

BLOC

Black Leaders Organizing for
COMMUNITIES

The

BLOC

Agenda

A PLATFORM FOR PROSPERITY

Approved 12/07/2019

We are Black People of the City of Milwaukee. We are mothers and fathers, brothers and sisters, young and elder, straight & LGBT+. We are teachers. We are students. We are drivers and transit riders. We are organizers and leaders in our communities, be they neighborhoods, schools, churches, workplaces or otherwise.

For the past two years we have asked black residents of Milwaukee: "What would it look like for your community to thrive?" We've received thousands of answers to that question. Thousands of visions of communities where people are safe and opportunity abounds. Visions of communities free of the oppressions of white supremacy and police brutality. Communities bound in love for each other.

The proposed agenda reflects the aggregated visions of our community around 10 basic human needs: Safety, Housing, Health, Food, Water, Education, Purpose, Dignity, Democracy, and Freedom & Justice. Every demand is designed to improve the quality of life and economic wellbeing of the Black community in Milwaukee.

The fact that we have to demand these basic necessities speaks to the disfunction of America's political and economic systems.

We present this agenda to all levels of government: city, county, state and federal, to all candidates for office, to the media, to labor unions, to churches and neighborhood organizations, and to the non-profit, business, and philanthropic communities. It will take all hands on deck to heal our community.

This agenda is BLOC's vision for our future. It is the tool against which we will measure the positions of candidates and the progress of elected officials. The intent is for this to be a living document, being edited and added to as goals are achieved and new community concerns arise. We will review proposed amendments to the Agenda at subsequent People's Assemblies. We come together. Today and everyday. Together, we are powerful. And together we will rise!

Join us in your block club & neighborhood association.

Join us in town halls, state capitols & community meetings.

Join us in resistance and solidarity.

Join us in creating a future worthy of our ancestor's sacrifice, our boldest aspirations, and our children's great promise.



Safety

We deserve to be safe in our homes and neighborhoods without fear of harm. We believe that safety is best ensured when the members of our community have their physical, mental, and emotional needs met and when we build sustainable, resilient, and family supporting environments.

To meet this need we call for the following:

- Passage of policies that ensure that basic needs are met with a special focus on mental health, living wages, and violence interruption programs as specific efforts to curbs violence (see the rest of the agenda)
- Passage of common sense gun reforms such as background checks
- Raising the age for gun ownership to 21
- Requiring a license for gun ownership that requires training and psychological evaluation

We also call for increased and major financial investments in:

- Expanding non-police violence prevention programs such as 414 Life to more neighborhoods
- Expanding access to mental health professionals in Black neighborhoods
- Expanding after school programs
- Grants for neighborhood groups to support community events, block parties, safety initiatives and other revitalization projects
- Implementing crime prevention through environmental design (CEPTED) improvements such as LED street lighting, landscaping, etc
- Expediting the removal of lead paint and laterals in homes and schools
- Redesigning streets for safety & speed reduction (including but limited to curb bump outs, protected bike lanes ,speed humps & roundabouts)
- Hiring additional neighborhood-based community organizers
- Strengthening the capacity of the Milwaukee Fire & Police Commission to hold police officers accountable for unnecessary use of force

Housing

We deserve a safe, quality affordable place to call home. We believe that we will only be free when we can take full advantage of the wealth building opportunities that homeownership facilitates. We must take ownership of our communities from government and big banks who neglect our neighborhoods and landlords and developers who subject us to high rents and slum conditions.

To meet this need we call for the following:

- Strengthening of policies that target racial housing discrimination by landlords, banks, and other institutions
- Passage of "Ban the Box" laws to prevent housing discrimination against felons
- The creation of inclusionary zoning areas
- Passage of policies that hold slum lords & banks accountable for negligent properties
- Passage of policies to allow for property tax protections that combat displacement
- Creation of rent controls that limit excessive increases in rent

We also call for increased and major financial investments in:

- Renovating and selling city-owned properties
- Developing alternative housing forms such tiny homes, cooperative housing, and community land trusts
- Expanding Home Ownership Down Payment & Closing Cost Assistance Programs for well established renters
- The creation of "public defenders" to assist residents with evictions
- Anti-displacement assistance for low income families, seniors and families with disabilities
- Grants for home repairs of owner-occupied houses
- Expanding Rent Assistance Programs
- Creation of the Neighborhood Housing Tax Credit

Health

We deserve affordable, high quality healthcare, clean air, clean water, and green infrastructure in every community. We will only be free when every woman can choose her own destiny, when our healthcare is no longer controlled by big pharmaceutical and insurance companies that profit off our pain and illness and poisons our environment and when the government fulfills its fundamental responsibility to ensure access to health care.

To meet this need we call for the following:

- Focusing health prevention efforts on tackling the social determinants of health such as housing, etc (see the rest of the agenda)
- Passage of policies that strengthen environmental protections to reduce all forms of pollutions including but not limited to air, water, soil, food, etc.
- Ensuring that local hospitals have and invest the resources to provide adequate, quality care to residents
- Strengthening and enforcing policies that eliminate medical redlining and other discrimination in the health care system
- Training medical professionals for implicit bias
- Incentivizing and recruiting more Black people into medical professions
- Requiring all K-12 students to regularly see a therapist
- Incorporate mental health care into school curriculum
- Expanding access to healthy foods in Black neighborhoods
- Tackling the social determinants of health such as: housing, income, etc
- Authorizing the federal government to negotiate to low prescription drug costs.

We also call for increased and major financial investments in:

- Creation of a Medicare for All Insurance system that covers basic visits & procedures, dental & mental health care without co-pays.
- Establishing more mental health clinics, physical health clinics & urgent care centers in Black neighborhoods
- Expediting the removal of lead paint & water laterals from homes & schools
- Research on sickle cell anemia, diabetes, infant mortality and other afflictions that disproportionately impact Black people.
- Developing more green space and planting more trees in Black neighborhoods
- Moving towards 100% renewable energies
- Providing Universal Access to Reproductive Health Care for men and women.

Education

We deserve an opportunity to thrive and pursue our dreams. All children should have access to great public schools and apprenticeships that give them the tools and skill necessary to survive in a 21st century global economy and be valuable member of their community.

To meet this need we call for the following:

- Abolishing the WI School Funding Formula & equitably and fully funding schools
- Recruiting more Black teachers, counselors and nurses
- Canceling Student Debt
- Establishing more community schools and community controlled schools
- Establishing more mentorship and apprenticeship programs
- Reforming curriculum to re-focus on needed and essential life skills including but not limited to: Science, technology, engineering, arts, mathematics (STEAM), coding, financial literacy, taxes, emotional intelligence, parenting, home economics, drivers education and culturally relevant history
- Establishing certified technical training programs in high schools
- Removing police officers from in and around schools

We also call for increased and major financial investments in:

- Supporting public schools in order to raise salaries to recruit and retain quality teachers, nurses & counselors, create smaller class sizes and increase the cultural competencies of students
- Providing tuition-free access to public colleges, universities & technical schools
- Supporting Historically Black Colleges & Universities (HBCUs)
- Extending public library hours

Employment & Purpose

We deserve a fair & democratic economy that works for all of us, with good jobs for everyone who wants to work, where everyone has a decent income and can sustain a family, and where all workers can join a union or other worker-led organizations. Our community will reach its full potential when every family has access to quality employment, free, high-quality childcare and when our economy is no longer controlled by Wall Street and the richest 1%.

To meet this need we call for the following:

- Raising the minimum wage to at least \$15 an hour
- Passage of "Ban the Box" legislation to prevent employment discrimination against formerly incarcerated individuals
- Repealing of Right to Work Laws
- Expanding and enforcing workers' rights to: a living wage, family leave, sick leave, collective bargaining, freedom from discrimination based on sex, gender identity, gender expression, age, race, ethnicity, nationality, and/or sexuality
- Ensuring that all people have access to a living income regardless of ability to work.
- Strengthen policies that end business loan discrimination by banks and other lenders
- Expansion of programs to train youth in skilled trades
- Increasing the amount of Black people employed by or owning Black-owned businesses
- Increasing the amount of government contracts going to Black-owned businesses

We also call for increased and major financial investments in:

- Establishing universal child care for working parents
- Raising the amount of the earned income tax credit
- Establishing Offices of Cooperative Development or positions in Economic Development Departments that focus on cooperatives
- Expanding and promoting grants for Black-owned Increasing the amount of government contracts going to Black businesses & community-owned businesses
- Expanding the Earn & Learn and other youth job program
- Multi-Billion-Dollar Stimulus Package Into the Black Community
- Establish Child Development Accounts / Baby Bonds for all children
- Increase social security benefits for the elderly & disabled
- Establishing a City and/or State owned public bank
- Establish a publicly-owned, green energy cooperative

Transportation

We deserve access to the full range of opportunities available in our cities and towns by being able to safely and efficiently travel to and from places of employment, recreation and other needs. We will only be free when we are no longer bound to the few jobs, businesses and resources that are available in our communities and when we no longer spend excessive amounts on transportation or auto repair.

To meet this need we call for the following:

- Establishing a regional transit authority with Milwaukee and the surrounding counties
- Expanding the hiring of Black transit operators and street repair contractors

We also call for increased and major financial investments in:

- Expanding bus transit to reach Chicago to the South and other job centers to the north and west of Milwaukee.
- Making MCTS fare-free for all residents
- Establishing an off-road light, commuter rail system
- Establishing a national high-speed rail system
- Expanding off-road bike trails
- Fixing city streets and potholes
- Redesigning streets for safety & speed reduction (including but limited to curb bump outs, protected bike lanes, speed humps & roundabouts)

Recreation

We deserve to live in communities where there are ample spaces to enjoy life, nature and connections to other people. In order to build thriving communities our neighborhoods must have maintained public parks, successful eateries and entertainment venues.

To meet this need we call for the following:

- Keeping parks city/county owned for the public good

We also call for increased and major financial investments in:

- Expanding Boys and Girls Clubs, Urban Underground, True Skool, and other youth programs
- Reopening county pools and other amenities
- Upgrading & repair parks, playgrounds and sports facilities in Black neighborhoods
- Supporting development of non-bar/club recreational activities such as skating rinks, movie theaters, concert venues, arcades, etc.
- Investing in public art by local artists

Freedom & Justice

We deserve to live in a nation that promotes peace and harmony both at home and around the world. We seek to address the drug crisis with treatment instead of incarceration and dismantle the criminal justice system that steals childhoods, murders Black and brown people and locks people up for being poor. We will only be free when the U.S. government ceases to instigate violence in other countries, and corporations no longer reap profits from poverty at home and abroad.

To meet this need we call for the following:

- Repealing Truth in Sentencing & Mandatory Minimums
- Repealing & Replacing the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act also known as the "1994 Crime Bill: with a safety bill crafted in a people centered process that invest in prevention and community healing
- Expanding use of probation and parole instead of incarceration
- Reviewing and reforming all sentencing guidelines
- Legalizing & regulating marijuana, expunging records and ensuring that Black people can grow marijuana and own dispensaries
- Decriminalizing sex work
- Passage of "Ban the Box" legislation to prevent discrimination against the formerly incarcerated.
- Abolishing or reducing fines for low level offenses
- Abolishing all fees in the penal system and administrative fees for probationers, parolees and those on supervision
- Abolishing the use of cash bail
- Divesting resources from police, prisons & military to invest in communities
- Reducing US military presence abroad

We also call for increased and major financial investments in:

- Reparations for descendants of slavery in America that results in a transfer of wealth from institutions that benefited from slavery
- Increasing the pay rate of public defenders
- Hiring more public defenders, especially Black public defenders.
- Supporting and expanding restorative justice programs
- Investment into counseling, job training, and rehabilitation for the incarcerated

Dignity

We deserve a world where everyone is treated with respect and dignity, where women have the freedom to control their own bodies, where we have the freedom to move and migrate and where everyone is free to be who they are. We will only be free when we uproot racism, patriarchy, heteronormality and all other forms of oppression and no one lives in fear, trauma or violence.

To meet this need we call for the following:

- Passage of the Equal Rights Amendment
- Passage of protections against the discrimination of hair styles
- Passage of measures that prohibit and prosecute racial and religious profiling
- Protecting Women & LGBT Rights
- Passage of the Employment Non-Discrimination Act and making nondiscrimination protections for trans* people explicit under federal and state law
- Removing barriers to obtaining government-issued identification for trans* people that aligns with their gender identity
- Ensuring comprehensive access to basic health care and transition-related care in benefits for trans* residents
- Decriminalizing border crossings
- Promotion of unisex and family restrooms

Democracy

We deserve a democracy in which all of our voices are heard. We will only be free when our political system is no longer dominated by big money, when we redraw gerrymandering districts to fairly represent our communities, when we restore the right to vote to all incarcerated and formerly incarcerated Americans and when every voter is guaranteed the right to freely and fairly cast a ballot.

To meet this need we call for the following:

- Automatically registering residents to vote
- Creation of a non-partisan redistricting process
- Restoration of voting rights to the incarcerated so that they can vote while in prison
- Counting the incarcerated as residents of their home before incarceration, not as residents of prisons
- Improving of responsiveness from elected and government officials
- Making election days local, state and federal holidays
- Empowering neighborhood associations with decision making authority for their neighborhoods
- Implementing instant runoff voting and ranked choice voting systems
Ending corporate personhood and overturning Citizens United

We also call for increased and major financial investments in:

- Establishing and expanding early voting locations
- Publicly funding elections
- Establishing participatory budgeting programs