

AFRICAN AMERICAN RESPONSE CIRCLE



June 7, 2021

Via Email

Supervisor Keith Carson
Alameda County Board of Supervisors
1225 Fallon Street
Oakland, CA 94612

Dear Members of the Alameda County Board of Supervisors:

Our coalition writes today to demand an investment of \$100 million in Alameda County's Black community as an integral component of COVID-"recovery": the *African American Response Circle's Black Community Recovery Plan* (Plan). We note that while many parts of the County may in fact be entering a recovery period, our pandemic may be just beginning. With relatively lower levels of COVID-19 infection, the Black community in Alameda County has lower rates of natural immunity; conversely, the highest COVID-19 death rates have been experienced by African Americans. These facts, coupled with low vaccine rates among Black County residents, significantly increase our risk of serious infection. Although the state will be reopening June 15th in a celebratory COVID-recovery mode, our efforts to mitigate, test, contract trace, and vaccinate, must accelerate, not scale back.

Our Plan addresses this reality head-on, with significant investments in the community health infrastructure that has proven to be so vital over the last 18 months. In addition, our Plan tackles many of the collateral impacts of the pandemic – including the massive need for mental health and housing supports – as well as the structural inequities that must be addressed in order to ensure that we eradicate the kinds of disparities that the COVID-19 pandemic highlighted, ones which have no place in the 21st century.

In 2008, the Alameda County Office of Public Health published *Life and Death From Unnatural Causes*, a report that included dizzying statistics on the state of the County's Black community:

When comparing a white child born in the Oakland hills to a Black child born in West Oakland, the Black child was:

- 1.5 times more likely to be born premature or low birth weight
- 7 times more likely to be born into poverty
- 2 times as likely to live in a home that is rented
- By fourth grade, this child is 4 times less likely to read at grade level
- 5.6 times more likely to drop out of school
- 5 times more likely to be hospitalized for diabetes, 2 times as likely to be hospitalized for and to die of heart disease, 3 times more likely to die of stroke, and twice as likely to die of cancer.

A 2013 update to that study found no improvement, and highlighted the relationship between living in concentrated areas of poverty and negative outcomes in all areas including health, economic well-being, housing, educational attainment, victimization, and incarceration.

Who is most likely to live in a high-poverty neighborhood in Alameda County? We are.

In Alameda County, **1 in 15 White** residents live in **high-poverty neighborhoods**, compared to



1 in 9 Asians



1 in 4 Latinos



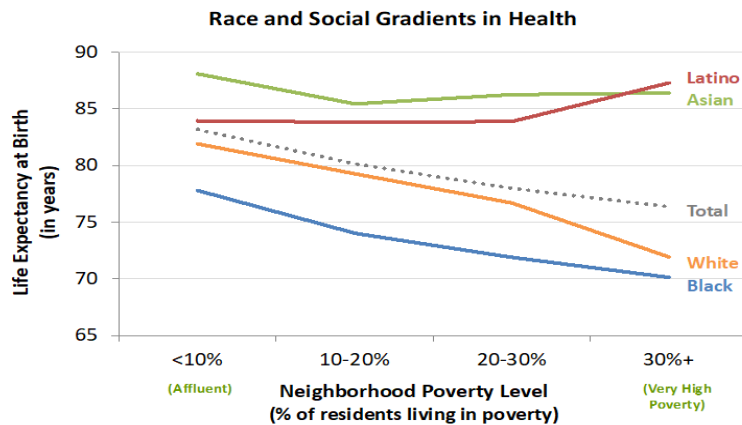
1 in 3 Blacks



East Oakland, the Fruitvale, and West Oakland have persistently experienced the most concentrated poverty in Alameda County, with nearly a quarter of all residents in these three neighborhoods living at or below the federal poverty level.

Within high-poverty neighborhoods, Alameda County’s Black residents have the worst outcomes. Simply put, without investment, we will continue to die.

Place, Racism, and Neighborhood Poverty: How do they Interact?



The Equity Challenge

Alameda County is expected to realize nearly \$325 million in American Rescue Plan Funds. In its relief and recovery response, the Board of Supervisors (Board) must address the historic and systemic inequities that resulted in the catastrophic COVID-19 outcomes realized by Alameda County’s Black community; we call upon the Board to move resources using an equity frame.

Our Plan addresses both the immediate and long-term needs of Alameda County’s Black community; the plan represents a critical combination of investment that seeks to reverse the havoc brought on by the pandemic and lay the foundation for a new playing field for opportunity and power premised on redress and recognition of multi-generational disinvestment and discrimination.

With an understanding that resources must be targeted to maximize impact and to meaningfully address need, we seek to direct investments in the highest poverty neighborhoods in Alameda County, including East Oakland, the Fruitvale, and West Oakland. Given the often under-recognized need in these communities and the relative paucity of service providers, we understand that the Board has also prioritized investments in Ashland/Cherryland and Hayward. While we support this focus, we also urge the Board to consider the needs of South Berkeley, Emeryville, and North Oakland, neighborhoods which should be targeted for investment based on every reliable indicator that exists. In all jurisdictions covered by our Plan, the focus will be on the Black community: our outcomes are the worst and our need the greatest, reflecting the generational and unequivocal havoc that has been wreaked on us throughout our history in the County.

Beyond funding our Plan, we urge the County to develop policies and practices that address the historical legacy of racism and the accompanying structural issues that continue to kill us. The County should ask itself how and why the legacy of racism and systemic inequities have made the COVID-19 pandemic worse for African Americans, and use this moment as an opportunity for radical reform. Any assertion that the parameters of the American Rescue Plan meaningfully limit the Board’s ability to act decisively in this moment would be specious at best; we urge creative use of the funds in alignment with the approaches being taken by other jurisdictions across the country.¹

Similarly, the Board must direct County staff to rethink existing allocation processes with respect to funding this Plan and similar efforts. This is not the time for a cumbersome request for proposal process, which wastes the time and resources of both community-based organizations and County staff. It is also not the time to be stringent regarding the percentage of administrative dollars awarded. Instead, we call upon the Board to invest in the capacity of our community-based organizations – to strengthen them so that they can play a vital and long- lasting role in a new, thriving, and resilient Black Alameda County.

AARC ALAMEDA COUNTY BLACK COMMUNITY COVID RECOVERY PLAN

Housing is a Human Right			
Rental Supports	\$6 million	According to the 2019 homeless count, the County’s homeless population was 47% Black, more than 4 times the Black County population overall. Current rental support programs are difficult to access and have strict income and other eligibility requirements, resulting in low pick-up rates for Black residents. Our program will be easily accessible and will focus on the Black community.	\$1,000 month for 500 individuals or families. for 12 months
Down Payment Assistance	\$12.5 million	Home ownership continues to offer the greatest opportunity for generational wealth transfer. Redlining, gentrification, and loan foreclosures have all taken a	Up to \$50,000 for 250 individuals or families

¹ See for example: <https://www.northjersey.com/in-depth/news/2021/05/05/stimulus-money-state-spending-checks-american-rescue-plan/7398418002/>

		drastic toll on Black home ownership rates in the County.	
Home Ownership Retention Support	\$6 million	Black homeownership has plummeted over the last decade, in part due to foreclosure and inability to retain homes generationally. Funds will be used for retention support including legal services, lien clearing, and home improvement.	Up to \$25,000 for 250 Black homeowners
Affordable Housing Development	\$8 million	Existing parcels in Oakland are development ready. These parcels will be developed by Black development teams. Priority will be placed on affordable home ownership development.	
Economic Self-Sufficiency			
Land Trust	\$10 million	The time for land and property banking is now. Funding used to support expansion of BCZ hubs in East, West, and North Oakland. Land trust ownership beneficiaries to include BLOs and community members.	3 BCZ hubs at \$3.3 million each to include commercial and residential property investments, support for Black businesses, and BLO and community ownership
Grants for Black Businesses	\$10 million	A recently published study of the impact of the pandemic on disadvantaged businesses in Oakland highlights the toll that the pandemic has taken on our commercial life, citing numerous examples of how White-owned businesses have consistently fared better during the crisis than their non-White owned counterparts ² . Struggling businesses need grants not loans if we expect them to re-open and/or survive.	Up to \$250,000 each for 40 Black-owned businesses
TA for Black Businesses	\$1.5 million	Black businesses need support and technical assistance to re-emerge and thrive in the COVID Recovery period.	
Universal Basic Income	\$15.75 million	Expand on Oakland's 500 family pilot to include 1000 additional Oakland families and 750 Hayward/Unincorporated Area Families. UBI's benefits include not just immediate financial supports for struggling families but also violent crime reduction, with studies in jurisdictions nationally and internationally showing a direct linkage between UBI and reductions in violent crime.	\$750 monthly benefit x 12 months of funding 1750x\$750x12=\$15.75M
Spiritual and Physical Health			

² *Impacts of COVID-19 on Disadvantaged Businesses in Oakland California*. Mills College Community Action Forum. May 2017.

Mental Health Services	\$9.36 million	Culturally responsive mental health services for both crisis stabilization and respite services, targeting the direct impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic including increasing rates of depression and anxiety and escalating violence. Although limited County-funded mental health services are available, low reimbursement rates impact access and culturally responsive providers are not widely available.	1000 Black residents receive 1 hour of culturally responsive counseling per week for 12 months. \$180 hourly rate x 1000 hours per week for 12 months $180*1000*52 = \$9.36$ million
Community Health Centers and Providers	\$6 million	Investment in community clinics and providers to supports the holistic delivery of health services including services targeting diabetes, high blood pressure, and heart disease, which are the most prevalent in the Black community and rates of which have escalated as a result of the pandemic. In addition, community clinics and providers will deliver the COVID-19 testing, contract tracing, vaccination, and case management services that will be critical to our continued efforts to blunt the effect of COVID-19 on the Black community.	\$4 million for up to 2 community clinics and \$2 million for up to 2 community providers
Life Coaching/Service Connectors	\$4.5 million	While many system-connected individuals receive some form of case management those who are not formally system involved do not; dedicated life coaches charged with identifying family needs and connecting to resources are critically needed.	60 life coaches at \$60,000 annually with a 25% benefits factor for 1 year $\$60,000 \times 1.25 \times 60 = \4.5 million
Impact Hubs	\$5 million	Additional community Impact Hubs need to be established throughout the County where vulnerable and high-risk individuals and families can easily access needed services through a “one-stop” approach. Hubs will be created through expansion of existing CBO’s in targeted neighborhoods and will connect the community to services including training and employment, reentry supports, violence prevention, housing navigation, and rental supports.	5 hubs at \$1,000,000 each located in distressed, high need, stressor beats.
African American Wellness Complex/African Resource Center	\$5 million	The County commissioned the development of a proposal for an African American Holistic Wellness Complex in 2015; the project has never been funded. This Complex is designed to serve as an anchor for Black life in Oakland with a focus on spiritual, mental, and physical well-being.	
Total	\$99.61 million		

In submitting this Plan, we note that the Board's ability to act is not dependent on resources, but on will. In addition to American Rescue Plan Funds, the County has reserve balances in excess of \$1.5 billion; in addition, there is at least another \$350 million in the Emerald Fund, a fund that the Board of Supervisors can use for any purpose upon a 4/5 vote. Effective January 1, 2023, the County will also realize \$150 million in new General Fund revenue annually pursuant to Measure W, funds which can be used to support many of the initiatives outlined in our Plan.

About the African American Response Circle

The Brotherhood of Elders Network, an intergenerational network of men of African ancestry who foster environments where Black boys and young men are empowered to flourish, established the African American Response Circle in April of 2020 to specifically focus on the disparate impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the African American community in Oakland/ Alameda County. The AARC is comprised of approximately 90 Black-led/Black-focused organizations and African American community leaders.

Thank you for your prompt attention to this urgent matter.

Sincerely,



Greg Hodge

African American Response Circle
Brotherhood of Elders Network

