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Public Health & Environment Committee
Councilwoman Phylcia Porter, Chair
Councilman Mark Conway, Vice-Chair
100 N. Holliday St
Suite 400
Baltimore, MD 21202

Grand Rising,

We appreciate the opportunity to submit this testimony for the Public Health & Environment Committee's legislative oversight hearing on Psychiatric Rehabilitation Programs (PRPs) in Baltimore City. But let us be clear: this is not just about oversight it is about justice. Justice for our communities, for those who have been used, manipulated, and abandoned by a system that was supposed to help them heal.

For too long, PRP programs in Baltimore City have operated under a cloud of fraud, exploitation, and silence. We've watched these programs, many of them run by individuals who are not rooted in our communities, buy social security numbers, enroll people into programs without their knowledge, and submit Medicaid billing codes for opioid use disorders for individuals who have never touched a narcotic in their life.

Let's stop pretending this is rare. It's not. It's widespread. It's rampant. And the money trail leads straight to the bank accounts of companies, many of them Nigerian or African-run, that have turned mental health into a cash cow instead of a calling. They've made millions off our pain. And what have they given back? Nothing.

Not a backpack.

Not a Thanksgiving meal.

Not a toy drive.

Not one gallon of milk to a hungry child on Pennsylvania Avenue.

They've taken from us. And they've left us to fend for ourselves.

But then there's The Journey Mental Health & Wellness Center.

This isn't just a PRP. This is a lifeline. Located in the heart of Pennsylvania Avenue where too many have turned a blind eye, The Journey Mental Health does what government and profiteers have failed to do. They serve without question, without funding, and without fanfare.

Let us tell you what The Journey looks like:

A community refrigerator that's filled from her own pocket while the rest of the PRPs pretend they don't see hunger outside their doors.

Bookbag giveaways for children who would otherwise show up to school with nothing.

Thanksgiving baskets. Toy drives.

Feeding over 700 people a week alongside Simmons Memorial.

And every bit of this is not for clients, not for billing but for community.

Nikki Smith doesn't get paid for this. In fact, she works overnight shifts to keep her office open. She's been fighting for a year to receive her MA number to bill Medicaid while fraud-ridden PRPs continue business as usual, untouched, unchecked, and unbothered.

And now because of their greed, she is being punished.

She is on the verge of closing her doors, not because she did something wrong, but because you allowed the ones who did everything wrong to keep operating while you placed a moratorium that's suffocating the ones who got it right.

Where was the oversight when companies were submitting fake claims?

Where was the oversight when they used our community members as pawns in a game of Medicaid fraud?

Where was the oversight before another moratorium got placed, pushing the few who care to the brink of collapse?

The committee says it wants accountability. Then let's start here:

Investigate these fraudulent PRPs that never gave back to the neighborhoods they exploited.

Lift the barriers for providers like The Journey Mental Health, who have followed every rule (she has all her receipts), yet continue to be punished.

Offer emergency funding to the handful of PRPs who are truly embedded in the communities they serve and don't just say it for a grant application.

And most of all stop making the good suffer because the greedy got away with it.

If The Journey Mental Health closes its doors, it won't just be the loss of a program. It will be the loss of the only one who stayed when everyone else turned their backs.

Baltimore deserves better.

Pennsylvania Avenue deserves better.

She deserves better.

And we will not stay silent while someone who brewed here gets crushed under a system that keeps rewarding those who just flew here.

Because it is not just her doors that will close, it is the spirit of a neighborhood that will be buried with her. And when the lights go out in her office, what will be left? Another vacant building. Another broken promise. Another reminder that no good deed goes unpunished when it's done by Black hands.

Where is the mercy for those who followed the rules? Where is the emergency relief for the woman who has filled more stomachs than your city contracts ever have? You speak of oversight yet you closed your eyes when the fraud was flashy, and opened them only when a real one showed up without gold on her fingers or lies on her lips.

The Journey Mental Health doesn't have PR campaigns.

She has people.

She has a purpose.

She has pain that she carries in silence, so her community doesn't have to.

And while others gave our people a clipboard and a lie, she gave them a sandwich and a reason to hope.

This woman is true Baltimore. Not imported. Not opportunistic. Not performative. But rooted in the concrete, like the roses Tupac spoke of. Gritty. Beautiful. Resilient.

And you have the audacity to let her drown, while the frauds float?

Let this hearing be the reckoning. Let this be the moment you don't just record testimony but respond to it. Investigate those who built wealth off deceit. Restore the dignity of those who built trust off sweat. And stop turning Black women into collateral damage for policies that were too cowardly to target the real criminals.

We are watching. Heaven is watching.

And if this city turns its back on The Journey Mental Health,

Then Baltimore will have turned its back on itself.

People Empowered By The Struggle (PEBTS)

Advocates for Equity. Warriors for Truth. Family to The Forgotten.

Sincerely,

Yolanda Pulley

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Executive Director/Founder

People Empowered By The Struggle

501(c)3 Nonprofit

“A One-Stop-Shop for all struggles”