***Testimony 2:***

*Amanda Zahorak, North Central College, Naperville Alumni, Former Naperville Resident, Employee at DuPage Habitat for Humanity*

Hi Everyone!

My name is Amanda Zahorak and I work for Habitat for Humanity.Not not too long ago, I was also a resident of Naperville, graduating in 2017 from North Central. I chose NCC because one day while walking through the streets of Naperville, it felt like home.

However, for a student who did not come from wealth and worked two jobs to pay for the cost of living, the feeling of home dwindled. I lived on and off campus, experiencing what it was like to seek housing in Naperville. My roommate and I lived in a one-bedroom apartment behind Naperville North with rent that ran us about $900 each. The apartment was complete with a door that could barely lock, a carpet that smelled like smoke, and a balcony door that would pop open when it was too windy. It wasn’t much but it was home.

Making ends meet was tough. It also came with an immense amount of guilt when my mother pulled from her 401K to help me subsidize my rent. Or when my dad gave up his business and went to work for the college maintenance department to help alleviate my student loans. But in moments that I felt sorry for myself, I was reminded that I was not a single mother, I was not totally on my own, and I was not without support. This reminder came from seeing a car in the parking lot that was damaged also housing two car seats, hearing the cries of a restless child late at night, or seeing my neighbor walk in with his two children - the words exhausted and hopeless written all over his face.

So, I did the practical thing and switched my major from Education to Business. Maybe then, I could afford to live in a place like Naperville. I graduated with a good paying job, but I also had the burden of debt. Ultimately, I had to move home. A home that I had the benefit of having away from Naperville, with the promise that one day, I could afford to go back.

Fast forward five years and Naperville was still unattainable - even after I did all the right things and made all the right moves.

I now work for Habitat for Humanity because affordable housing is a problem EVERYWHERE and a huge barrier to success for many families. Families, like I ran into all of time in my Naperville apartment with the door that barely locked, the carpet that smelled like smoke, and the balcony door that popped open when it was too windy.

The world would look at me and consider me middle class. If you look closer, you’ll also see privilege. Privilege because of the color of my skin, coming from a two-parent household, and having the benefit of an education. Many families here are not so lucky. They struggle between home security, food security, and the search for a safe community. So, my question is - will Naperville rise to the occasion and make the cost of home affordable? Or will it fall to practices that are outdated, casting out certain people as “other” and “unworthy” of bearing a Naperville address. As someone who once called Naperville home and would like to again, I certainly hope together we rise. Choose option one and support AHIP. Thank you.