



Supporting Baltimore During & After COVID-19

Legislative Proposals and Opportunities for
State and Federal Partnership for Baltimore

THE OFFICE OF BALTIMORE CITY COUNCIL PRESIDENT BRANDON M. SCOTT

APRIL 7, 2020

Dear Baltimore,

COVID-19 is an unprecedented public health threat that is unlike anything we have seen. This global pandemic will have devastating health and economic impacts on all Baltimoreans. We will see the other side of this crisis. Getting there will take all of us. There are still many unknowns related to COVID-19 and the situation is evolving rapidly. During this time, I am working with fellow government officials, health professionals, and business and nonprofit leaders to continue to serve you by gathering and sharing needed information and advocating on your behalf.

This document lays the groundwork for a successful and equitable recovery for Baltimore. It outlines how I intend to address our immediate and long-term needs and ensure the well-being of our people. In this unprecedented global public health emergency, everything must be on the table — including using the Rainy Day Fund — to offset the impact of this crisis on our residents.

In addition to the proposals laid out here, we must continue to practice social distancing. Limiting personal contact reduces the number of people that will get infected, thus, giving our hospitals the capacity to care for those who are seriously ill. This disease is highly contagious and if nothing is done to slow the rate of infection, the number of people who get sick will overwhelm our hospitals' capacity to care for them.

We know this public health emergency will result in unprecedented economic consequences. Early estimates indicate that the unemployment rate may rise to 30%. High unemployment rates will cause significant hardship for many residents. Even in the best of times, we are a city with extensive needs, with thousands of residents who already struggle with extensive financial hardship.

As the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic begins to be fully felt, it is my duty to guarantee that our most at-risk residents are provided for.

Without an adequate response from all levels of government, the effects on our economy and on our workers will linger well past the conclusion of social distancing. All levels of government must support workers and small businesses in the coming months in the form of payroll support, rent and mortgage relief, increased unemployment benefits, and other forms of direct support.

If you have feedback or would like to get involved, please email me at councilpresident@baltimorecity.gov.

In Service,



Brandon M. Scott

Baltimore City Council President

Proposals

Expand Unemployment Insurance

No one is immune to the economic fallout associated with COVID-19. Immediate support is needed for people whose source of income has been impacted.

Use Rainy Day Fund to Stabilize Baltimore

Our city is projected to lose nearly \$170 million in revenue due to the pandemic. The Rainy Day Fund is meant for emergencies like this one and should be used to ease the financial hardships facing our most vulnerable residents.

Better Leverage Local Public Health Assets

Public health experts must be driving the City's response to COVID-19 to protect our residents. Baltimore is home to world-renowned medical institutions, who must be part of any strategy or solution.

Address Homelessness and Housing Insecurity

People experiencing homelessness and housing insecurity will find it nearly impossible to comply with the CDC's public health virus to stay safe during this pandemic. We must work comprehensively to quickly meet the needs of this community.

Coordinate with Community-Based Efforts

Now more than ever, Baltimore needs effective coordination between city government, grassroots organizations, non-profits and philanthropic institutions to ensure the effective and efficient delivery of resources for people in need.

Support Businesses

Our frontline workers and businesses are economic engines for our city. We must ensure that they can access the resources they need.

Develop Regional and Federal Strategy

When COVID-19 is spreading exponentially across jurisdictions, Baltimore cannot act alone. More cooperation is needed at the local, state, and federal levels to save lives.

Meeting Immediate Needs

March 5th Informational Hearing on COVID-19: On February 10, I asked the administration to brief the Council on the strategic response to COVID-19. On March 5, 2020, the City Council held an informational hearing (City Council Resolution 20-0194R). That same day, the Governor declared a State of Emergency after the first 3 cases were confirmed. In April, we will hold a follow-up to this hearing to benchmark our current progress and determine next steps as we continue the fight against COVID-19.

Daily Live Briefings on Facebook and Instagram Live: On March 15, 2020, I started holding daily live informational sessions on Facebook and Instagram to share updates, raise awareness about resources, and answer residents' questions.

Baltimore COVID-19 Asset Map: On March 23, 2020, I released a resource map to ensure residents could easily be connected to the information and resources they need to navigate this pandemic shut down effectively. This map includes youth and senior food sites, grocery stores offering special hours, and health care clinics for people without insurance — all in one place. To date, the map has been accessed more than 19,600 times. You can see it at bit.ly/bmorecovidmap.

Telephone Town Hall with Johns Hopkins: On March 26, 2020, we held a telephone town hall with Dr. Josh Sharfstein, a former Health Commissioner for Baltimore who is now the Vice Dean for Public Health Practice and Community Engagement at Johns Hopkins University. More than 3,800 people participated in the town hall. We answered 20 questions live on the call and responded to an additional 150+ questions in the days that followed.

Daily Calls to Seniors: My office has been reaching out by phone to seniors around the city to check in with them and inform them of vital resources.

Advocating for Special Grocery Store Hours for Seniors: I personally called numerous grocery store chains to advocate for special hours for seniors and others who are considered at heightened risk of contracting COVID-19. As such, many stores now offer early morning hours strictly for seniors and people with compromised immune systems to reduce their risk of exposure to the virus.

Price Gouging: On March 31, 2020, I released a statement addressing price gouging during the COVID-19 pandemic. I spoke with Attorney General Frosh, who assured me his office was taking this issue very seriously, and shared information about how to report suspected price gouging with residents.

Resource Emails to Residents: Every day, my office is sharing information that can assist and inform. This includes weekly email newsletters. You can sign up for these emails at bit.ly/cpbmsupdates.

Expand Unemployment Insurance

No one is immune to the economic fallout associated with COVID-19. Immediate support is needed for people whose source of income has been impacted.

I know that countless Baltimoreans have lost their jobs during this time of crisis. No one is immune to the economic fallout associated with the coronavirus, and we must step up to support people who have lost their source of income. Critical steps have been made to expand unemployment insurance and I know that there is still more to be done.

Unemployment insurance is crucial to supporting residents and guaranteeing their economic well-being. The best way to support those who are out of work is to replace their lost wages. Other supports are important, but let's not make this more complicated than it needs to be. We need to help workers get the benefits they are entitled to.

- The recently expanded eligibility, such as including self-employed and part-time workers, is essential during this time. All workers negatively impacted by COVID-19 should be able to receive unemployment benefits. The increase in benefits supplemented by the federal government is also extremely important. Workers should receive 100% of their lost wages.
- I am pleased that the recent federal stimulus addresses eligibility and increases to benefits. I advocated for this in my letter to Baltimore's congressional delegation. My advocacy will continue, as I seek to ensure that expanded eligibility and increased payments are continued in future stimulus bills.
- With a record number of people filing for unemployment, there is an urgent need to speed up and streamline the application process. I am calling on the Baltimore City Department of Social Services and the Maryland Department of Labor to reduce wait times, ease the application process, and get benefits to people quickly.

Use Rainy Day Fund and Existing Resources to Stabilize Baltimore

Our city is projected to lose nearly \$170 million in revenue due to the pandemic. The Rainy Day Fund is meant for emergencies and should be used to ease the financial hardships facing our most vulnerable, along with other existing resources.

One of the negative consequences to this pandemic will be a severe hit to Baltimore's finances. The Department of Finance's preliminary projections show that the City could see a nearly \$170 million reduction in revenue. As Council President, I have a duty to be a responsible fiscal steward of the City's finances. That does not mean, however, that the city should hoard its resources during a crisis. We are in a position to ease the financial impact faced by thousands of Baltimore's most vulnerable residents.

That is why, although it will be difficult and although resources are scarce, the City should use a small fraction of the Rainy Day Fund to help out our most vulnerable residents. The Rainy Day Fund has over \$100 million and is used to protect against budget deficits in emergencies. This is an emergency, and we should respond accordingly.

\$3 Million to Reduce Homelessness: Now is the time to take substantial transformational steps to reduce homelessness in our city. I call on the Mayor and the administration to allocate \$3 million of the City's Rainy Day Fund to address homelessness. With public health leaders indicating that coronavirus may return later in the year, we must make concrete, permanent efforts to reduce homelessness now to reduce current and future risk of infection for these residents. This includes using these funds to rapidly rehouse our most vulnerable neighbors to reduce their exposure and provide them a safe space to self-quarantine.

Use Rainy Day Fund and Existing Resources to Stabilize Baltimore

\$10 Million to Establish a Loan Fund for Businesses: We should support Baltimore's small businesses by tapping the Rainy Day Fund to create a \$10 million small business loan fund. This fund could provide loans up to \$50,000 to help operations continue and support employees with payroll, benefits, and other essential expenses. Baltimore County and Prince George's County are pursuing similar programs, and Baltimore City should follow suit. I will encourage our business community and financial institutions to contribute to the fund or provide similar, easy-to-access programs.

\$8 Million for Workforce Development: With unprecedented layoffs and entire sectors of the economy shuttered, Baltimore's workers need serious support. The best way to do this is directly. We should take \$8 million from the City's Rainy Day Fund to support workforce development in healthcare-based careers for those displaced from work due to the coronavirus. Hospitality and service industry workers should have access to training to transition to a sector where work exists. This support should be targeted in neighborhoods with low levels of income and employment to ensure that those most in need get the necessary resources.

This pandemic highlights the significant value that our healthcare industry provides for our city. We must recognize the value of this sector to all of our residents and work to create meaningful career pathways for our students. I am calling for an increase in funding to support education in healthcare-based careers, including doctors, nurses, and researchers. I will work with our institutions to increase partnerships with our public schools. Additionally, I will work to attract healthcare-based research and development firms to Baltimore so that our city remains at the forefront of public health innovation for the world.

\$4 Million for Non-Profits and Cultural Institutions: Baltimore is home to many non-profit cultural institutions that have been forced to close as a result of this crisis. Many of them risk permanent closure without significant support. That would be devastating for Baltimore's music, art, theater, and cultural communities. The City should use \$4 million from the Rainy Day Fund to support these non-profits through a grant program.

In addition, the City and the State should, wherever possible, use our capital budget to take on needed capital work for these cultural institutions in order to free up scarce resources for operating costs.

Use Rainy Day Fund and Existing Resources to Stabilize Baltimore

Neighborhood Impact Investment Fund: The economic impact of COVID-19 on small businesses across Baltimore is far reaching and devastating to our local economy. Across Baltimore, businesses are shuttered and Baltimoreans are out of work, with the impacts most acutely felt by residents and businesses in our deeply challenged neighborhoods. The Neighborhood Impact Investment Fund was created to spur economic development in these very neighborhoods.

Amid the COVID-19 crisis and in its aftermath, economic development will be completely different as we adjust to a new normal. But there is a current critical economic development need that the NIIF can address. We should repurpose the NIIF to directly support businesses and workers in Baltimore's most challenged neighborhoods, through a lens of equity. It should be used to support small business operation and payroll expenses in our most economically-challenged neighborhoods. Now, at this critical moment for businesses, let's leverage the tools available to us to make sure Baltimore's struggling small businesses have the support they need.

Children & Youth Fund: This pandemic is having a devastating effect on our City's young people. Many students in our city face food insecurity, and are now struggling to access nutritious meals while at home. Our city's vast technological and digital divides mean that many students who are now expected to learn at home do not have the basic equipment to do so. And many of the small non-profits that provide essential services to our communities are struggling to adapt to these circumstances.

We should use the resources available in the Baltimore City Children & Youth Fund to meet the needs of our young people during this unprecedented time. I was honored to co-sponsor the legislation creating the Youth Fund, and I believe in its mission of supporting small, grassroots nonprofits. But its mission can and should be adapted to meet the present need: providing meals for youth, obtaining laptops and tablets to aid young people with digital learning, and support non-profit organizations that directly serve youth during this public health emergency.

Better Leverage Local Public Health Assets

Public health experts must be driving the response to COVID-19 to protect residents. Baltimore is home to world-renowned medical institutions, who must be part of any strategy or solution.

Baltimore is fortunate that several world-renowned medical institutions call our city home. Our outstanding hospitals and medical schools are leading the world's response to COVID-19. I participate in daily coordination calls with the public health sector and rely on them for accurate health information to share with Baltimore residents. In this time of crisis, we must rely on the public health experts as we craft our response to the coronavirus.

Prioritizing Testing: Public health experts agree that increased testing is the only real way to fully understand the scope of this pandemic. Without testing, cases of COVID-19 can go undetected, leading to unintentional spread between people. Testing is needed to detect who has the virus and to trace who that person was in contact with, thus allowing our health professionals to treat them. Given existing disparities in our healthcare system, COVID-19 is anticipated to have the most devastating impacts on Black and Brown communities, in addition to low-income residents who may struggle the most to afford testing and treatment.

We must ensure that testing is available for our senior population and people with underlying health conditions. This also includes residents with social vulnerabilities to the virus, such as people experiencing homelessness, immigrants, and the uninsured. Finally, all testing must be done through a lens of equity, taking into consideration factors like access to a personal vehicle, for example.

Better Leverage Local Public Health Assets

Having Needed Protective Equipment and Medical Resources: To protect our healthcare providers and ensure that our hospitals are able to treat the expected increase in patients as a result of COVID-19, I will coordinate with the private sector, public safety professionals, hospitals, and nonprofits to increase the supply of personal protective equipment (PPE), which is critical for our healthcare workers and first responders to stay healthy and avoid unnecessary transmission of the virus to their families and communities.

Plans include:

- Paying unemployed workers to produce needed safety masks;
- Enacting emergency procurement to obtain the needed PPE to keep our city employers who interact with COVID-19 patients safe;
- Calling on companies like Under Armour to step up and assist with the production of much-needed PPE;
- I am encouraging the administration to add additional money to the Maryland COVID-19 Emergency Relief Manufacturing Fund for city businesses to incentivize the production of PPE.

Equitable Data Collection: Currently, there is publicly available data detailing the impact of COVID-19 with regard to race. We know that Black and Brown communities suffer from increased risk of respiratory illnesses like asthma and may have higher risk of having difficulties recovering from COVID-19 due to other underlying illnesses. In a majority Black city, it is incumbent on the government to monitor this data to ensure that we create public policy to best protect our residents. I have introduced legislation seeking to get health information collected and published by race and ZIP code.

Address Homelessness and Housing Insecurity

People experiencing homelessness or housing insecurity will find it nearly impossible to comply with the CDC's public health guidelines during this pandemic. We must work comprehensively to quickly meet the needs of this community.

Addressing Homelessness: I understand that people experiencing homelessness will find it nearly impossible to comply with the CDC's guidance on healthy sanitation and social distancing. This threatens their health and the health of others. As a City, we must more effectively meet the needs of this community. We should work together to mitigate the risk of wide-spread transmission of COVID-19 among people experiencing homelessness. We must find an alternative to homeless shelters, as shelters are extremely susceptible to the rapid spread and infection of the coronavirus. As stated above, we can make a big stride in addressing the problem by allocating \$3 million from the Rainy Day Fund to address this issue.

Promoting Housing Stability: Many people in our city already experience housing insecurity and the current crisis will just make that worse. Working with the City Council I am calling on the following:

- A freeze on rents retroactive to the beginning of the declaration of the State of Emergency;
- An eviction moratorium effective until 90-days after the State of Emergency declaration is lifted;
- A moratorium on rental payments until 90-days after the State of Emergency declaration is lifted;

Addressing Homelessness and Housing Insecurity

- Federal funding for a rental payment forgiveness program for the duration of the State of Emergency for residents and businesses who can demonstrate need;
- A moratorium on mortgage payments on rental properties until 90-days after the State of Emergency declaration is lifted;
- A moratorium on rent and mortgage payments and evictions on all commercial properties until after the State of Emergency declaration is lifted.

Coordinate with Community-Based Efforts

Now more than ever, Baltimore needs effective coordination between city government, grassroots organizations, non-profits and philanthropic institutions to ensure the effective and efficient delivery of resources for people in need.

Baltimore has a rich and diverse network of non-profit and philanthropic organizations that serve all kinds of needs in our city. Many of these non-profits have already spent years building important community networks to deliver services. It will be necessary for philanthropic and non-profit organizations to utilize these networks and reinforce government relief efforts. We must work with established community partners to provide residents with the resources they need to make it through this pandemic.

Food Access: No Baltimorean should go hungry, especially not during this time of crisis. Food pantries, important members of our non-profit and faith communities, will play a vital role in supporting families who struggle to put food on the table. As mentioned above, I am urging the Mayor to direct additional funding to nonprofits in our city. I will advocate that a significant portion of that funding goes to food pantries, the Maryland Food Bank, and other nonprofits providing direct food relief. There are many great organizations that already support people with food, the City now needs to provide our pantries with the necessary funds to guarantee they will have food to provide.

Faith Coordination: Baltimore is home to a multitude of faith communities that have deep roots in our City. I recognize that our religious congregations have an important role to play in this crisis. Social distancing and quarantines can lead to isolation and loneliness, especially for seniors. It will be important to coordinate with faith leaders to ensure our most vulnerable populations are supported socially during this time and throughout the recovery. Although we cannot physically be together, we can still connect with our communities through phone and internet. Maintaining our faith and hope is crucial during this great time of uncertainty. I look to our many religious leaders to help guide our city and ensure our spiritual and social connections remain intact.

Coordinate with Community-Based Efforts

Community Connections: Baltimore is a city of neighborhoods and many unique communities. Just as I recognize the importance of our faith communities, I also understand the vital role that neighborhoods and community associations play in our city. These existing community connections will be vital to maintaining our health and security. My office is providing updates to all community leaders across the city to ensure that every Baltimore community has the most up-to-date information about how to respond to the coronavirus. I also provide daily updates on social media and host telephone town halls to guarantee that Baltimore has the knowledge and resources to fight this pandemic.

Support Businesses

Our businesses are economic engines for our city. We must ensure that they can access the resources they need.

Small businesses are an integral piece of what makes Baltimore uniquely Baltimore. I am working to lessen the economic impacts of COVID-19 on these important economic engines in our city.

In addition to tapping the Rainy Day Fund to create a \$10 million small business loan fund, we must make sure businesses are aware of the resources being made available to them. The Baltimore Development Corporation (BDC) is serving as a resource center for small businesses in our city to make it through this difficult financial time. I encourage all small businesses to take BDC's Business Impact Survey so that the city government can best understand the impact you face and how we can support you.

I will be reaching out to business associations and small businesses in Baltimore to hear the issues first-hand and to share updates of available assistance programs. I encourage all small businesses to take advantage of the Maryland COVID-19 Emergency Relief Fund Programs for Businesses. These are three different funds totaling \$130 million to assist businesses.

The Small Business Administration (SBA) is also providing support during this time. They have a variety of loan programs and business supports to assist business owners during this time of economic uncertainty. The SBA is distributing funds to small businesses from the CARE Act. I urge all Baltimore businesses to take advantage of these economic supports from the federal government.

As recovery efforts continue, I encourage the state and federal government to utilize existing programs which will help speed recovery time, as the mechanisms to distribute funding are already in place. We cannot waste anytime to support our local small businesses. This funding needs to come quickly and efficiently to aid Baltimore's businesses.

Develop Regional and Federal Strategy

When COVID-19 is spreading exponentially across jurisdictions, Baltimore cannot act alone. More cooperation is needed at the local, state, and federal levels to save lives.

In this time of crisis, Baltimore cannot act alone. The coronavirus is global in nature and is spreading rapidly across jurisdictions. To overcome this crisis, we must work across boundaries and dividing lines to coordinate our resources and responses. Cooperation is needed at the local, state, and federal levels to save lives and livelihoods.

Ensuring the Stimulus Package Delivers for the People: The federal government recently passed a \$2.2 trillion stimulus package that will address COVID-19's economic impacts across the country. During the congressional negotiations for the CARES Act stimulus bill, I called on Baltimore's congressional delegation, consisting of Senator Ben Cardin, Senator Chris Van Hollen, Representative Dutch Ruppersberger and Representative John Sarbanes to advocate for Baltimoreans and ensure that the wellbeing of the people is prioritized over the preservation of corporate profits. You can see my letter to our delegation [here](#).

The current stimulus package includes substantial support to the US economy. Residents will receive a one-time cash payment of \$1,200. States and municipalities will receive \$150 billion to fight the coronavirus and make up for lost revenues caused by the economic downturn. Unemployment benefits are expanded, now including self-employed and part-time workers. There is a fund of \$350 billion to support small businesses. The healthcare sector will receive \$100 million to respond to COVID-19. There is a \$500 billion fund to support businesses and industries threatened with bankruptcy. This fund will be overseen by the Inspector General and has restrictions on elected officials being able to receive loans. For more detailed information on what the stimulus package includes, [click here](#).

Develop Regional and Federal Strategy

Congressional leaders have indicated that additional stimulus packages may be needed. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi has signaled that more support is necessary to assist average Americans. I agree and will continue to advocate for an additional stimulus bill with more direct cash payments to residents because \$1,200 is not enough for most Americans. I am in communication with our hard-working congressional delegation to guarantee that Baltimore residents get the help they desperately need.

Maryland and Baltimore City will need more support to face the current health crisis and the long recovery. I will also advocate for more money for states and cities who are truly on the front lines of this health and economic crisis. As Congress continues to address the current crisis, any future bills must support public interests over corporate interests. I will advocate with the federal delegation that the next stimulus bill:

- Continues to support everyday Americans with further cash assistance in form of direct payments as well as further expanding unemployment insurance and SNAP benefits;
- Increases support for student loan borrowers by forgiving outstanding interest on federal student loans;
- Continues payroll and benefits support for small businesses by expanding the Small Business Administration loan program created in the previous bill, and
- Provides fiscal support to states and local governments in the form of both direct assistance and robust, job-creating infrastructure spending.