

Testimony in Support HB 964
House Environment and Transportation Committee
Stephanie Killian
February 25, 2025

My name is Stephanie Killian. I am speaking in support of House Bill 964. I worked for Montgomery County from 1985 until I retired in 2021. For most of that time I worked at the Department of Housing and Community Affairs, and was the Housing Division Chief when I retired. The Department of Housing and Community Development, as it was known when I started with Montgomery County government, was the agency that implemented the Emory Grove Urban Renewal Plan beginning in the late 1960s and through the mid 1970s. By the time I joined the department a decade later, it was already acknowledged that the Emory Grove Urban Renewal Plan was a failure. Everyone recognized that the County had taken a strong residential, mostly owner-occupied community and replaced it with more than 250 very low income subsidized rental units.

I became interested in Emory Grove in around 1988 when I was assigned the task of revisiting many of the neighborhoods identified in the 1969 Community Renewal Program Report, which was a large assessment of more than 65 communities throughout Montgomery County deemed to be “substandard”. The Emory Grove I visited in 1988 was not the thriving residential community it once had been. Instead, it was a depressing area comprised of very low income rental housing, drug activity, and high crime levels.

Over the years, and especially recently, I have conducted a lot of research about Emory Grove. I have learned in my research that Emory Grove is the only instance where Montgomery County used Urban Renewal in a residential neighborhood to undertake the wholesale demolition of owner-occupied homes. In other neighborhoods where government action was taken, substandard owner-occupied homes were renovated through County housing rehabilitation programs, or were replaced through the County’s Home Replacement program or other efforts.

I am pleased to be on the Heritage Emory Grove Board of Directors as we work to bring a strong residential community back to Emory Grove.

I support House Bill 964 which will establish a task force to assess how urban renewal caused the displacement of residents from the Emory Grove community and make recommendations on potential remedies for those who were displaced by urban renewal. A comprehensive study of the causes and effects of urban renewal in Emory Grove has not been written, and it is time that we document the actions that were taken in Emory Grove and identify remedies for those who were displaced.

Thank you for this opportunity to speak in support of HB 964.