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Board of Standards and Appeals
250 Broadway
New York, NY 10007

*Testimony in Support of Housing for Homeless LGBTQ Youth
January 28, 2020*

My name is Amanda Davis, an Astoria resident and project manager of the NYC LGBT Historic Sites Project, an award-winning initiative to document historic places connected to the city's LGBT community. Our project has highlighted the Ali Forney Center on our website for its significant contributions to the city's history and its life-saving work to provide housing for homeless LGBT youth. Regarding today's hearing, our project team strongly supports the variances for a new shelter for LGBT youth in Astoria.

The Ali Forney Center -- founded in 2002 in New York City following the murder of its namesake, a homeless gender non-conforming young person -- is the nation's largest provider of housing, health care, and support services for homeless LGBT youth. The center provides 157 emergency and transitional beds, and the space in Astoria will be its first permanent housing project.

LGBT youth are most at-risk of being homeless, largely because their families cannot accept their sexual identity and/or gender expression and throw them out of their homes. As a result, many LGBT young people are left to fend for themselves in the streets, putting them in physical danger. The Ali Forney Center, which estimates that 40% of NYC's homeless youth are LGBT, was created to help alleviate this problem by providing a safe, home-like environment. In addition, the center assists all its residents in completing their high school education/GED and 75% go on to college, giving these young people an opportunity to succeed as adults.

Our project team, comprised of professional historic preservationists, believes that the new construction project for Astoria was designed to an appropriate scale for the surrounding neighborhood and it will not have any negative impacts on the community since the requested variances are just a few feet for setbacks and building height. The new center will also provide 24/7 staffing and will have street-facing security cameras, which will contribute to neighborhood safety as a whole.

Our project team urges the BSA to support these variances. Thank you.