

**WRITTEN STATEMENT
OF
SUPPORT
WITH AMENDMENT
FOR
CITY OF BALTIMORE COUNCIL BILL 21-0172**

A BILL ENTITLED:

BALTIMORE CITY LEGACY RESIDENTS-URBAN HOMESTEADING PROGRAM

SUBMITTED BY – YUSEFF GRIFFIN

DECEMBER 20, 2021

Thank you Committee of the Whole members, President Mosby, Councilmembers Middleton, Stokes, McCray, Conway, Schleifer, Costello, Glover, Ramos, and Bullock for your vision and unequivocal commitment to begin to take equitable measures to notably remedy Baltimore’s history of insidious housing inequities of uprooting, and displacing Black Baltimoreans.

My name is Yuseff Griffin. I am President of ICANDOWECANDO, a recently established, non-profit justice, empowerment, strengthening and inclusive community building collaborative partnership organization in Baltimore and Washington, DC.

I am humbled and honored to have been extended this opportunity to write this statement in support for City of Baltimore Council Bill 21-0172, the Baltimore City Legacy Residents-Urban Homesteading Program. It should be noted for the record, that I support this Bill 21-0172, with amendment. I will outline the amendment in my concluding remarks.

As a justice, tolerance, and racial equity community advocate, this Bill is of paramount importance to me. And it is of even greater significance to Black Baltimoreans whose families suffered undue duress and harm because of the history of racial inequities in housing here in Baltimore. The disparaged, hundreds of thousands of Black residents, who have been displaced from their homes due to inequitable housing decisions, practices, systems, and systemic racism, that callously removed Black Baltimoreans from their homes, generationally, many of their descendants still suffer today as a result of such egregious history of actions here in this city. Sadly, these housing decisions, practices, systems, and systemic racism was created by a conglomeration of Baltimore’s own past government officials, university systems, news media, and even the philanthropic community, as succinctly outlined in Lawrence T. Brown’s book, *The Black Butterfly*. The Black Butterfly is – “a reference to the fact that Baltimore’s majority-Black population spreads out on both sides of the coveted strip of real estate running down the center of the city like a butterfly’s wings.”

At this very moment in Baltimore's history, this Bill serves as a poignant and essential prescription designed to assist in addressing the wrongs of the past that harmed Black Baltimoreans. Why? Now, you are the elected officials in place who want to do that which is prescriptive, visionary, just, equitable, and courageous. And as developers, those with no care, concern, or commitment whatsoever to Black Baltimoreans, whose families have been egregiously harmed in the past, lurk in the background, poised at any and every moment to "snatch up" city housing and land for development, now is the crucial time to act. Finally, Baltimore must take care of its own before developers' gentrification once again displace another generation of Black Baltimoreans.

In closing, I respectfully submit my request for the Committee of the Whole to faithfully consider including the proposed amendment to Bill 21-0172, as outlined below:

Program Participation

(3) INCLUSION

AN INDIVIDUAL WHO HAS BEEN WORKING IN THE CITY OF BALTIMORE AT THE GRASSROOTS LEVEL, AS A COMMUNITY ADVOCATE, VOLUNTEER COMMUNITY STRENGTHENING ORGANIZER, AS A POLICE OFFICER, AS A TEACHER FOR AT LEAST 5 YEARS IS ELIGIBLE TO PARTICIPATE IN THE PROGRAM IF THE INDIVIDUAL:

- (I) IS 18 YEARS OF AGE OR OLDER;
- (II) IS A FIRST TIME HOMEBUYER;
- (III) IF CURRENTLY LEASING A PROPERTY, IS IN COMPLIANCE WITH EXISTING LEASE TERMS FOR A CONTINUOUS PERIOD OF 12 MONTHS PRIOR TO APPLYING FOR PROGRAM PARTICIPATION
- (IV) IS ABLE TO DEMONSTRATE THE ABILITY TO AFFORD THE MATERIALS AND THE ABILITY TO AFFORD OR COMPLETE THE REPAIRS REQUIRED, TO BRING A LISTED PROPERTY INTO COMPLIANCE WITH THE BUILDING, FIRE, AND RELATED CODES ARTICLE AND THE HEALTH ARTICLE; AND
- (V) PROVIDES DOCUMENTATION OF THE INDIVIDUAL'S EMPLOYMENT TO THE DEPARTMENT.

This concludes my statement on Council Bill 21-0172- Baltimore City Legacy Residents – Urban Homesteading Program. Kindly accept my deepest appreciation for the honor and privilege accorded me.