

To: Education, Energy, and Environment Committee

From: Carol Naughton, CEO, Purpose Built Communities

Subject: Favorable Testimony for Maryland's ENOUGH Act (SB 482 / HB 694)

Good afternoon, Chair, Vice-Chair, and Members of the Committee. My name is Carol Naughton and I'm the CEO of Purpose Built Communities, a nonprofit organization that works with local leaders nationwide to strengthen neighborhoods of concentrated poverty to become places with deep, durable pathways to prosperity for everyone who calls that neighborhood home.

Purpose Built Communities supports more than twenty-five neighborhood revitalization initiatives across the country, including one here in Maryland, in the Cherry Hill neighborhood of Baltimore. We see tremendous opportunity in Maryland and the City of Baltimore and are excited to be part of the Governor's transformative effort to give those in underserved areas a pathway to a better life.

I am here today in support of the ENOUGH Act, a bill that would fundamentally reshape the state of Maryland's response to decades of underinvestment in low-income neighborhoods. But, before I speak on the ENOUGH Act, I'd like to provide some observations about my time as a nonprofit leader, working with communities that have been historically underinvested.

At Purpose Built Communities, we believe that neighborhoods are an important unit of change to dramatically increase upward economic mobility for those who have been left behind. Our neighborhood model fundamentally changes the conditions in which families and children live, work, play, and learn so that neighborhoods become healthy, sustainable, and aspirational, turning them into places that accelerate upward economic mobility.

One in eight Maryland children live in poverty, and 60,000 Maryland children live in neighborhoods of concentrated poverty—where at least 30 percent of households live below the poverty line—conditions that are barriers to children and families being able to fulfill their potential. Safe and affordable housing is scarce, school systems are underfunded, and ongoing population loss weakens social cohesion.

These conditions prevent children and families from accessing the resources necessary for a person to succeed in the United States. And that can have lifelong consequences.

It is for these reasons that I stand in support of the ENOUGH Act. It is a bold proposal to end concentrated poverty in Maryland by encouraging a comprehensive, long-term, community-centered approach.

The ENOUGH Act will fund and assist the development of new neighborhood and regional place-based partnerships while strengthening existing ones through a competitive grant process. This grant program will support Maryland's children and young people through education opportunities and career readiness. Recognizing that neighborhoods are critical to improving economic mobility, the bill will boost families and communities by providing access to good

jobs, safe neighborhoods, affordable housing, and quality education and healthcare, including mental health services.

Through place-based initiatives, this legislation will target the root causes of hardship in communities – rural, suburban, and urban – that have disproportionately high numbers of children living in poverty. Place-based initiatives take an evidence-based approach, looking at what children, families, and neighborhoods actually need and providing concrete improvements including affordable housing, education programs, family support, community development, and healthcare for those who need it most, changing the trajectory and outcomes for a child's future college and career success.

The ENOUGH Act will deploy a whole-of-government approach designed to give neighborhoods what they need to not just survive, but thrive. The strength of the ENOUGH Act is in its power to create critical infrastructure for place-based partnerships, expand access to resources to implement this work throughout Maryland, and set a national example for statewide action to improve economic mobility.

And notably, this bill is intentional about ensuring that the voices of those closest to the problem are centered in finding a solution. A key part of the ENOUGH Act entails working with community organizations, nonprofits, anchor institutions, community members, and other key stakeholders to develop locally focused, targeted plans of action to address poverty.

Reinvesting in neighborhoods and those living in them is central to Purpose Built Communities' mission and the ENOUGH Act. Our network members, including in Cherry Hill, are on the front lines of this issue and can tell you how important the ENOUGH Act would be to our efforts. Our network members have seen tremendous success, developing new mixed-income housing and opening new schools to serve thousands of kids. In neighborhoods where this work has had time to take root, graduation and income rates are up, and crime is down. With the ENOUGH Act, we would be able to partner with the state to deliver results faster and help the Governor deliver on his mission to end child poverty in Maryland.

Years of haphazard actions have left our cities and towns behind. Simply put, we can't afford another round of empty promises and half-measures. That's why I'm advocating for this bill: it will actually address these fundamental issues head-on. Simply adding programs is insufficient; we need a comprehensive approach to create the conditions for lifelong physical and mental health – the essential foundations for upward mobility.

Governor Moore is correct - when we uplift children and their neighborhoods, we can reinvigorate our communities. His mission is shared by Purpose Built Communities, where every day, our network members go to work in their communities on these same issues. With the resources that the ENOUGH Act provides, we can start to address root causes and heal wounds that have existed for decades.

Maryland has a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to lead on eliminating generational poverty. By passing the ENOUGH Act and ensuring its policies are fully implemented, Maryland can show the rest of the country that we can shift how we think about and approach poverty.

Thank you for your time, and I am proud to be here in support of this historic legislation.