TOGETHER WE CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE

HAZELWOOD INITIATIVE INC.

March 24, 2014

Councilpersons Deborah Gross and Corey O'Connor
510 City-County Building
414 Grant Street
Pittsburgh, PA 15219

Councilpersons Gross and O'Connor,

I am writing on behalf of the Board of Directors of the Hazelwood Initiative, Inc., and our 200 plus members to express our support for the Pittsburgh Land Bank originally introduced by Councilwoman Gross and amended by Councilman O'Connor (2014-0025.) Like most cities in Pennsylvania, neighborhood redevelopment in Pittsburgh is impeded by blight and abandonment. We lack a modern, efficient system for recycling unused property at scale and getting it back onto the market and productive reuse.

The Land Bank is a powerful solution that allows public control of abandoned property and empowers communities to reverse the social and economic consequences of neglected and abandoned property. The Land Bank will help transform blight in our most disinvested neighborhoods into engines of economic development. The goal of a land bank is to take cancerous blight and create a system to get abandoned properties clear title, publicly inventoried and marketed for reuse by neighbors, community groups, developers or Realtors. Councilpersons Gross' and O'Conner's legislation will do just that.

By viewing vacant and abandoned properties as potential assets—rather than barriers—to revitalization, communities can reinvest in their once-neglected neighborhoods. Vacant and distressed properties are predominantly in neighborhoods struggling with poverty. Failing to act to properly maintain and repurpose those vacant properties is unjust, and we are saddling the poorest with the burden of vacancy and blight. Land Banks are a new tool in our toolbox to relieve this burden, and give community members an active role in the revitalization of their neighborhoods. As amended, The Land Bank gives the community the opportunity and voice to decide the fate of a tax-foreclosed property, rather than allowing each vacant parcel of land to fall into the hands of speculators.

We also want to thank you for taking our input into account into the crafting of your amendments. There have been many public meetings with diverse community groups asking for feedback on the bill. We particularly feel our voices have been heard, and appreciate being included in the process of drafting amendments.

Sincerely,

James W. Richter

James W. Richter
Executive Director

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