

Good afternoon, Committee Chair and Vice Chair.

I'm Heidi Stevens, the Poppleton Neighborhood Zone and Community Schools Director for the United Way of Central Maryland. I've worked in communities all my life and in Southwest Baltimore for seven years. I am here on behalf of the United Way to support the ENOUGH Act HB694 and to give you reasons why you should support it.

I jumped at the opportunity to testify today because I've seen how communities that join together and focus on their individual, collective, and unique strengths can bring about fundamental transformation.

So many times, communities struggle because of a lack of resources and disinvestment and because people who live and work in that community lose hope. They work in silos trying to move generational challenges designed to get the results we see now. People become frustrated, some move away, and others resign to the fact that what they see will always be.

In the Poppleton neighborhood of Southwest Baltimore, community organizations, faith leaders, community members, community schools, and strategic partners used to work in silos. Now, we've formed a collaboration that hosts monthly community dinners designed to share stakeholder resources and strengths; we have healthy and productive discussions about moving the needle forward in Poppleton regarding housing, jobs, mental health, and safe neighborhoods.

Learning from information shared by the United Way Neighborhood Zone Community Advisory Team and the community association, they work together to write grants that benefit the entire community. Right now, they are working on a grant that will increase youth voice, provide leadership training, and create exposure and opportunities designed to engage youth at an early age with the hopes of changing mindsets that will empower young people in the community. They want to create a vibrant community where young people will be proud to live and work.

ENOUGH will allow communities to start from a position of strength as stakeholders work together to discover what's needed in their communities and work on solutions that bring lasting change. The United Way of Central Maryland stands on the side of the communities and families we serve. We look to a favorable outcome.

Thank you for your time!