intellectual Disabilities has to be opened in another school building.

Furthermore, these decisions about possible school closings must involve all stakeholders, to include Caregivers, Students, Teachers, Administrators, and the Community.

Thank you.

In Service,

Cecelia Thompson

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*Cecelia Thompson*

*Former Board Member - School District of Philadelphia*

*Commissioner - Mayors Commission on People with Disabilities - Philadelphia*

<https://www.phila.gov/departments/mayors-office-for-people-with-disabilities/commission/>

*Panel Member - Governors Special Education Advisory Panel (SEAP)*

<https://www.pattan.net/About-Us/Partners/The-Special-Education-Advisory-Panel-SEAP>



August 12, 2024

Mr. Reginald L. Streater, Esq.  
President  
Board of Education  
Education Center, Suite 101  
440 N. Broad Street  
Philadelphia, PA 19130

Re: Support Letter, Request for Authorization to Extend KOZ,  
3025 John F. Kennedy Blvd.

Dear President Streater and Philadelphia School Board Members:

Thank you for the opportunity to express my support for the request for authorization to extend KOZ at all parcels associated with 3025 John F. Kennedy Blvd. Centennial Parkside Community Development Corporation has worked with Brandywine Realty Trust for more than 7 years to improve the quality of life in West Philadelphia. Their support and partnership has enabled us to sustain and grow as an organization, to conduct impactful analysis, and to strengthen community knowledge of the development process. Additionally, financial support from Brandywine allowed us to purchase a strategically placed property, which will enable the community to develop much needed low-moderate income housing.

Brandywine has approached our work together with integrity, quality, respect and heart. They really care about our community and have repeatedly demonstrated this care through action. Through dedicated effort on the company as a whole and individual employees, Brandywine has succeeded in building long-standing trust based relationships with community leaders, relationships that extend well beyond what we see from other external partners. Brandywine's ability to continue to impact our community is tied directly to their ability to lease space in Schuylkill Yards. The KOZ incentive helps developers like Brandywine build on incredibly difficult sites, and the incentive is an absolute necessity to help companies decide to locate in redeveloping areas of Philadelphia.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jessi Koch". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Jessi" being more prominent than the last name "Koch".

Jessi Ray Koch

Director of Equitable Development / Acting Co-Executive Director



Centennial Parkside CDC

August 15, 2024

Mr. Reginald L. Streater, Esq.  
President  
Board of Education  
Education Center, Suite 101  
440 N. Broad Street  
Philadelphia, PA 19130

Re: Support Letter, Request for Authorization to Extend KOZ, 3025 John F. Kennedy Blvd.

Dear President Streater and Philadelphia School Board Members:

Thank you for the opportunity to express our support for the request for authorization to extend KOZ at all parcels associated with 3025 John F. Kennedy Blvd. Mount Vernon Manor CDC has been working with Brandywine Realty Trust since 2017 to improve the quality of life in West Philadelphia. Brandywine Realty Trust, from the start of the Schuylkill Yards project, has approached this milestone project in a different way than other developers here in Philadelphia. Brandywine and the project team have consistently engaged the communities that surround the project in an authentic way and have responded positively to community concerns about the project. Their support and partnership has enabled us to continue our work in being a champion for affordable housing developments within the Mantua community.

Brandywine has approached our work together with integrity, quality, respect and heart. They genuinely care about our community and have repeatedly demonstrated this care through action. Brandywine's ability to continue to impact the Mantua and Powelton community is tied directly to their ability to lease space in Schuylkill Yards. The KOZ incentive helps developers like Brandywine build on difficult sites, and the incentive is an absolute necessity to help companies decide to locate in redeveloping areas of Philadelphia.

Respectfully,



Michael Thorpe, Executive Director Mt. Vernon Manor CDC

