

**NCSHA 2008 AWARDS**  
**Maryland Department of Housing and Community Development**

**Category:** Communications  
**Sub-Category:** Creative Media  
**Entry Name:** HOPE Marketing Campaign

**BACKGROUND**

In the summer of 2007, the State of Maryland launched the Home Owners Preserving Equity (HOPE) initiative to provide responsive solutions for homeowners facing foreclosure. At this time, Maryland was dealing with almost 4,100 foreclosure events statewide with the Baltimore and Washington, DC metropolitan areas leading the rest of the State.

Governor Martin O'Malley's first step as part of this effort was to convene the Maryland Home Preservation Task Force which included staff from the Maryland Departments of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) and Labor Licensing and Regulation (DLLR) and other stakeholders in this issue such as federal and local government partners, community development groups, housing agencies, banking and finance organizations and non-profit service providers.

The task force assessed the scope of the potential foreclosure problem in Maryland and recommended ways to prevent foreclosure and preserve homeownership. The task force evaluated existing financial assistance programs, shared ideas and best practices, identified private resources, and reviewed the legal and regulatory landscape and current mortgage lending practices. All of the recommendations are well on their way to being implemented.

For its part, DHCD created two refinance mortgage programs, Lifeline and Homesaver, and one short term mortgage assistance loan program, Bridge to HOPE, for homeowners who may have financed their homes with high cost or unconventional loans.

In addition, DHCD has provided nearly \$3 million in operating support to a network of 32 nonprofit counseling agencies throughout the State. HOPE nonprofits provide foreclosure prevention assistance Statewide, helping families avoid foreclosure and plan for a stronger financial future. Grants have enabled these counseling agencies to increase service levels and retrain staff in response to the current national housing crisis.

At the end of the recent legislative session in April, Governor O'Malley signed landmark lending and foreclosure reforms into law. The new measures better regulate the mortgage industry, allow more time for homeowners facing foreclosure to resolve their situation and offer more protections from fraud.

To communicate these initiatives and resources to homeowners in need, DHCD embarked on an aggressive advertising campaign. DHCD's comprehensive marketing and outreach plan included 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.
2. Engaging and aligning stakeholders through dialogue with local government, elected officials, nonprofit leaders, media and private sector organizations (lenders, realtors).

3. Deploying campaign to reach targeted public audiences and connect to them through the strategic use of publications, promotions, public relations and special events.
4. 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. 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](http://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.
- **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.
- **Development of a Campaign Theme** -- The "Mortgage Late? Don't Wait!" slogan was created by one of our partner agencies – the Baltimore Homeownership Preservation Coalition (BHPC). In March, BHPC approved DHCD's adoption of this tagline for the State campaign.
- **Development of Campaign Materials** – DHCD produced a brochure, a Consumer Information Kit and flyer to promote the "Mortgage Late? Don't Wait!" campaign along with the MDHOPE website and hotline. Such materials are made available at various outreach events and also were sent to other government agencies.
- **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.
- **Bus Ads** – MTA buses in the Baltimore area and Metro buses in the Washington, DC area featured two different designs of the "Mortgage Late? Don't Wait!" ad. Buses displayed a combination of interior ads, rear exterior signage otherwise known as "tails" and side exterior signage known as "kings."
- **Billboard ads** – Advertisements similar to the bus ad designs were put up in locations in the Baltimore and Washington, DC areas.
- **Postcard Mailings** – "Mortgage Late? Don't Wait!" postcards were mailed to identified priority zip codes throughout Maryland that have seen the highest numbers of foreclosures and reached almost 700,000 households.

- **Radio spots** – Thirty and sixty second spots as well as a Spanish-language spot aired on several stations throughout the Baltimore and Washington, DC metropolitan areas.
- **Print ads** – Advertisements ran in more than fifty newspapers all over Maryland including two Spanish language publications.

### **ACCOMPLISHMENTS**

The campaign has been 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. The campaign's success can be quantified in a variety of ways:

- DHCD has assisted more than 7,000 callers to the Maryland HOPE Hotline since the launch of the outreach campaign in April of this year. The campaign resulted in a major increase in call volume to the Hotline, increasing from an average of 45 calls a day to more than 150.
- By the end of fiscal year 2008, DHCD processed 34 Lifeline and Homesaver loans totaling more than \$8.6 million.
- Since January 2008, non-profit housing counselors have provided foreclosure prevention assistance to approximately 7,800 homeowners. Of this number, approximately 1,500 have achieved positive outcomes, including payment forbearance or forgiveness, loan modification, or the orderly sale of the property.

### **JUSTIFICATION FOR NOMINATION**

In addition to the string of accomplishments detailed above, a simple cost benefit analysis also puts this campaign in a favorable light. DHCD spent approximately \$500,000 on this campaign. However, it is estimated that each foreclosure lowers surrounding housing values and, each foreclosure is estimated to cost lenders and the public approximately \$50,000. In this respect, the benefits of helping struggling homeowners and communities far outweigh DHCD's costs.

Also, the campaign is an excellent case study in how partnerships provide exponential benefits. DHCD's connections with non-profit and community groups and other government agencies helped the outreach effort considerably. Agencies such as DLLR and the Maryland Office of Home Energy Programs and groups such as the Baltimore Homeownership Preservation Coalition distributed campaign materials at their locations and events and marketed the State's HOPE website and hotline to their respective audiences, reaching more than 100,000 homeowners.