

**HB 0337- Delegate Lehman**  
**State Lottery Fund - Laurel Race Course - Local Impact Aid**

January 28, 2025

Delegate Vanessa Atterbeary  
Ways and Means Committee  
HB0337 - State Lottery Fund - Laurel Race Course - Local Impact Aid  
Hearing Date: January 30, 2025

Dear Chairperson Atterbeary, and Members of the Ways and Means Committee,

My name is Vicki DeLair, and I am writing to express my strong support of HB0337, the State Lottery Fund - Laurel Race Course - Local Impact Aid. For context, my testimony comes from my personal, professional, and experiential perspectives; as a born-and-raised Maryland resident, as the Missions Director for The Church at Severn Run, and as the Executive Director of Love Wins Movement, a non-profit, for-impact organization based in Anne Arundel County. My goal is to highlight the critical need for this bill, which aims to allocate funds from the State Lottery to support local impact aid for the Laurel Race Course community.

I want to begin on a personal level because I believe that starting with all of us on the same page, as far as it is possible, is crucial to understanding the why behind the importance of this bill. As a local resident, I am convinced that the majority of people who live and work in our communities, have absolutely no knowledge of the constant struggles and unique and pressing needs of the hundreds of individuals and families living in and around Laurel Race Course. As someone who has lived in this area for decades, and who has probably driven by the area hundreds of times, I had absolutely no idea how difficult life was, and honestly I don't blame any of us, because the work life, job schedules, and other factors do a fantastic job of making sure this community is invisible, operating in ways which most of us do not.

It was only when my personal life intersected with my professional life that my eyes were opened to this problem. When we first connected with the amazing ministries

affiliated with the Race Course, I found myself asking “how” and “why” repeatedly as I discovered how life is. I found myself saying I don’t understand how this is how it operates, or why there aren’t supports in place, or how an industry built on betting and horse racing could have these pockets of people living in such great poverty and facing constant need.

It didn’t take long to convince me to get Love Wins Movement and The Church at Severn Run on board to work collaboratively with the other “mighty few” organizations working to infuse hope and find sustainable solutions. In the few years that we’ve been involved, here are some of the main challenges faced by the Race Course community:

- Consistent, uphill struggles with accomplishing daily life tasks, such as working, taking care of their families, maintaining good physical, mental and spiritual health, and keeping good hygiene.
- Daunting schedules, with the workday often starting at 3am, and extending well into the evening, increasing the level of difficulty for someone to access services, community support, medical care, or other assistance.
- Living conditions show glaring indicators of being far below the poverty line, with many housed in dorm-style accommodations, absent a kitchen or private bathrooms, preventing them from cooking meals or storing food, etc.
- Significant challenges in physical and mental health, abundance of family stressors, lack of supportive community, which often leads to depression and further isolation, drug and alcohol addiction,
- Lack of transportation makes them unable to be independently resourceful, and increases the hidden, almost invisible population, keeping them underserved.
- Language barriers, and cultural fears, with no tangible option or time to put into education and legal systems of support.

At this point, one might ask but with community programs already available, why do we need another specific grant or funding program. Here is what I can share from my experiences:

- The scale of need in this community is too large to fully describe, and existing funding opportunities and resources cannot effectively address the specific and unique needs of this population.

- Many organizations receiving community support funding are not affiliated with or directly serving this backstretch population.
- Many funding streams are categorically restrictive, highly competitive, and have well-established applicants, which is not a bad thing, but there is a visible gap in who is “missing out” from the benefits of these funds.

I must say that I am encouraged that this bill will use lottery funds, making sure that it does not burden our current budgets, and that it is time bound to reflect the communities and their time in the area, knowing that there are uncertainties with the innovative track changes coming in the next few years. Also, having it set up to specifically support individuals and organizations already working “boots on ground”, means that there are already “experts in the field” with local organizations who already have relationships and are determined to make a difference, like Storehouse Ministries and Chaplain Ron Singh, meaning it will streamline the process of how and where to disperse or allocate items. By pinpointing this large, yet often invisible need, it supports those doing the work and allows them to offer more comprehensive services and really address the pains and deep needs of those impacted. I am convinced that the benefits are endless when existing organizations, who are there for the right reason, are given the opportunity and supports needed to sustain lasting change. For example, in our often limited capacity, Love Wins Movement and The Church at Severn Run currently work to:

- Provide food regularly to the backstretch worker community
- Offer spiritual and pastoral care
- Develop and increase community connection
- Financially support Ron Singh’s tireless efforts
- Provide support for addiction, health resources, and community health training

With additional funding, we would be able to:

- Provide healthier, culturally appropriate foods.
- Help obtain essential services like heat, refrigeration, and basic bedding.
- Provide transportation and offer classes, education, and trainings that coincide with their unique schedules.
- Provide more consistent presence, pastoral care, counseling, and translation services to decrease the relational poverty and isolation issues.

- Greatly decrease the financial strain, resource limitations, and burdens that the current organizations working to make a difference experience.
- And address so much more under the surface that has yet to be uncovered.

I am very much looking forward to seeing what can happen when impact organizations that are stretched thin but refuse to give up are able to provide direct and immediate pathways that significantly improve the quality of life for this community. So, in conclusion, I urge you to support HB0337 to ensure this investment in our community's growth and development. Thank you for considering my testimony, and thank you so much for your time and the work that you do. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.

Sincerely,

Vicki DeLair

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