

**Testimony of Kelly Scatena
For Democratic Policy Committee Hearing,
Whole-Home Repairs: Lessons from Year One
February 2, 2024**

Hello and thank you to the members of the Senate Democratic Policy Committee for inviting me to share my experience with the Whole-Home Repairs program. My name is Kelly Scatena. I was born and raised in Pittsburgh and live here with my husband of 23 years, Mo. Mo and I are raising 8 kids together, 2 are in college and 6 are still at home with us. We've been living in our house for about 13 years. We are small business owners. He is a mechanic and works very long hours.

About four or five years ago, we had our first roof leak. We got a patch but then a year or two later it started leaking again. The guy who came out to do the patch said we really had a problem that was beyond patching. We needed to take the chimney off and redo the whole roof. Then not much later, a huge chunk of cement cracked off our foundation. It was about 4 feet by 3 feet. It fell off the foundation in the back. I've never seen anything like that.

It felt like my house was dying from cancer. I was afraid it was going to crumble out from underneath me.

I was afraid to go to the bathroom because I worried the ceiling was going to fall on my head. I was constantly stressed thinking about the house falling while my son was in his room in the basement. On top of this, the pillars holding up our porch roof were about to fall over. I was scared when my kids were having fun playing outside that it would fall over on them. I love gardening but I was afraid to go on the walkway leading to my backyard because the steps had crumbled away so much that I was worried I would fall or lose more of the wall.

We are resourceful but these were more than a DIY job. These were big jobs and we couldn't afford either. Even if we could afford one, which do you do first? The caving roof or the crumbling foundation?

We have always worked hard. I felt like we did the right thing by getting a little house for our family. Our house is totally paid off but I felt like I didn't actually have the security of being a homeowner because there was a ticking clock. We couldn't pay out of pocket to stabilize our home and you can't get a loan on a crumbling house. I knew we couldn't afford another house, we can't afford rent. We were just going to stay here until our house was condemned. We had no other options.

I actually had a neighbor 3 doors down. Her home was bought by a company out of San Francisco. They condemned the building, kicked her and her family out, and then flipped the property and now charge a much higher rent. It's been years and they still haven't found a place of their own. I feel for her and worried that would be us.

The stress of that was terrible. The wolf was always at the door.

Then I saw something about Whole-Home Repairs on TV. I went to Rep. Benham's office before the program had even opened. I had my application in the first day they were open.

I did the application online and about 3 months later I got a call from Ian at Action Housing he told me they wanted to look at my house. They made it really clear that they were focused on habitability issues but I knew that's what I had.

Ian and the contractor Justin came out to my house and they started making plans. I still didn't fully believe it was real so I told them 'don't spend too much time on plans, I don't even know if I'll get it.' They told me, 'that's why we're here.'

Then Justin showed up with a team of 8-10 guys. Some on the roof, some on the foundation, some on the walkway. It was like a swarm of bees getting to work. They were done in less than two weeks. I couldn't believe how fast it was. They did all of this through a terrible heatwave and they were really polite, hardworking, and wonderful. These guys were even so careful to not harm the flowers I had planted around the front porch. That really showed an attention to detail. Justin also did not leave me hanging at all. When I call him, he calls me back right away.

I never cared if my house was pretty. I just needed it to be safe for my family, but it's so beautiful now.

Home should be the place where you feel safe and now I have that. I can relax in my house and not worry that it's going to fall down on me. Now that I've gotten these repairs I feel like I have a solid foot on the ground. I feel like I'm actually a homeowner because I'm here for good.

My husband's job is hard on his body. He's working on cars in the freezing cold and in the heat. It's not a job you can do until you're 75. Now we can actually look forward to retirement knowing we have a place to live. We can picture growing old here and having the grandkids here too.

This has been life-changing.

Thank you for giving me the time today to share my experience and for the work you did to create this program. I hope more people in my community are able to get this support.