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Legislative District 40



THE SENATE OF MARYLAND
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

Bill: Senate Bill 816

Title: West North Avenue Development Authority – Neighborhood Social Connection and Development Program – Establishment

Committee: Finance

Sponsor: Senator Antonio Hayes

Good afternoon, Chair, Vice Chair, and members of the Finance Committee,

For the record, I am Senator Antonio Hayes, and I am here to present **Senate Bill 816**. This legislation establishes the **Neighborhood Social Connection and Development Program** within the West North Avenue Development Authority (WNADA), a targeted initiative designed to strengthen the social fabric of our communities as a catalyst for broader economic revitalization.

We often think of development in terms of bricks and mortar—new buildings, roads, and retail. However, successful neighborhood revitalization also requires "social infrastructure"—the connections between neighbors that create safety, stability, and a sense of pride. SB 816 recognizes that for the West North Avenue Corridor to thrive, we must invest in the people and the networks that hold these neighborhoods together .

This bill authorizes WNADA to create a program specifically dedicated to fostering these social connections. It accomplishes this through two main mechanisms:

1. **Technical Support:** The Authority will provide technical assistance to community development corporations, neighborhood associations, and volunteer groups .
2. **Targeted Grants:** The Authority is empowered to set aside up to **\$500,000** of its existing funds to award grants for community-building activities .

The grant funds are specifically tailored to support grassroots engagement. Eligible uses include:

- **Community Events:** Block parties, festivals, speaker series, and recreational events that bring neighbors out of their homes and into their community .
- **Outreach:** Newsletters and digital content to connect residents with resources .
- **Operational Support:** Stipends for volunteers, refreshments for events, and rental space.
- **Green Spaces:** Projects to create and maintain community gathering spots .
- **Capacity Building:** Resources for training community organizers and supporting grant writing efforts .

Crucially, the bill mandates that participating organizations collaborate directly with residents. The goal is to ensure that these activities reflect actual neighborhood priorities and, whenever possible, are led by the residents themselves .

To ensure this model works, WNADA will compile evaluations and outcomes by July 1, 2029, to develop a "template for neighborhood building" that can be scaled and replicated across the State and the country.

Senate Bill 816 is an investment in the "soft" infrastructure that makes hard development projects sustainable. By empowering neighbors to connect and lead, we are laying the groundwork for a safer, more vibrant West North Avenue.

The Act will take effect on October 1, 2026. I respectfully request a favorable report on Senate Bill 816.

Position: Favorable