

NCSHA 2009 AWARDS
Maryland Department of Housing and Community Development

Category: Communications
Sub-Category: Creative Media
Entry Name: MDHOPE Marketing Campaign - *“Mortgage Late? Don’t Wait!”*

BACKGROUND

Property foreclosures in Maryland edged up to 9,320 events in the second quarter, up 0.3 percent from the previous quarter but down 1.4 percent from last year. The State’s foreclosure rate remained steady at one foreclosure per 249 households while the State’s national ranking improved slightly from the 16th highest in the previous quarter to the 17th highest in the current quarter.

Total foreclosure filings in Maryland posted the third lowest level since the first quarter of 2008 when the State’s new foreclosure prevention law went into effect. According to RealtyTrac, a total of 6,543 default notices were issued across Maryland in the second quarter, down 0.1 percent from the previous quarter and down 4.0 percent from last year.

MARYLAND’S RESPONSE TO THE FORECLOSURE CRISIS

Maryland’s HOPE initiative has been successful in attacking the foreclosure crisis from every angle.

Governor Martin O’Malley’s creation of the Homeownership Preservation Task Force in 2007 launched Maryland’s development of a multi-pronged strategy aimed at addressing the crisis and making recommendations that would help promote and preserve homeownership.

Maryland’s comprehensive strategy includes:

- Emergency regulations, extending the amount of time available to homeowners to seek counseling and find alternatives to foreclosure.
- Creation of the Lifeline, Homesaver and the Bridge to Hope programs to help homeowners who are stuck with exotic, expensive and in some cases fraudulent loans.
- The creation of a pro-bono attorney network that has enlisted more than 700 volunteer lawyers to aid at-risk homeowners.
- The establishment of a framework of operations with six servicers to ensure the highest quality of service and transparency to homeowners seeking loan modifications or other alternatives to foreclosure.
- The investment of significant resources into a statewide network of counseling agencies, giving homeowners access to free, reliable information about alternatives to foreclosure and resources to help them avoid it. DHCD supports a statewide network of 30 nonprofit housing counseling agencies and two nonprofit legal services providers as part of its Home Ownership Preserving Equity (HOPE) initiative. In a June report, NeighborWorks recognized Maryland as being in the top five states nationwide in serving the most clients through the National Foreclosure Mitigation Counseling program.
- The distribution of more than \$5.5 million in federal, state and local funds to the MDHOPE network members since 2007. Assistance providers have aided more than 13,000 homeowners in Fiscal Year 2009.

- The allocation of more than \$18.9 million in federal funds through Maryland's Neighborhood Conservation Initiative to help local jurisdictions stabilize communities hardest hit by the foreclosure and subprime lending crisis.

MARKETING AND OUTREACH EFFORTS

To communicate these initiatives and resources to homeowners in need, DHCD embarked on an aggressive advertising campaign. DHCD's comprehensive marketing and outreach plan includes the following:

1. Developing a consistent message and effective campaign materials and information resources for use in outreach to targeted PUBLIC audiences through advertising and public relations. Engaging and aligning stakeholders through dialogue with local government, elected officials, nonprofit leaders, media and private sector organizations (lenders, realtors).
2. Deploying a campaign to reach targeted public audiences and connect with them through the strategic use of publications, promotions, public relations and special events.
3. Tracking and evaluating impact of outreach.

The tools used to carry out this strategic plan are the same which are available to any other state and jurisdiction across the country and, thus, is replicable. The campaign continues to help the Department be successful in meeting its strategic objectives: to reach homeowners facing foreclosure, especially those living in the hardest hit communities in the Baltimore and Washington, DC metropolitan areas and make them aware of the State's foreclosure prevention services. Components of DHCD's HOPE Marketing Campaign include:

- **A Dedicated Website** – One of two centerpieces of this campaign was an online presence which homeowners could easily find foreclosure assistance resources. The website – www.mdhope.org – offers information on DHCD's refinance loan and short term mortgage assistance loan programs, a listing of non-profit housing counselors around the State and upcoming events for homeowners, the latest foreclosure data in Maryland and helpful tools such as the Consumer Information Kit to help homeowners assess their financial situation. This website was just refreshed and updated this year. From July 2008 to the end of June 2009, the MDHOPE website logged more than 128,000 hits.
- **A Dedicated Hotline** – The second centerpiece of the campaign was a toll free hotline, (877) 462-7555, to which homeowners could call to get more information on DHCD's refinance loan and short term mortgage assistance loan programs as well as locate non-profit housing counselors in their area. In Fiscal Year 2009, the hotline fielded more than 17,000 calls.
- **Outreach** - DHCD began meeting with the Governor's Office and counterparts at the Maryland Department of Labor, Licensing and Regulation to coordinate responses to the numerous requests from event organizers around the State to provide exhibits and campaign materials for housing and foreclosure events.

- **Development of Campaign Materials** – In addition to the brochure, Consumer Information Kit and flyer promoting the “Mortgage Late? Don’t Wait!” campaign, DHCD recently created a Fraud Prevention tip sheet and a “Fast Facts on Foreclosure” powerpoint. These resources are offered on the MDHOPE website and are available at various outreach events. From July 2008 to June 2009, approximately 80,674 campaign pieces were distributed at events and mailed out.
- **Bus Ads** – In Fiscal Year 2009, more than 3,700 ads were shown on MTA buses in the Baltimore area and Metro buses in the Washington, DC area as well as in area bus shelters.
- **Billboard ads** – Advertisements similar to the bus ad designs were put up in approximately 165 locations in the Baltimore and Washington, DC areas.
- **Radio spots** – From July 2008 to June 2009, more than 5,800 thirty and sixty second spots aired on several stations throughout the Baltimore and Washington, DC metropolitan areas.
- **Radio Symposia** – In May and June 2009, DHCD sponsored two symposia on Radio One stations in Baltimore and Washington, DC. The one hour, commercial free program allowed DHCD representatives the chance to speak directly to families in listening area about many housing related issues, especially, foreclosure prevention.
- **Print ads** – Advertisements ran in more a half dozen of Maryland’s most popular newspapers including two Spanish language publications.
- **Movie Theatre Advertising** – In Fiscal Year 2009, DHCD partnered with Screenvision to air specially produced “Mortgage Late? Don’t Wait!” screen ads which ran on more than a hundred theatre screens all over Maryland. The ad played more than 191,000 times during high peak movie-going periods such as the summer and holiday seasons.
- **Hispanic Community Outreach** – DHCD continued to develop its library of Spanish-language resources. In addition to translating “Mortgage Late? Don’t Wait!” campaign materials into Spanish, the Department also produced a Spanish language radio spot to air on the area’s most popular Hispanic radio station, El Zol. DHCD also partnered with El Tiempo newspaper in the Washington, DC area to create, “Especial Vivienda”, a special insert in the February 23rd issue devoted to housing and foreclosure prevention information.

SUMMARY

These marketing and outreach efforts make Maryland’s approach to preventing foreclosure both unique and innovative. Messaging to target audiences is understandable, effective and consistent. These efforts, in concert with the state’s policy efforts aimed at challenging loan servicers to be more responsive to homeowners are helping to lessen the number of foreclosure in Maryland.

PLEASE NOTE: This entry includes a blue folder with samples of our campaign materials and CDs of our broadcast spots and powerpoint presentations.