

SB816_support_Elev8 Baltimore.pdf

Uploaded by: Alexandria Warrick Adams

Position: FAV

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SB 816

West North Avenue Development Authority – Neighborhood Social Connection and Development Program – Establishment (WNADA Neighborhood Social Connection and Development Act)

TO: Senate Finance Committee

FROM: Elev8 Baltimore, Inc.

POSITION: Favorable

DATE: March 3, 2026

CONTACT: Alexandria Warrick Adams, CEO | aadams@elev8baltimore.org | 503.410.1882

Chair Beidle, Vice Chair Hayes, and Members of the Senate Finance Committee:

Elev8 Baltimore respectfully submits this testimony in strong support of SB 816, the WNADA Neighborhood Social Connection and Development Act.

Elev8 Baltimore is a Baltimore-based nonprofit partnering with schools, families, and communities to ensure every student is prepared for high school, college, career, and life. As an ENOUGH community quarterback and community school implementation lead partner, we see daily that social connection is foundational to youth success, neighborhood stability, and public safety.

Our work is rooted in a simple truth: when families are meaningfully connected—to one another, to schools, and to trusted community partners—young people thrive and communities grow stronger. Through extended learning, family engagement, mentoring, and case management, we build relationship-based systems that foster trust, resilience, and opportunity.

From our experience in West Baltimore (and across the state), strong social connectivity produces measurable benefits aligned with the goals of SB 816:

- **Stronger protective factors for youth:** Consistent, caring relationships with adults and peers reduce isolation, increase engagement, and build resilience.
- **More effective access to resources:** Connected residents share information and access services earlier, preventing crises before they escalate.
- **Deeper school-family-community partnerships:** Engaged and connected parents are more likely to participate in school life and advocate for children's success.
- **Improved community safety:** Events and shared gathering spaces build trust, strengthen collective responsibility, and support violence prevention efforts.

The West North Avenue Corridor is a critical focus for neighborhood stabilization and economic revitalization. By investing in social cohesion, SB 816 strengthens the impact of broader place-based development efforts. The bill's evaluation and replication components also position Maryland to scale successful neighborhood-building strategies statewide.



For communities such as Sandtown, partnering with WNADA would provide dedicated resources to support resident-led planning and implementation, ensuring activities reflect neighborhood priorities.

SB 816 offers a practical, community-centered strategy to strengthen the social fabric that underpins public safety, youth development, and economic opportunity. Elev8 Baltimore respectfully requests a **Favorable** report on SB 816.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony. Please contact us if we can provide additional information.

Sincerely,



Alexandria Warrick Adams
Chief Executive Officer
Elev8 Baltimore, Inc.

Senate Bill 816 Written Testimony (1).pdf

Uploaded by: Antonio Hayes

Position: FAV

ANTONIO HAYES

Annapolis, Maryland 21401

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

Testimony to Maryland General Assembly_WNADA_Socia

Uploaded by: Chad Williams

Position: FAV



SB0816/HB1276

**West North Avenue Development Authority
Neighborhood Social Connection and Development Program**

WNADA Neighborhood Social Connection and Development Act

**Chad Williams
Executive Director**

&

**Christy Turner
Sr. Policy Analyst**

House of Delegates

Economic Matters Committee

West North Avenue Development Authority

HB1276

House Office Building, Room 230

Tuesday, March 3, 2026 - 1:00 PM

Senate

Finance Committee

West North Avenue Development Authority

SB0816

East Miller Senate Building, Room 3

Thursday, March 5, 2026 - 1:00 PM

West North Avenue Development Authority (WNADA)

WNADA's Mission

As you know the [West North Avenue Development Authority for Baltimore City \(WNADA\)](#) is empowered by the General Assembly to revitalize the historical communities along the W North Avenue corridor where residents and businesses can thrive in an environmentally friendly area with economic equity, various housing options, reliable public transportation access, and neighborhood improvements; that supports diverse entertainment, commercial, and recreation along with light industrial manufacturing and retail as destination site for Baltimore City and the State of Maryland.

WNADA's Comprehensive Plan alignment to Governor and General Assembly Goals

On January 25, 2024, the Authority submitted a [Comprehensive Plan](#) to the Governor and General Assembly for West North Avenue through a series of stakeholder forums bringing together 16 different neighborhoods to agree on one plan. In the Comprehensive Plan, pages 117 – 128, the Authority lists Goals, Objectives, Strategies, Tasks, Timeline, and the State and City agencies responsible for achieving measurements, outcomes and benchmarks in coordination with the Authority. These WNADA goals, objectives, and strategies are aligned to the Governor's priorities of safer, affordable and competitive as illustrated in our [Governor and WNADA - Goals/Objectives/Strategies](#) matrix sheet. This matrix sheet also illustrates the measurable quantitative and qualitative impact of our work.

Since last session, our agency has now included goals, objectives and strategies for Arts and Culture, Neighborhood and Public Safety development, along with Housing, Real Estate, Economic, Business, Transportation, Infrastructure and Green Space development.

This current fiscal year our agency has taken those various development visions and created conceptual development plans in partnership with community development organizations, neighborhood associations and residents for the [Future of West North Avenue](#).

WNADA Neighborhood Social Connection and Development Act

Since our inception, community engagement has been engrained in our strategy. We've conducted listening tours, hosted planning sessions and resident coordinating council meetings, and facilitated community-led and partner-based events. As our agency has evolved, so has our approach to defining neighborhood development; however, our primary goal remains to foster holistic development that strengthens the corridor and facilitates collaboration among residents. Our vision is to create thriving and self-sustaining communities by prioritizing the preservation of community identity and the amplification of local voices. We are also committed to enhancing public spaces, ensuring public safety, workforce readiness and empowering resident leadership and civic capacity.

Despite the innovation and demand for programming among residents and community organizations along the West North Avenue Corridor, financial and capacity barriers often limit access to grant funding opportunities and the consistency and scaling of events and non-profit operations, in comparison to other

Baltimore communities, highlighting the need for alternative approaches for neighborhood development support.

This is why HB1276/SB816 is crucial. The WNADA Neighborhood Social Connection and Development Program seeks to establish a rolling grant process, allowing neighborhood associations and community-based organizations year-round access to funding. The legislation will focus on providing technical support, capacity building, and grant funding for initiatives like social gatherings, cultural events, outreach efforts, and activation of recreational green spaces is vital for revitalizing the West North Avenue corridor that will generate increase population growth and generate additional property, sales and income revenue for the State and Baltimore City.

The program will also facilitate pathways for youth involvement in community activities, ensuring they are active participants in shaping their neighborhoods by partnering with youth focused nonprofits and recipients of ENOUGH Act funding located in neighborhoods along the WNADA Corridor.

Additionally, the social connectivity grants will support neighborhood newsletters, community bulletins, and digital platforms that help residents connect with local resources and learn about neighborhood events to ensure both legacy residents and newcomers don't struggle to find information or feel isolated. Stipends offered to volunteer organizers and funding for operational staff will ensure programming doesn't depend solely on volunteer efforts so neighbors and youth participants can count on consistent events and activities year-round while receiving compensation for their time and efforts.

The neighborhood-led implementation of events will serve as a blueprint for other grassroots economic development activities across Maryland.

The funding structure and eligibility requirements enables grassroots efforts to thrive and expands WNADA's capacity to address diverse neighborhood needs beyond traditional focuses on preservation and public safety. By emphasizing initiatives that promote social connectivity, economic vitality, and community engagement, this legislation broadens our impact.

Supporting neighborhood-driven events demonstrates how strategic investment in local initiatives can enhance social cohesion that is essential for retaining and attracting residents, businesses, and visitors.

WNADA is committed to building stronger, safer, and more connected communities in West Baltimore.

Fiscal Impact

This Act will have no additional impact on the General Fund and the agency is not presently or will in the future request additional funding to implement this program. This program simply defines the use of existing annual appropriated funds for neighborhood development activities.

WNADA Neighborhood Social Connection and Development Program Boundaries

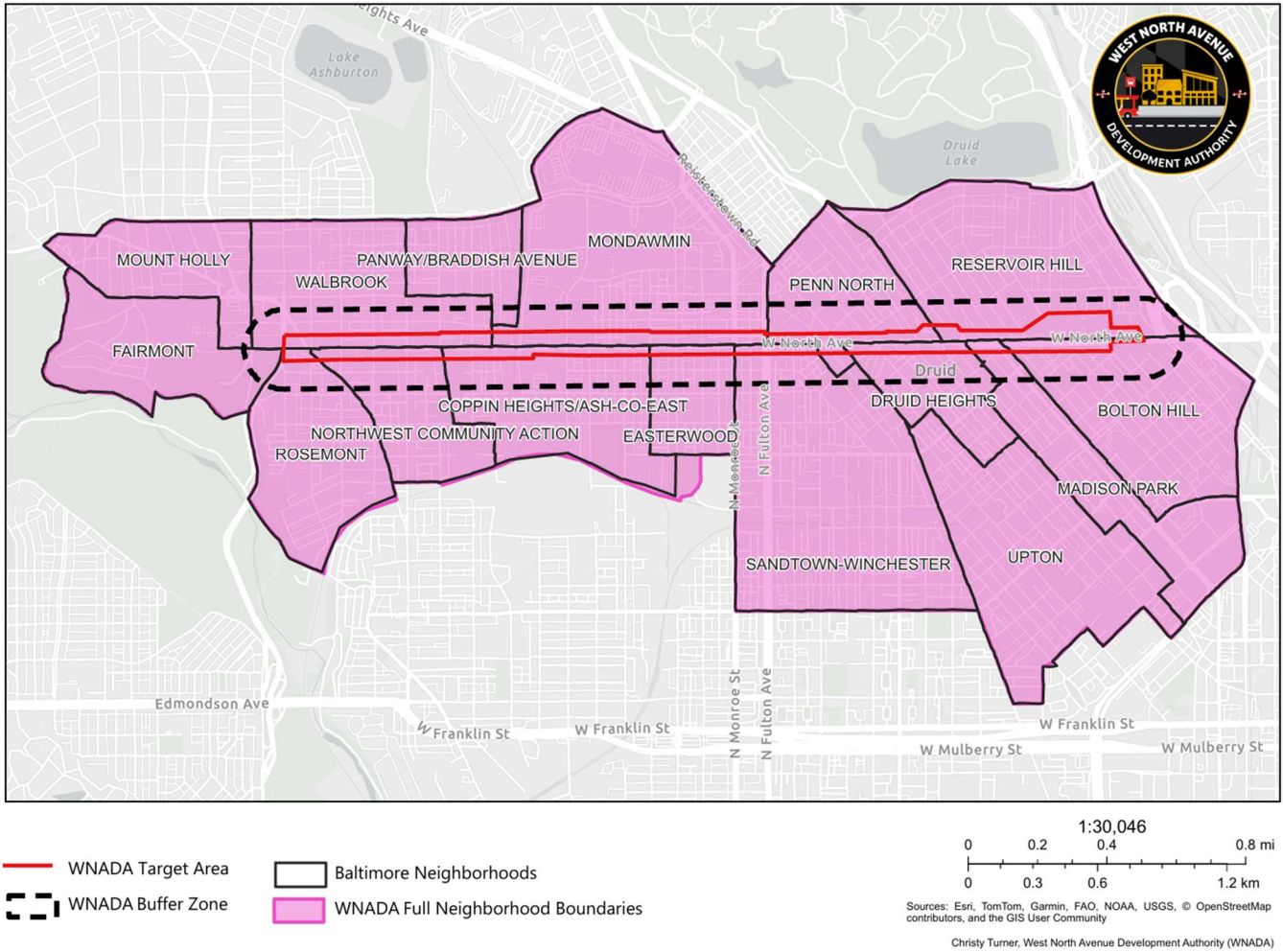


Figure 1: WNADA Neighborhood Social Connection and Development Program Boundaries

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Uploaded by: Ms. JohnDre Jennings

Position: FAV



DRUID HEIGHTS
Community Development Corporation

Druid Heights Community Development Corporation

2140 McCulloh Street Baltimore, Maryland 21217

Testimony
Bill Hearing – SB816
Position-Support

March 5, 2026

Honorable Chair and Finance Committee:

I'm writing to support SB816 the WNADA Neighborhood Social Connection and Development Act, sponsored by Senator Antonio Hayes, Delegate Sarah Wolek, Delegate Melissa Wells, and Delegate Marlon Amprey. With this Act, WNADA aims to launch a Social Connectivity initiative funded through grants for existing neighborhood associations and community development corporations. This initiative will bolster social connections and development activities across WNADA's 16 neighborhoods.

My name is JohnDre Jennings, I serve as the Executive Director of Druid Heights Community Development Corporation. I have spent over nine (9) years in West Baltimore, where I work to empower communities of color and increase affordable homeownership. In my experience, I have seen West Baltimore neighborhoods that need an increase of homeownership and revitalized corridors. I am pleased that the State of Maryland is taking steps to address the years of economic and neighborhood development abandonment that our community has faced. This support includes funding support towards neighborhood investment for projects which include Bakers View Homeownership project, restoration of our Maggie Quille Center and green space projects such as our Gold Street project.

Investing in social connectivity will foster relationship-building among neighbors and families through organized events—such as block parties, cultural festivals, and recreational gatherings. Additionally, these investments will enhance green spaces and parks, providing safe outdoor environments for residents.

The social connectivity grants will also support neighborhood newsletters, community bulletins, and digital platforms that help residents access local resources and stay informed about events. This ensures that both legacy residents and newcomers feel connected and informed. Stipends for volunteer organizers and funding for operational staff will help ensure that programming is consistent and not solely reliant on volunteers, allowing neighbors and youth participants to count on year-round activities while receiving compensation for their efforts.

I urge the committee to support WNADA Neighborhood Social Connection and Development Act. Thank you for the opportunity to share this written testimony and the chance to weigh in on policy and the wellbeing of West Baltimore. Your consideration of these matters and solutions is very much appreciated.

Sincerely,

Ms. JohnDre Jennings

JohnDre Jennings, Executive Director

SB0816-FIN-FAV.pdf

Uploaded by: Nina Themelis

Position: FAV



BRANDON M. SCOTT
MAYOR

*Office of Government Relations
88 State Circle
Annapolis, Maryland 21401*

SB0816

March 5, 2026

TO: Members of the Senate Finance Committee

FROM: Nina Themelis, Director, Mayor's Office of Government Relations

RE: Senate Bill 816: West North Avenue Development Authority - Neighborhood Social Connection and Development Program - Establishment (WNADA Neighborhood Social Connection and Development Act)

POSITION: SUPPORT

Chair Beidle, Vice Chair Hayes, and members of the Committee, please be advised that the Baltimore City Administration (BCA) **supports** Senate Bill (SB) 816.

SB 816 would create the Neighborhood Social Connection and Development Program within the West North Avenue Development Authority (WNADA) using existing funding to provide technical support to community development corporations, targeted grants for community building activities, and to support community events, outreach and provide other operational support. broader economic revitalization.

The BCA appreciates and supports the need to provide technical assistance in particular to smaller community-based organizations to ensure they have all of the tools and resources necessary to provide services within their communities. The legislation also requires that organizations participating as a part of the Program collaborate directly with residents to ensure that the services provided reflect the priorities of the neighborhood.

SB 816 provides the complementary supporting structure that makes development projects sustainable. The success of WNADA and the City of Baltimore as a whole is rooted in direct community engagement and reflecting the needs of our residents.

For the above reasons, the BCA respectfully requests a **favorable** report on Senate Bill 816.

HB 816_IAB_UNF.pdf

Uploaded by: Bryson Popham

Position: UNF



191 Main Street, Suite 310 – Annapolis MD 21401 – 410-268-6871

March 3, 2026

The Honorable J. Sandy Bartlett
Chair, House Judiciary Committee
100 Taylor House Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

RE: House Bill 816 -*Maryland Automobile Insurance Fund-Affordability-Purpose of Fund and Authorized Program*
UNFAVORABLE

Dear Chair Bartlett and Members of the Committee,

On behalf of the Maryland Association of Mutual Insurance Companies (MAMIC), we respectfully oppose House Bill 816.

As you may recall, MAMIC is comprised of 12 mutual insurance companies that are headquartered in Maryland and neighboring states. Approximately one-half of our members are domiciled in Maryland, and are key contributors and employers in our local communities. Together, MAMIC members offer a wide variety of insurance products and services and provide coverage for thousands of Maryland citizens.

House Bill 816 addresses two very different subjects: one is familiar, the Maryland Automobile Insurance Fund (MAIF) and the other is affordability. Addressing the latter issue first, legislation introduced during 2025 (House Bill 1098) created a task force to address affordability in automobile insurance. That task force report has been delivered to the legislative committees with subject matter authority, and at least one legislative initiative (Senate Bill 865) has been introduced this year in response.

MAMIC acknowledges that affordability is an appropriate subject for legislative study. Its members have participated in the study under House Bill 1098, and they look forward to a continuing role in addressing this important topic.

The inclusion of affordability as a factor in MAIF's insurance rating formula (See, page 2, lines 22 through 24 of House Bill 816) would be a mistake with potentially serious consequences. Created in 1972 to replace the former assigned risk program, MAIF's express statutory authority is to provide automobile insurance to persons "that are unable to obtain it" from a private insurer in the State (Insurance Article, Section 20-301(a)). In Section 20-507 of the Insurance Article, MAIF rates are expressly subject to the authority of the Maryland Insurance Commissioner in determining whether they are "excessive, inadequate, or unfairly discriminatory." In other words, MAIF is required to follow the same basic rating principles that all other insurers must observe.

The new language on affordability in House Bill 816, as drafted, expressly refutes that requirement. Longstanding provisions in the statute permit rates to be adjusted by standard industry factors such as points on an individual's drivers license, and prior claims experience of an insured or applicant. These factors are well-understood and universally employed in the business of rating automobile insurance policies. House Bill 816, however, requires MAIF to establish an affordability program "that may otherwise be inconsistent" with the statute in its requirement of the Commissioner to determine whether rates are excessive, inadequate or unfairly discriminatory.

In fact, MAIF has been violating these fundamental requirements for a number of years. Despite pressure from the Maryland Insurance Administration to charge adequate rates, MAIF has consistently failed to do so. As a result, MAIF's surplus has declined to a point where, by operation of statute, it has become necessary to assess private insurers in Maryland to subsidize MAIF operations. The price for that subsidy is nearly \$20 million this year, imposed upon every

vehicle owner who insures a car in Maryland with a private insurer. It will be millions more next year and the year after that, in all likelihood. In essence, this subsidy operates as a tax on ordinary Marylanders who are already struggling to deal with the high cost of automobile insurance. The passage of House Bill 816 would simply guarantee that MAIF's failure to price its product in accordance with the statutory requirements that have existed since MAIF was created will continue into the indefinite future. The new language in House Bill 816 acknowledges that the affordability program it creates may be "considered inconsistent" with these basic rating requirements.

Perhaps in response to unanimous insurance industry opposition to this legislation, MAIF has drafted a series of amendments to place some limits on its future use of an affordability program. It is important to remember that any affordability program that employs inadequate rates will, under the current MAIF statute, guarantee that the inevitable losses MAIF will incur will be paid for by the 99% of Marylanders who procure automobile insurance in the private market. Nevertheless, given the current concern among elected officials in Maryland over affordability of automobile insurance in general, MAMIC is working with the Insurance Commissioner to guarantee that any such program receives appropriate oversight and regulation from the Maryland Insurance Administration. The first step in any such program is to place appropriate sunset language on the enabling statute, so that proponents of the program must come before the General Assembly at some future point in time to report on its implementation and to justify its continued existence.

MAMIC members, together with more than 100 private automobile insurers in Maryland, will be monitoring such a program themselves, and we pledge to participate with you should this bill pass when the issue, inevitably, arises again.

While MAMIC continues to oppose the bill for the record, we advise the Committee that we will withdraw our opposition upon the adoption of suitable amendments, including the sunset provision referenced above, to safeguard the viability of the private passenger automobile insurance market in Maryland.

For these reasons, MAMIC respectfully requests an unfavorable report on House Bill 816.

Thank you for your consideration.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Melissa G. Shelley". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Melissa Shelley
President, MAMIC

cc: Bryson Popham

HB 816_MAMIC_UNF.pdf

Uploaded by: Bryson Popham

Position: UNF



191 Main Street, Suite 310 – Annapolis MD 21401 – 410-268-6871

March 3, 2026

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Melissa Shelley
President, MAMIC

cc: Bryson Popham