

Testimony for HB0443

By Stefanie Hopkins

It has been over 20 years that I have been in Baltimore and I have had the opportunity to work in adult literacy, community mediation, youth mental health, mentoring and after school tutoring.

I first moved to Baltimore City when I chose to do an AmeriCorps year of service through Lutheran Volunteer Corps that allowed me to live in an intentional community with others serving in various social impact roles. It is a privilege financially to be able to live on a small stipend for the year.

When the Freddie Gray uprising happened in 2015 I had been fully home with my 3 kids for several years and felt very disconnected from grassroots work. It was time for me to put my social work degree to use and to figure out my piece of the puzzle to pursue equity in Baltimore.

For several years I worked in workforce development training for adults facing various barriers to employment including returning citizens and recent high school grads with limited work experience. I saw up close the challenges of many who needed support and a network to help them find a job that provided a living wage that would enable them to provide for themselves and their families.

Currently I have the opportunity in my work at Baltimore Corps to connect job seekers to make a social impact in Baltimore. Far too often dynamic candidates get overlooked due to bias in the hiring process including requiring college degrees and preferencing candidates with a significant amount of experience including internship opportunities.

In 2020, Maryland volunteers provided an average value of 31.29 per hour of their time to their communities, 6% higher than 2019, even in the midst of the pandemic. I am most passionate about elevating indigenous leaders in Baltimore to bring their strengths and expertise to the collective work that needs to happen in building stronger and more equitable communities.

There is so much untapped talent in Maryland. How can we better cultivate the talent that is already here by identifying those who are experts already in their community? How do we position local leaders for greatest impact to continue to connect and serve their communities?