

Testimony of Venise Whitaker

My name is Venise Whitaker, a lifelong resident of Philadelphia. I grew up in Frankford and currently reside in Fishtown. I am writing to express my support for the following bills:

1. H.B. 1854 - Residential Construction Lemon Law
2. H.B. 1855 - Home Improvement Consumer Protection Act
3. H.B. 1856 - Adjacent Neighbor's Bill of Rights
4. H.B. 1857 - Continuing Education for Construction Code Officials

My background is in mental health and trauma, where I've primarily assisted clients affected by sexual abuse and neighborhood trauma. While I have been an active community advocate for individuals, I began focusing on housing advocacy in 2016. Residents started seeking my advice on dealing with construction impacts on their homes, which was a new area for me but not the concept of trauma.

Over the past 7 years, I have diligently documented unsafe construction practices throughout Philadelphia. Those involved in unsafe construction often claim that there are no laws requiring them to collaborate with adjacent neighbors, despite sharing party walls. Those responsible for not protecting adjacent neighbors lack understanding of construction and the city's older rowhome structures.

For 7 years, I have witnessed affordable homes suffer damage due to adjacent construction and demolitions for new construction luxury homes. I've stood by residents whose homes were deemed unsafe and protested alongside architects and engineers who support better construction practices, all advocating for protection for adjacent neighbors. Philadelphia urgently requires state laws to establish a foundation for preserving residents' homes.

Additionally, many responsible for unsafe construction are flippers and developers without accountability. They use LLCs to evade scrutiny and invade neighborhoods, profiting at the expense of our community. Much of the flipped and new construction is known to be defective, leaving consumers with "dream house nightmares" as warranties expire before properties are even sold.

In conclusion, I am devoted to my city and state, but it lacks adequate protection against construction-related damage. This construction bill package is long overdue; without proper laws, homes will continue to be harmed, and defective new constructions will be sold by elusive LLCs.

You rock,
Venise Whitaker

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Please find additional references below.

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