

Utica Hearing testimony

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The HomeOwnership Center has a mission of "Revitalization and Growth of Neighborhoods," we believe that the way to strengthen a community is through homeownership and empowering, primarily low income families, through education. We are similar to a small credit union providing capital for down payment and closing cost assistance loans, as well as all types of home improvement loans. After purchasing or repairing a home, residents are encouraged to join a Block Association, where our role is to facilitate the discussion between all parties so that sustainable change occurs in the neighborhood.

As a member of the NYS Neighborhood Preservation Coalition (NPC) we are asking your assistance to provide increased funding for both the Neighborhood and Rural Preservation programs in NYS to *\$125K annually*.

Since we are limited to three minutes, perhaps the best way to illustrate the importance of this funding is through the story of one of our customers.

Marva Campbell, our 2006 HomeOwner of the Year, is by far one of the most dedicated customers to come through our First Time HomeBuyer Program.

If one were to walk in the front door and onto the gorgeous wood panel floors of Marva's house to see the beautiful wooden staircase leading to the second floor, they would never guess that she was at one time struggling to get by. This was the case in 1998 however, when she arrived at The HomeOwnership Center (HOC) as a recently divorced mother of two who was working full time but still swamped in debt. All she could afford was a tiny apartment with two bedrooms, giving one room to her son while sharing the other with her daughter.

She just had a track through the apartment. It was a combination of a living room, dining room, bed room and storage room.

Marva felt she was in transition for a while, with changing careers and attending college and it was not the best time to buy a home so her participation with our program ceased for a few years. That all changed In 2001, when she came back to The HOC with the determination to change the lives of her family by improving her credit and purchasing a home. She continued to work full time, attend school full time, repair her credit and move into a new career.

Although we were able to qualify her for a mortgage product, she was so determined and so successful in accomplishing her goals that she no longer qualified for any of the products that we offered. Luckily, The HOC's First Time HomeBuyer Loan Coordinator was able to refer her to one of the local lenders with whom we partner and helped secure a mortgage product that was perfect for Marva.

Now ready to buy, Marva started to look at what was on the market. "I saw a lot of houses but I wanted a home," she said. She missed out on one or two homes but kept working with her realtor. When she first saw the house on the outside she wasn't quite sure. "At first it didn't appeal to me," she said. "But once I went inside it grabbed me. This was my home!"

The rest is history. Marva closed on her home on her birthday, February 1, 2006. She and her two children moved into a beautiful, spacious home that they could truly enjoy and call their own.

We work with customers like Marva on a daily basis. The funding through the New York State Division of Housing and Community Renewal (DHCR) helps provide assistance to, housing rehabilitation, home buyer counseling, landlord/tenant training, community rehabilitation and renewal.

On an average across the state, programs such as those operated by The HomeOwnership Center leverage \$26 for every \$1 received under these programs.

Included in the package of information is additional background information on The HomeOwnership Center and NYS Neighborhood and Rural Preservation Programs