



Our Commitment to Oakland's Black Community

A Letter from Mia Bonta, Oakland Promise CEO

"Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere."

— Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

July 15, 2020

Dear Oakland Promise Community,

These past several weeks have been among the most difficult times experienced in our country. With the multitude of deaths to Black people in this country over the years which most recently culminated in the murder of George Floyd, we are more aware than ever, of the massive problem of systemic racism. The outrage and protests springing up in every state show that maybe this time --- maybe just this time, America will continue to own and deal with the oppression, wounds and injustices that have affected the Black community in the U.S.

Clearly, the national conscience has been raised to address not only of police brutality, but of racial discrimination in areas such as incarceration, healthcare, education, housing, wealth accumulation, economic opportunity, and participation in the political process. In all areas, we can see how Black people and other people of color are either suffering more in problem areas or hindered in areas of progress. With the confluence of COVID-19, the African American community is the [most severely affected of all groups](#). Our staff at Oakland Promise --- none more than our Black team members, not only grieved but felt the pain, anger and frustration of the decades-long (not including centuries) injustices endured by our African American community.

As a Black Latina woman of Puerto Rico, I have also felt this pain deeply and have been disheartened at the slow progress we have made since the time of Rodney King to now, with the tragedy of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor and others. Yet, I have also seen how so many organizations and individuals have come together to protest out in the streets, support racial equality and stand up for the simple, inalienable truth: Black Lives Matter. We may be in a once-in-a-lifetime moment, much like the time when the Civil Rights Movement was fought for by Martin Luther King, Jr. and others in the 1960s. Laws and policies were changed then. We are at a watershed moment, one where there is no way of wanting to turn the clock back to 'normalcy'. We have the chance to make and create change for the better - individually, systemically and societally.

That is where Oakland Promise will do its part to effect change.

Over four years ago, OP was formed to disrupt existing inequities for Oakland's young learners, who were mostly from Black and Brown low-income families, to complete post-secondary education and have an opportunity to pursue successful careers that would enable them to thrive. So our vision is an Oakland community without barriers to equity. We are keenly aware that in order to be able to pursue college however, not only do these young learners and their caregivers need financial, mentorship and advisory resources, they need to be kept safe during their journey from the barriers that are tied to being Black in America.

What can we do to sustain our fight for racial equity and justice?

Since OP's strategic focus is on providing educational access especially for people of color, we feel the most effective impact we can make in creating a world of racial equity is implementing initiatives that are aligned with our mission. Here are just a few of the actions we will take in the coming weeks and months:

- **“Oakland Promise Youth Community Organizer Grant”**. To elevate the drive of our powerful youth in Oakland, we will soon be launching this grant, which will be open to any young person or youth-led initiative that supports activism and community organizing with the goal of uplifting the Black community.
- **Youth-led Series of Virtual Town Halls**. We are creating and hosting a platform this summer and fall where youth can be in direct dialogue with elected and other community leaders to address accountability and transparency: (Session titles are subject to change):
 - *Disrupting the Cradle-to-Prison Pipeline through Investment in Black and Brown Communities*
 - *Alternatives to Policing: The School to Prison Pipeline and Demands for Change*
 - *Racial Justice and Allyship in Oakland*
- **Key Participation by Oakland Leaders and Organizations**. In partnership with other community-based organizations, we have invited and confirmed Mayor Libby Schaaf, Councilmembers Sheng Thao, Loren Taylor, and Nikki Bas, and other community leaders to a virtual ‘town hall’ with students to directly address how our Oakland systems and policies are managing this moment and how they are working on issues affecting African Americans in Oakland. Some of our partner organizations in this effort include:
 - We Lead Ours
 - Oaktown Proud Youth
 - Youth ALIVE!
 - Iceehouse
 - Yemeni American Youth Center
 - Vision Quilt
 - OYAC
 - APISA Initiative of OUSD Office of Equity
 - Higher Ground

- **Amplifying Black Voice and Experience.** We will use our OP platform to listen and promote Black voices and to center the Black experience in our work.
- **Resources for Parents.** We are providing resources for parents on how to talk about issues of racism, particularly affecting Black communities to children.

In the months and years ahead, as an organization predominantly staffed by Black people and people of color working for Black people and people of color, we will be working diligently to lead by example. In this tumultuous moment, we have an opportunity to come together in this crucial time to demonstrate to the Oakland community that our work is directly related to social and racial justice and that we are actively striving to support our Black community. I hope you will actively join us in this important work together.

How can you help in this cause? Here are some of the ways...

- Protest and/or contact your legislators regarding policies that would create a more just world.
- Support police reform, training and screening to reduce brutality and discrimination and reallocate funds back into the community.
- Listen, ask questions and talk to your friends and families about their experiences in racism and what we can individually do to challenge it.
- Listen, ask questions and talk to young learners and how to prepare them to challenge racist situations, while being resilient in their self-esteem and potential.
- Join a cause and donate to an organization that relates to social and racial justice for the Black community.
- Become an OP volunteer, mentor, or contributor
- Complete the US Census and Vote in 2020

Together, we can create an Oakland in the near future that is just, peaceful, and full of opportunity for our young people --- one that will sustain the change that we seek in this moment.

In Community,



Mia Bonta, Chief Executive Officer

