



WRITTEN TESTIMONY
**THE IMPORTANCE OF THE WEST NORTH AVENUE DEVELOPMENT
AUTHORITY FOR ADDRESSING VACANT HOUSING & THE WEALTH GAP**

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BUILD supports the passage of HB 258 which makes alterations to strengthen the West North Avenue Development Authority (WNADA). WNADA represents a crucial tool in Baltimore City and the State of Maryland's work to end the crisis of vacant and abandoned housing once and for all, as well as a tool to intentionally address the racial wealth gap in our state.

As many of you know, Baltimore City is facing a crisis of vacant and abandoned homes. Not only are there more than 13,000 vacant and abandoned buildings, there are also 21,000 vacant lots and tens of thousands of houses at significant risk of vacancy because of their proximity to other vacant properties.

The highest concentration of the vacant and abandoned buildings is in West Baltimore.

Many of BUILD's member congregations and organizations – including St. Martin's Church of Christ, Trinity Baptist, Macedonia Baptist, Masjid Ul Haqq, Coppin Heights CDC, Doxa Ministries, and more are located in or directly adjacent to WNADA's targeted geography.

WNADA's focus on bringing measurable and sustainable economic change to these communities is crucial in this moment for our state. In addition to the focus on vacant and abandoned properties, WNADA has shown repeatedly that it is committed to addressing the racial wealth gap through strategies like homeownership and entrepreneurship that uplift communities that have long been disinvested in Baltimore City.

Their work can and must be continued – investing in communities that have long been harmed.

BUILD's History and Track Record on this issue

BUILD – Baltimoreans United In Leadership Development – is a broad-based, non-partisan coalition of nearly 50 religious congregations, non-profits, and schools in Baltimore. Founded in 1977, BUILD has a long, productive track record acting on issues related to housing, jobs, schools, safety, and more. This has included the creation of the nation's first living wage ordinance in Baltimore City and working with the state legislature to invest \$1 billion in rebuilding Baltimore City's aging school infrastructure in recent years. We are part of the Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF), the nation's oldest and largest multi-faith organizing network in the United States.

For 15 years, BUILD has worked to address vacant and abandoned properties in Baltimore. In recent years, this has included public commitments from Baltimore City and the State of Maryland in a citywide strategy that will amount to more than \$1 billion in public investment from both the city and state – including in the area where WNADA is focused. This work has been partially modeled on BUILD's successful work in specific neighborhoods – which has been lifted up as a model by both the city and state.

BUILD has shown repeatedly that using a “whole blocks approach” in a community-driven way can prevent displacement, reduce gun violence, increase population, and – importantly – increase tax revenue for both the city and state. WNADA has been and continues to be an important partner in this work.