



Written Testimony for City of Baltimore Council Bill 19-0410 Trauma-Responsive Care Act

On behalf of Fight Blight Bmore we welcome the opportunity to submit written testimony for bill 19-0410 *The Trauma-Responsive Care Act*. We are writing in support of the bill provided the recommendations listed below are adopted. Fight Blight Bmore cannot offer a favorable testimony for the current iteration of this bill.

Background on Fight Blight Bmore

On Mother's Day 2016, I witnessed what could have been an awful tragedy about two blocks from the Dr. Emerson Julian Center. A few children were riding their bikes down the sidewalk of Fremont Avenue, crossing Lafayette Street, where four brownstones were being demolished. The demolition site was filled with debris, gaping holes about six feet deep in the ground, and no gate to prevent site access. I witnessed the potential danger associated with these unsafe conditions such as a child falling into the unsecured debris. That day, I began researching, documenting, reporting and tracking environmental hazards created in part by the demolition sites around the city and the structures that preceded them. That day Fight Blight Bmore (FBB) was born as a call to action to address blight and the issues it causes for individuals and communities.

Due to resident flight beginning in the 1960's to surrounding counties, city neighborhoods lost population, businesses, community institutions and places of employment. These losses and subsequent strategic disinvestment in many city neighborhoods, were fueled in part by racism, resulted in depressed property values and tax revenues. This in combination with factors such as the post-industrial economic downturn of the 1970's and the epidemic abuse of illicit drugs in the 1980's resulted in numerous vacant, abandoned, improperly used, unkempt and/or underutilized properties. The resulting blight created or worsened environmental stressors which can be defined as any physical, chemical, or biological factor that can cause an adverse effect on ecosystems or human health. Baltimore's most blighted neighborhoods Harlem Park- Sandtown Winchester, Upton-Druid Heights, have life expectancies that mirror those in North Korea and Kagazistan¹. Lowered life expectancies and other poor health outcomes can be tied to the presence of blight in communities. The result of blight is community based trauma.

¹ Capital News Service. [In West Baltimore, life expectancy the same as North Korea](#). (February 15, 2016)

Fight Blight Bmore makes the following recommendations for the current iteration of the bill:

Name of the Bill

That bill be named for a social or community worker whose work focused specifically on addressing community based trauma in Baltimore examples include but are not limited Drs Joanne And Elmer Martin or Violet Hill Whyte.

Task Force Composition: It is our recommendation that the taskforce composition include the following amendments:

1. **There should be a minimum of 4 licensed clinical social workers on the task force.** They should represent varied expertise for different types of trauma, and they should have a proven background in working successfully with a racial equity focus.
2. **The youth representatives who are asked to join the task force should be compensated for their time, contributions, and effort.** The youth of Baltimore City are often called to lead initiatives and offer direction and insight to the challenges that face this city. However, the youth of Baltimore City did not create the conditions in which they live and should not be expected to work towards solving these issues for free. While legislation may not allow for task force member compensation, most members' participation will be in their professional roles. The youth representatives should be incentivized and brought into parity via an accommodation for their compensation.
3. **The number of formerly incarcerated individuals should increase to a minimum of three.**
4. **There should be a minimum of one member of the taskforce with expertise in addressing the physical, social and economic trauma of African American community displacement using collaborative work, cooperative economic and cultural practice.** The relevant community displacement traumas include but are not limited to segregation, redlining, contract lending, restrictive covenants, exclusionary zoning, Urban Renewal programs, subprime lending, condemnation, demolition and other community and economic development laws, policies, regulations and practices. With Baltimore City, Department of Housing and Community Development, Department of Planning and Department of Public works as an agencies impacted by the bill, this is critically necessary.

Defining Trauma-Informed Care

As the bill is currently written, it is implementing the SAMHSA definition and understanding of Trauma Informed Care. According to SAMHSA, an organization is considered informed when it is able to be aware of the impact of trauma, recognize its signs and symptoms, and respond to trauma by integrating language and knowledge about trauma into its policies, procedures, and practices.²

² McArdle, Flannery, *Bill Synopsis: 19-0410 The Baltimore City Trauma Responsive Care Act.* (2019).

It is our recommendation that the definition used in this bill for the purpose of guiding the work of the taskforce and agency staff members be revised to include a historical context. This historical definition should include an understanding of the legal, systemic, cultural, and social methods through which Baltimore city agencies have created the conditions that are the source of and/or contribute to the collective trauma experienced by its Black residents. It is mentioned in the six principles of SAMHSA to have a historical approach; however, it is our recommendation that the historical approach be explicit in the definition of trauma informed care used by the taskforce.

Trauma-Informed Trainings: The trauma-informed training as identified in this bill is a “Didactic Course in trauma-informed care that is developed by the US Dept. of Health, MD Dept of Health, or Baltimore Dept. of Health” and provided by Baltimore Dept. of Health or its designee in collaboration with Task Force.³ **It is our recommendation that the trauma-informed trainings are developed by local, black-led organizations that specialize in understanding trauma from a holistic, racial equity, strength based approach.** As mentioned in *Baltimore Awakes: An Analysis of the Human and Social Service Sector in Baltimore City*, the mainstream, white-dominated institutions and research leaders often miss the mark when assessing issues of trauma in the Black community because they operate under a false notion of black pathology and white superiority. These institutions continue to harm the very communities they state they are trying to help.⁴

Taskforce Evaluation: The Baltimore City Department of Human Resources is responsible for assessing the compliance of the task force in regards to federal, state, and local laws. **It is our recommendation that a community-based external party be employed to evaluate and assess the impact of the taskforce and the trainings.** Government agencies are accountable to the people whom they serve. Therefore, a collective body of community members, or a third party consultant should evaluate the effectiveness of the taskforce rather than an agency affiliate.

City Agency Responsibility and Accountability: It is no secret that Baltimore City’s government agencies have a history of being responsible for traumatizing and/or re-traumatizing Baltimore City residents. From the effects of redlining in 1911 to the current state of our most blighted communities, “*People living in neighborhoods with blight are not only losing access to home equity, community history and public sector improvements, they are also being exposed to community based trauma resulting in long term stress from fear of unsafe property implosion, toxic exposure, and crime.*”-Nneka Nnamdi.⁵ While these are just two examples, they speak to the responsibility of the city to assess and acknowledge the ways in which it has contributed to the trauma experienced by Black residents. **It is our recommendation that the duties of the taskforce and/or agency staff include an analysis of each city agency in regards to their historical involvement in creating these conditions.**

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<https://baltimore.legistar.com/LegislationDetail.aspx?ID=4068857&GUID=9C48A666-88A8-4D49-A794-AC0D1C3D49B9&Options=ID|Text|&Search=19-0410>

⁴ <https://lbsbaltimore.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/When-Baltimore-Awakes.pdf>

⁵ <https://www.fightblightbmore.com/fight-blight-bmore-blog>

We urge the committee to take this opportunity to disrupt the deadly effect of white supremacist, business-as-usual, tactics used to address the challenges of our city. As the bill is currently written, it contributes to the falsehood that Black communities, leaders, and professionals are not capable of leading and being the center of our own healing. It is for this reason foremost, that we do not support the bill without these stated amendments. It is understood that the task force will comprise of impacted individuals, and it is understood that there are many Black professionals and individuals involved with the creation and implementation of the task force. However, our recommendations addresses the need to confront the white supremacist notions that permeate through the policies and result in the harm of Black communities.

As it is written today, this bill will continue to perpetuate white supremacist norms and procedures that result in the harm of the mental, emotional, physical, and spiritual health of Baltimore's Black communities. In conclusion, it is recommended that the above listed amendments be made to Baltimore city council Bill 19-0410 in order for it to be considered an equitable legislative solution to the effects of trauma on our city.

Thank you for considering our recommendations. If you have any questions or would like to discuss anything mentioned in more detail, please contact nneka@fightblightbmore. For more information on Fight Blight Bmore, please visit our website at fightblightbmore.com.

In solidarity,

Nneka Nnamdi

Nneka Nnamdi
Founder
Fight Blight Bmore

Trauma-Informed Care Act, Now the Elijah Cummings Healing City Act
Hearing Date: 12/17 10am