

Sheena Kahende

Affordable Housing & Expanding Vocational Organizations Services
Friday, April 12, 2024

My name is Sheena Kahende and I was registered to testify on April 8th 2024 at the Montgomery County Council Regular Session but was unable to attend due to unforeseen circumstances. I am a concerned Montgomery County resident, mother of one and employee.

I am testifying today on the increasing need for affordable housing opportunities for single parent/income households. I am testifying to request the inception of programs that support single parents trying to find affordable and safe housing for their children and families.

In April, 2019 Providence Hospital Emergency Department closed its door permanently causing me to lose my job as a Patient Access representative, unable to afford my housing I became houseless with my then 3 year old daughter. Alone, ashamed, and scared I made my way to The Crisis Center in Rockville, MD on Piccard Dr. to plead for help. I was provided a voucher for a motel room at the Red Roof Inn on Shady Grove Rd. and after two nights I was called by DHHS and told I had to vacate the room due to non-use, in actuality I was babysitting overnight for a friend who worked overnight.

This experience was very traumatic for my daughter and myself. It was at this point I lost faith in the DHHS system. I have also been on the HOC Housing Path waitlist since 2014 with no feedback on housing opportunities or vouchers. The system is backlogged and failing the community.

I am sharing this story put show how a vulnerable family a single mother and a child could be thrown back on the street by a government agency in place to help families and vulnerable population.

Since then I managed to graduate from Montgomery College with an Associate's Degree, and I am pursuing a Bachelor of Science from University of Maryland Global Campus. As a single mother I wear

many hats and with the help of organizations like Interfaith Works (IFW) I was able to find employment after being laid off due to a Covid-19 diagnosis in August, 2022. I was able to receive free interview clothes from IFW as well as a Smartrip card to help with my commute. I am so thankful for vocational counselor, Kennisha Maddox for her continued support and check-ins even after I completed my probationary period at work. Ms. Maddox ensures I have everything I need to be successful in my new role as a Sales Coordinator in the Hospitality Industry, however we regularly have conversations about the affordable housing issues that plague Montgomery County. I believe services that organizations like IFW provide could be expanded with the help of the City Council to include housing opportunities.

Affordable housing is not a luxury it is a necessity for every community to thrive. It has become increasingly expensive to live in Montgomery County where I grew up and want to raise my daughter. Successful organizations already in place helping people find work should be awarded the funding to expand their services.

I am pleading with City Council to think of single parent and single income households and fund Interfaith Works and other community organizations so that all families can afford to be educated, live and work in Montgomery County, MD.

Thank you to Montgomery County Council for the opportunity to share my story. I hope you consider my testimony fight for stable housing for all. Your consideration of these matters and solutions is very much appreciated.