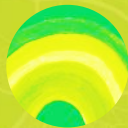


A woman and child pause for a photo in West Baltimore on April 3, 2020. *[Jermaine Gibbs]*



# AUDACIOUS THINKING



Summer 2020

# OSI RESPONDS to COVID-19



The spread of the COVID-19 pandemic has resulted not only in COVID-related illness and deaths in Baltimore, but widespread quarantines, job loss, food insecurity, economic insecurity, the suspension of in-person public education, and many other challenges. OSI-Baltimore has been working with our national and international colleagues, our many local partners, and community-based leaders to identify areas where we can bring expertise and resources to address these challenges.

**One top priority is direct financial and other emergency support for workers in Baltimore** who have been hit hard by COVID-19 and are at greatest risk of falling into extreme hardship, including those who are unemployed and the formerly incarcerated. OSI is giving a total \$1.25 million in emergency support to help some of the most vulnerable populations and has embarked on a public-private partnership with Baltimore City, which will provide an additional \$6 million in direct cash assistance. OSI will work with community-based organizations to identify residents most in need. OSI's funding includes \$250,000 from Open Society Foundations' International Migration

Initiative to support undocumented immigrants excluded from many other relief efforts.

On June 4, OSI-Baltimore Director Danielle Torain joined Mayor Jack Young and other government and civic leaders at a socially distanced press conference to announce the launch of Baltimore Health Corps, a \$12 million public-private partnership to hire hundreds of unemployed Baltimore residents to be contact tracers and care coordinators for residents of Baltimore neighborhoods hardest hit by COVID-19. **Unemployed Baltimore City residents can apply now for the jobs, which will pay between \$35,000 and \$39,000**

a year and contribute **\$11 million to the local economy**. OSI-Baltimore is one of several funders for the project and will help coordinate implementation.

“Baltimore Health Corps is exactly the kind of innovative, impactful public-private partnership that OSI is looking to support in response to COVID-19,” Torain said at the press conference. “The initiative is particularly crucial because it looks at the mid- and long-term impacts of COVID by promoting job creation and job access for populations of workers disproportionately marginalized from the job market.”

The COVID-19 pandemic has raised alarming concerns for students—especially poor students in Baltimore. Due to the lack of Internet access, many students are unable to participate in the Baltimore City Schools’ live online programming. In response, **OSI-Baltimore donated \$200,000 to purchase technology and engaged in a public-private partnership, including a \$3 million investment from Baltimore City**, to create a “mesh network” that will extend Internet access from school buildings to their surrounding neighborhoods.

As soon as it became clear that the April 28 special election and June 2 Maryland primary would be conducted primarily by mail, **OSI began working with grassroots partners, including Black Girls Vote, Baltimore Votes, and the No Boundaries Coalition, on a broad**



**voter education and communications campaign to keep marginalized communities from being disenfranchised.**

Efforts, including radio and TV PSAs, weekly webinars for community leaders, advocates, and candidates, and a widespread media campaign, contributed to the biggest-ever turnout for a Baltimore City special election on April 28. In the lead-up to the June 2 primary, OSI worked with partners to create new PSAs featuring Erricka Bridgeford of Baltimore Ceasefire, Marin Alsop of the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra, and Dr. Thomas M. Scalea of Maryland Shock Trauma,





OSI Director Danielle Torain speaks at a press conference announcing the launch of Baltimore Health Corps, with Health Commissioner Dr. Letitia Dzirasa (left) and Mayor Jack Young. (Mark Daniels)

among others; organized a “Car Caravan” to the mailbox; and sent free “Party at the Mailbox” packages to voters.

In the days after the quarantine began, it became clear that incarcerated populations and people who use drugs were among those most at risk. In April, **OSI’s Addiction and Health Equity and Criminal and Juvenile Justice programs co-released a request for proposals designed to prevent and decrease incarceration and overdose among populations most at risk for COVID-19.** The programs will fund selected proposals up to \$50,000 each.

In addition, OSI’s Criminal and Juvenile Justice program has convened justice advocates from around the state in a series of calls about ways to address the urgent threat of COVID-19 to incarcerated populations in Maryland. These calls, facilitated by the ACLU, have helped advocates galvanize around a set of demands for Governor

Hogan and have thus far, resulted in the expedited release of hundreds of at-risk incarcerated people.

One of OSI’s first responses to the COVID-19 pandemic was **the creation of an Information and Resources Page on the OSI website (osibaltimore.org)**, including an extensive, curated list of federal, state, and local government resources, community resources, and educational and arts resources. It has grown to include a Social Justice Syllabus of suggested reading material and has been shared and visited by thousands of Baltimore residents. Here are a few titles from the Social Justice Syllabus:

- **The New Jim Crow**, Michelle Alexander
- **Gender Outlaw**, Kate Bornstein
- **Bad Feminist**, Roxane Gay
- **Refugee**, Alan Gratz
- **Sister Outsider**, Audre Lorde
- **The Argonauts**, Maggie Nelson
- **The Hate U Give**, Angie Thomas
- **Decolonizing Wealth: Indigenous Wisdom to Heal Divides and Restore Balance**, Edgar Villanueva





# OSI-BALTIMORE COMMUNITY FELLOWS Respond to COVID-19



Some of the most vibrant social entrepreneurs in Baltimore City are also OSI-Baltimore Community Fellows. They're a corps of more than 200 activists, artists, leaders, and conveners dedicated to serving underserved communities in Baltimore. Not surprisingly, many are pivoting, adjusting, or refocusing their mission to respond directly to the COVID-19 pandemic. At [osibaltimore.org](http://osibaltimore.org), we have a roundup of about 25 Fellows' COVID-response efforts. Here is a sampling:



**MARIAH BONKOWSKI** (*2019 Fellow*), who was recently profiled in The Baltimore Sun, continues to provide hygiene products through her project Parts of Peace pantry locations to those who can't afford them.



**MARVIN HAYES** (*2019 Fellow*), whose program Baltimore Compost Collective, is part of the recently saved Filbert Street Garden (founded by 2011 Fellow Jason Reed) is continuing to be a food resource for the surrounding Curtis Bay community during the pandemic.



Two alumni Fellows, **SARAH HEMMINGER** (*Thread, 2009 Fellow*) and **J.C. FAULK** (*Circles of Voices, 2016 Fellow*), are working on Food with a Focus, a grocery distribution effort with houses of worship distribution network. The pilot program was launched by Circles of Voices and New Psalmist Church and has now expanded to 17 sites.



As a member of the Cherry Hill Crisis Response Team, Black Yield Institute, founded **ERIK JACKSON** (*2017 Fellow*), led an effort to support elders, children, and families in Cherry Hill and beyond by facilitating the sharing of nearly 5200 meals, along with 200 total bags of activities and hygiene products in just a 5-day period.



Access Art, co-founded by **SHAWN JAMES** (*2003 Fellow*), is currently serving as a temporary food bank. The organization had been given a grant to restructure and rebuild the food bank in a partnering school, but since schools are closed, Access Art has been distributing to the public.



**GIANNA RODRIQUEZ** (*2016 Fellow*), founder of Baltimore Youth Arts, has moved its programming online. The organization is still paying staff and students for their work and are preparing to accept 10 new young people from the juvenile justice system into the program. They are also posting COVID-19 information and resources on their website.



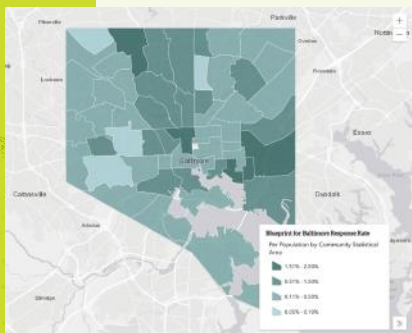
**KENDRA SUMMERS** (*2019 Fellow*) has been working with Mera Kitchen Collective, World Central Kitchen, and the Greater Baybrook Alliance to safely distribute 100s of hot dinners and donated supplies (face masks, toiletries, school supplies, etc.) to Latinx families in Brooklyn and Curtis Bay.



**REBECCA YENAWINE** (*1999 Fellow*) recently began a campaign with the Teacher's Democracy Project in coordination with the Baltimore City Public Schools, to collect used tablets and laptop for students in the City Schools.



# OSI AND BNIA LAUNCH BLUEPRINT FOR BALTIMORE DATA PORTAL



OSI-Baltimore, in partnership with the Baltimore Neighborhood Indicators Alliance (BNIA), has incorporated the data from the Blueprint for Baltimore survey into BNIA's Open Data Portal. The Blueprint for Baltimore data portal ([osiblueprint-bniajfi.hub.arcgis.com](https://osiblueprint-bniajfi.hub.arcgis.com)) is open to the public.

Launching the portal is the latest step in the Blueprint for Baltimore project, a partnership between OSI-Baltimore and community organizations, including Baltimore Votes, Black Girls Vote, Black Leaders Organizing for Change, CASA, and the No Boundaries Coalition. Data Fellows from those organizations canvassed more than 5,000 Baltimore City residents, focusing on marginalized communities often ignored by traditional polling, and identified residents' priorities for city leadership.

In February, OSI and partners held a mayoral forum to ask candidates to respond to the data gathered in the survey. A forum for City Council President candidates was planned for March 18 but canceled due to COVID-19. Instead, moderators used the questions planned for the forum to conduct remote interviews with the candidates. A second mayoral forum, planned in collaboration with the Stoop Storytelling Series, was moved online and took place May 20th. It was broadcast on WYPR May 26th.

Now that the data is on the Open Data Portal, organizers, advocates, and community members can explore survey responses by neighborhood and various demographic groups and use it to advocate for policies that are responsive to community priorities.

# OSI-Baltimore Statement on Recent Police Killings

Recent police murders of Black Americans George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and Ahmaud Arbery continue a long and shameful tradition in U.S. history, dating back to slave patrols, **which morphed into police units after the Civil War.** This dark history encompasses the killing of Freddie Gray, who died at the hands of Baltimore police five years ago last month, and countless others, including many whose names have been lost to history.

These killings and so many others committed by police are rooted in anti-Blackness and until we address that scourge, they will continue. We applaud Minneapolis City Council Vice President Andrea Jenkins, who called on state and local officials to **declare racism a public health emergency.** We call on officials in Baltimore and the state of Maryland to adopt a similar lens to address police violence.

Across the country, Black people, including Atlanta rapper Killer Mike and the young people from DewMore Baltimore, who led a massive, citywide march through the city on Sunday, May 31, reciting poetry along the way, have poured out their anguish at these latest in a seemingly endless series of lynchings. In the heart-breaking video of police killing George Floyd, a witness asks three police officers standing nearby,

“You gonna let him kill that man in front of you?” As Sherrilyn Ifill, director of the NAACP Legal Defense and Education Fund and a former OSI-Baltimore Board Member tweeted, we should ask ourselves this question every day.

From Minneapolis to Baltimore, proponents of the status quo have blocked efforts to reform police departments at every turn. When Minneapolis Mayor Jacob Frey banned “Warrior-style” trainings for the city’s police force, Police Union President Lt. Bob Kroll pushed back offering to provide the \$55,000 training for free for any police officers who wanted it.

In Baltimore, after the killing of Freddie Gray, Mayor Stephanie Rawlings-Blake invited the US Department of Justice (DOJ) to investigate the Baltimore Police Department. **The DOJ found that the BPD routinely violated the Constitution** in ways that disproportionately affect Black people. This led the city and DOJ to **sign**





**the Consent Decree in 2017**, legally mandating reforms. From the beginning, Baltimore's police union, the Fraternal Order of Police, opposed the Consent Decree and implementation has been slow at best. Perhaps most alarming, three years after the Consent Decree, fewer than half of Black Baltimore residents who responded to OSI's Blueprint for Baltimore survey even know about it.

The time for inaction has passed. We call on the city, the BPD, the Consent Decree Monitoring Team, and Judge William Bredar, who oversees its implementation, to vastly step up the implementation of reforms with the urgency they demand. Obstacles and slow-rolling cannot be tolerated. Lives are, quite literally, at stake.

**OSI-Baltimore has supported efforts to reform the BPD and will continue to do so with renewed urgency.** At the direction of communities most impacted by police violence, we have also pivoted to support

efforts to keep communities safe without engaging with law enforcement, like the Safe Streets program, which Blueprint survey participants identified as their preferred strategy to reduce violence. Thirty-two percent of those surveyed favored expanding Safe Streets, while only 11 percent favored hiring more police officers.

Asked what they would like to see the Mayor prioritize in the city's operating budget, 34 percent of respondents to the Blueprint survey said "Youth Programs," the most common response, while only 11 percent said "Policing." **We urge Baltimore City leadership to reduce funding to the Baltimore Police Department**, currently more than \$500 million per year—almost half of the city's total discretionary budget—to be more in line with the priorities of Baltimore residents.

OSI will continue to support community and public health responses to violence, including Safe Streets and further integration of restorative practices in Baltimore City Schools and the community at large, and trauma-informed care practices citywide. We encourage the Mayor to prioritize such initiatives as well.

OSI-Baltimore staff join the Baltimore community in collective pain and outrage. We encourage all residents to take care of yourselves, your families, and your neighbors in these difficult times, as Baltimoreans always have. **We know that dismantling the systems of anti-Blackness will be a long and difficult task, but we stand in solidarity with all of those working to achieve that goal.**

*For additional information and resources mentioned in this statement, visit the digital version at [osibaltimore.org](http://osibaltimore.org).*



Protestors gather at Baltimore's War Memorial Plaza after a youth-led demonstration on May 31, 2020. (Danielle Torain)

# Marking Fifth Anniversary of the Baltimore Uprising

This spring marks the fifth anniversary of the Baltimore Uprising following the death of Freddie Gray in 2015. To commemorate the anniversary of this momentous event, OSI-Baltimore is supporting 13 COMMUNITY-BASED EVENTS reflecting on this anniversary. Though some of these projects have been delayed or moved online due to COVID-19, all will still take place.

## OSI IS PROVIDING FUNDS TO SUPPORT THE FOLLOWING EFFORTS.

**901 Arts** will host four local Black artists, including rapper Kotic Couture, filmmaker Taylor Evans, and multidisciplinary social practice artist Abdu Ali, one per week, to share their work and lead youth in an activity/workshop of their design reflecting on the Baltimore Uprising and its underlying causes, culminating in a community event DJed by a local Black DJ and event producer.

**Baltimore Corps** will host Healing Baltimore Community Day, which will include an opportunity for community members to network and connect with community organizations and a panel discussion on healing from trauma and stressors from life in Baltimore City along with solutions on how to deal with trauma and stressors.

**Bard Early College High School** will host Writing & Thinking 2020, a two-day experience in which the West Baltimore school's 450 students will review texts related to the Uprising

and its themes, watch student-created film A Short Documentary for a Greater Mondawmin, hear from local activists and workshop leaders, and respond to writing prompts asking students to reflect on their identities and memories of the Uprising and how those events and police brutality affect them and their families.

**Beth Am Synagogue** will host a series of public events in Reservoir Hill examining how the killing of Freddie Gray and the subsequent Uprising affected neighborhoods and people across the city and how things have and have not changed in the past five years through direct storytelling, speakers, panels, and artistic performances.

**I AM MENTality Youth Male Empowerment** will host a full-day summit for Baltimore City youth, law enforcement officers, lawmakers, and community members to engage in relationship-building activities, including meditation and cooking,

and dialogue intended to improve the relations between police and the communities they serve.

**The Institute for Integrative Health**'s project, "How Are We Healing?" builds on conversations initiated during its 2018 exhibition and program series, A Beautiful Ghetto, Three Years Later: A Conversation About Healing, using a participatory community arts project led by 1998 OSI Community Fellow, Cinder Hypki, that produced over 490 participant-created images.

**The Jewish Museum of Maryland** presented "Gray in Black and White," an online exhibit of images of the Uprising and its aftermath featuring the work of Baltimore photographers Devin Allen and J.M. Giordano and conversation in which the artists discuss their work, the anniversary, and what lessons still need to be learned.

**Motor House** will curate a photographic portrait exhibit called "Joy", featuring 10 local activists photographed in their happiest places in Baltimore, paired with a narrative from the activist, as recorded by an oral historian, that discusses how they have continued to struggle for freedom and equality.

**The Murphy Family Charitable Foundation**, in partnership with the Murphy, Falcon & Murphy law firm, will present Freddie Gray: Five Years Later, a day of programming examining the effects of the death of Freddie Gray and ensuing events in Baltimore, concluding with a talk by Wes Moore, CEO of the

Robin Hood Foundation and author of the upcoming book "Five Days: The Fiery Reckoning of an American City."

**Organizing Black**, in collaboration with other local partners, commemorated the five-year anniversary of the Baltimore Uprising through a virtual week of action aimed at addressing the root issues of the uprising and a series of in-person events that will take place later in the year.

**Real News Network** produced a 15-20 minute video Five Years Later: What Have We Learned from the Death of Freddie Gray? featuring interviews with individuals who were directly involved in the Uprising as well as video footage from interviews and scenes filmed during the Uprising.

**St. Gregory Catholic Church** in Sandtown-Winchester will host "A Day of Healing and Music," reprising an event it hosted in the wake of the Uprising in 2015 in the center of Gilmore Homes, featuring live music by jazz quartet the Greg Hatza ORGANization, tables for community-based organizations providing services in the community to share information, and food.

**Times Community Services**, the non-profit arm of the Baltimore Times Newspaper, will present an exhibition of Baltimore-based artists, gallery walk, and community conversation on the subject, "Baltimore Uprising: Have Things Changed or Remained the Same?"

- The projects range from workshops for students and artistic performances to photography exhibits and panel discussions.