

With the high costs of building materials, construction and rising rents, the need for creative housing solutions is more important than ever. I have direct experience with what Delegate Henson is proposing and I can tell you that it works. Not only does that funding keep affordable housing units online, it builds good will with landlords and lifts up communities.

In Winston Salem, I started a program that renovated 35 units for \$35000. It was a crisis response because of Covid and a need to get people out of congregate housing but the results were more than I could have expected. In this case, the owner paid for the supplies, and donations we collected paid for a contractor to lead the work, pay for underemployed residents to help with renovations, and lunch for the volunteers and staff every day. When we moved someone in from the shelter, they immediately started working on their neighbors home - **Building community**. When community members saw the care that was given to these units, they reached out for help and got what they needed whether it was food, housing, resources, etc. -**Lifting community**. Once vacant units were filled, maintenance was done on resident homes and landscaping, the crime dropped considerably and neighbors began taking care of neighbors - **Establishing community**. I also worked with corporations for their days of service. The volunteers were always apprehensive about the safety of the community, coming in with preconceived notions about the community and after a day they left with a new understanding of the challenges underserved communities faced and some maintained their commitment to continue to support the community. - **Connecting communities**. Finally, this work acted as a catalyst to attract investors to the area, seeing the commitment we had to creating successful communities and in the end the work created and/or preserved over 1000 affordable housing units. A drop in the bucket for a city with a 12,000 unit deficit but a number that far surpassed city goals with conventional planning methods. - **Expanding community**.

This can be done in Maryland. Delegate Henson's creative thinking with this proposal could change the landscape for affordable housing across the state and will hopefully be an inspiration across the country. It is this innovative thinking that will save our most vulnerable populations and build goodwill with landlords that really got caught holding the bag during the Covid crisis. In addition, this proposal, in collaboration with Governor Moore's proposed year of service could change the face of community service in our areas and how people perceive low income housing and the communities that manage them.

There was one member of that community, Alex, who moved out of shelter and into a renovated unit, and worked alongside me every day. He is family. When I decided to move home to MD, I felt such guilt walking away from all that we had built, and he said to me "You've done all you can here, it's time for you to go take care of the people where you call home". Now here I am, and I am beyond grateful for this opportunity to submit testimony and be present at the hearing.

I encourage you to pass this bill and consider allocating even more funds, so that each county has a chance for real change.

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