



BOYS AND YOUNG MEN OF COLOR
— THE PROMISE AND OPPORTUNITY —

Transcript: Investing in Young Men of Color as Community Assets

Transcribed by Spark Street Digital

I'm Olivia Golden. I'm the executive director of The Center for Law and Social Policy, or CLASP. And it's my pleasure to welcome you to our annual forum on investing in young men of color as community assets. Today's forum in that annual series is entitled "The Role of Public Policy, Youth Voice, and Solution-Centered Strategies."

There is an amazing turnout. I just want to tell you, those of you in the room, we have about 700 people signed up to watch this on the web. And for those of you on the web, we have, I think, well over 100 people here in the room. So there has turned out to be incredible interest in this topic. I want to say some thank yous before saying just a couple things about why this is so important to us at CLASP and then turning it over to the panel.

The first thank you is to the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation's Future Promise Initiative—Forward Promise Initiative, which has generously supported our work on boys and young men of color over a series of years. We're very grateful. Maisha Simmons is here from the foundation, that's been really important to our ability to have a sustained focus. I think we also have funders of other aspects of our work, from J.P. Morgan Chase and from Annie Casey, and I'm sure many more on the web. So thank you as well.

And the biggest thank you goes out to the people who made this forum possible, our youth team, led by Kisha Bird and Andrea Barnes, Andrew Mulinge, Rhonda Bryant formerly with us and having set the foundation for all of this, and our communications team, Tom Salyers, Andy Beres, and Emma Paine. Can we give them a round of applause?

So just one word about why this forum and the extraordinary group of people who you are, who come here to hear it, is so important to CLASP. CLASP was founded in 1968 as a voice for the voiceless on many different issues. We've been working—our focus has been poverty for something over three decades. And we've always brought a racial equity lens to that work on poverty because we see that as part of our mission. If you want to reduce poverty, enable people to have ladders of opportunity, improve their lives, then you have to understand what are the barriers they face because of race, ethnicity, immigration status, geography, as well as the barriers they face because of low income.

And we identify those barriers at CLASP in order to suggest how to turn them down because we're incurable optimistic and solution-focused, as you'll see from this panel. We don't think there's a single silver bullet, but we do believe there are solutions and that framing those solutions is really crucial. And for those of you who are able to pick up our paper, we have several papers, including one broad framework paper on the table where you came in. You'll see that approach. For those of you who didn't, please stop by on the way out.

So why boys and young men of color in particular? We think it is very important to focus on girls and young women as well, and we do that, but to find solutions you have to think about the particular barriers particular

people face. And, of course, boys and young men face barriers in the justice system, in juvenile justice, but long before that in access to high quality early childhood schooling, work opportunities, health and mental health services. And so, in my own area of expertise, which is about children and families, boys and young men are central. They're central to young women. They're also central to children because so many of the young men are fathers, and their own economic success and personal wellbeing will enable them to be able to be the kinds of parents they want to be. So for us it's a crucial focus.

You'll see more broadly in our paper that we also think this is a crucial focus for the nation, because when you look at who are young people today and who's tomorrow's workforce, within a small number of years we'll be at the point where a majority of young people are young people of color. So when you think about our economics and our demography of the future as older workers retire, the young people we're talking about today are those who are central to a successful future.

And, of course, this is a time when, as a nation, we've also been talking about the values of fairness, of racial equity, of equality and opportunity, and human dignity, and this is crucial from those perspectives as well. So we're thrilled to host an incredibly timely panel to focus on practical solutions across the array of education, employment, health outcomes, and we have an extraordinary moderator who I'll introduce now, and she'll introduce the panel.

Rhonda Bryant, a longtime senior policy expert at CLASP, who really laid the groundwork for this work, who's now the founder and lead consultant of the Moriah Group, and her wonderful paper—just to do an advertisement—on high poverty schools, which has gotten a lot of attention and which you'll want to read while it's hot off the presses, is out on the table as well. She came to CLAP already having high level policy experience. And her experience now includes both high level state and federal experience, including a stint at the White House working on exactly these issues. So I'm thrilled to know that so many of you are here and watching on the web. And I want to thank Rhonda for taking on the role of moderating. Rhonda, all yours.

Thank you so much, Olivia. Thank you. I'm really pleased to be here today to moderate this panel. I'm thankful that you all asked me to be here to share some time with you all today. We have an amazing set of people to share their perspective. They really reflect a variety of sectors in terms of their work, which I think is really reflective of the fact that there is no one institute or institution or sector that is going to be responsible for doing this work around boys and young men of color. It really takes a collective effort on the part of our government, your youth-serving systems, our community-based organizations, all collaborating with one another to do this work.

You know, I, like so many of you, do this work because we see our young men of color as assets. We see their value. We know that they are of immense value to our nation, to the communities in which they live, and to their families. And it's only through the investments that we make to support them and to give them the opportunities that are necessary for them to thrive that that value will be fully and completely realized in our nation.

That said, if we are going to invest in these young people in order for them to thrive in large numbers it really takes a targeted focus that really reflects the magnitude of the issues and the problems that we see that's

reflected in so much of the data that's lifted up from time to time. But, today, our focus is really going to be on many of the solutions that we see that are arising up out of government, that are rising up out of community-based organizations, and what are some of the policy things that we can implement that are going to support what's happening locally on the ground, and are going to really begin to expand the ability that we have to be supportive of these young people.

So we have a great panel today. I want to handle a couple of logistical things for you all. So you see that we have on the screens your Wi-Fi password, we have our Twitter handle, #BYMOCSucceed. If something resonates with you today, please feel free to tweet about it and get some of these messages out there on social media. We have allotted a good deal of time today for question and answer. If you are on our webcast and you would like to send in a question, you're welcome to do that at the email Events@CLASP.org. That, again, is Events@CLASP.org. For those of you that are here with us in person, in your packet you have an index card. You're welcome to write your question on that index card. We have staff about the room who will collect those cards and bring them up so that I can pose the question to our panelists so that we can get as many questions in as possible during our time; all right?

So I want to introduce our panel. We have Greg Casar. He is a native Texan and the son of Mexican immigrants, and a newly elected Austin city councilmember representing district four. At the young age of 25 he is the youngest councilmember in Austin's history and district four's first ever direct representative. So, welcome, Greg.

We also have Jason Reece—there you are—who is the director of research at the Kirwan Institute. He is also adjunct faculty and lecturer, having taught both undergraduate and graduate courses focused on social equity and planning in the Ohio State University, as they like to say. Their full bios, I should tell you, are in the packets. I'm just giving you a couple of highlights so that you know who we have today.

We have Anthony Smith who is the director for Safe and Healthy Neighborhoods in Louisville, Kentucky. And under Anthony's leadership the city is doing some really exciting work through their initiatives with Citizens United, My Brother's Keeper, and so many others. So thank you also for being with us today.

We have Dariel Vasquez who is a first-generation college student from Harlem, New York, and currently a junior at Bard College. He's the founder of Brothers at Bard, which is an on-campus brotherhood group that also engages in work in the community doing character development and peer—for young men of color in high school.

And, finally, we have Kisha Bird, who is the director of youth policy at CLASP, holding it down for the important work here at the federal policy level.

So we'll begin our panel with a few questions that I have for you all to give you an opportunity to share some of your perspectives. And the first thing that I'd like to ask you is why, in your opinion, is a focus on young men of color so critical to the viability of the communities and states in which you live, and to our nation? And I'm going to ask each of you to give a few minutes of reflection on that. So we'll start with you, Jason.

Great. Thank you, Rhonda. And good afternoon everyone.

Good afternoon.

So, at the institute we have focused on young men of color for some time with our work. And to really illustrate why we think that's so important, we like to talk about two very fundamental barriers to opportunity that can be quite profound in our society. Structural barriers to opportunity, things like institutions, policies, environments, all those things that we know through the research are so important, and then the role of bias, both bias that plays out institutionally and the powerful role of implicit bias, which more and more research from the world of social psychology has told us can be very impactful in impacting actions of society at large but also those important folks who institute and execute our policies.

If you consider the building blocks of a safe and healthy upbringing where you can thrive, young men of color sit at a tremendous disadvantage. If you think about freedom from poverty, this is not a luxury. many of them are able to access. If you look at my home state of Ohio, about half of our African American boys are living in families in poverty. If you look nationally, about a quarter of our young men of color are living in neighborhoods with very intense and concentrated poverty. And also, if we think about the role of bias, what we see is that for young men of color, in particular, they're not afforded the opportunity to just be kids.

What we see in terms of our institutions and the way they view and the way they treat these young boys is that from a very early age they're viewed as older, they're viewed as threatening, and they're treated very differently. And this is what's so important. We see disparities in the way these boys are treated as early as preschool, which is a disheartening and just disturbing thought.

All this said, there's some very successful solutions out there that work. We have the evidence-based practices. What we really need is to focus the attention and the resources to address this challenge, not only for our communities of color but for our society as a whole.

Thank you. Again, good afternoon and thank you all for allowing me to come and represent Louisville and the work that we're doing in Louisville. And we found when we started looking at this work about three years ago, it came after an incident that we had in the community, and it was one where we had a triple homicide. We had three young people, it started with two young guys, who had been beefing with each other. They found each other in the street. They ended up shooting each other. So we have the police and we have the community and the news media there on the scene. Two girlfriends show up, they get into an argument, one pulls a gun and kills the other girl at the scene.

So Mayor Fischer does a community call and asks people to come and let's think about why do we have so many young people dying, especially so many young men of color, out on our streets, and what can we do differently and how can we as a community start looking at the root causes of this and do things differently. So he put together a team of folks, and their first focus was to look at the data around what is causing the violence in our community; right?

He broke up—37 people, community members, broke up into five workgroups. They looked at education. They looked at economic and employment development. They looked at community building. They looked at health and wellness. And then they also looked at the juvenile criminal system. And when you start looking at all of that data, start pulling back the layers, you really start looking and seeing who is having the worst outcomes in our cities, right, with young, black men at the bottom of the list on all of that.

And we are just at a unique position in Louisville where we have a lot of people who are ready to make something different, from our superintendent, who was at the table with us, to the folks and the youth—who work in our jails, who work in our school system, even the faith community, have all come together to say what can we do different from the systems-approach to really look at how do we create better outcome for young black men and boys, and boys of color in general in Louisville. So we've just been really working at it.

But it started from this incident, then we started looking at the data. We started at years and years and years of data. And you can see it when you look at 68% to 70% of young homicide victims and perpetrators are African American men and boys, something's going wrong in the system, not with those young men. So what can we do as a community to make that difference?

So we've been really pulling people together for the last three years, really saying we need to be different, we need to be better. And we've been able to partner with the national initiative that we talked about earlier. We are a Cities United city. We're an MBK city. And we're also a BMA city out of the National League of Cities, we joined the national forum. And all of that stuff has allowed us to layer all of that support into the communities that need it the most; right? So we're not just bringing this stuff in just because it sounds good. We're bringing it in because it provides resources and it provides another layer for attention that people who usually won't pay attention now pay attention when you say, "Okay, we're working with national, we're working with other foundations," and people start paying attention.

And we have been trying to really help a single message around what this work looks like for us. And I'll talk a little bit later about some zones of hope that we created and other ways that we use data to really target our resources and our energy because we really want to make sure we can have the biggest impact as possible. And we know this work also are going to have an impact. So when we talk about working with young boys and men of color, we're also talking about working with their communities and working with their families as well because we know we can't do that in the silo because they're not disconnected, they're connected to all of us and we need to make sure everybody's having that conversation.

Daniel?

Well, first off, good afternoon and good morning. I'd like to thank everybody who put together this panel for giving me the opportunity to speak here today and getting me all mic'd me, got me feeling like a big boy now. I'll keep it short and sweet. I think I want to start off by saying that—very biased, but I think young men of color have the greatest potential when it comes to solving the issues young men of color face; right?

And we need to—yes, we're in a crisis if you see the statistics and all, but we also need to realize that a lot of the language and the rhetoric that's used around the issues that young men of color face sort of make them the

problem instead of focusing on looking at them as the solution or the biggest potential to have or to make those solutions. And, obviously, I'm obviously speaking from experience, me being a product of organizations that work, programs that work, that's instilled in me a community-oriented mindset where I was able to look around at my peers and my friends and realize I was given certain advantages in life that they didn't. So how can I come back and spread those resources and those skills that I've acquired back to my peers and my brothers really?

So we need to focus on young men of color, I believe, as those youth leaders that have the greatest potential to impact young people. And we have young men of color, obviously we have more of them in college than in prison now; we can break that stereotype. So then how do we reach out to those who—all these men who are on college campuses and build programs where they can have impact on the communities around their college campuses, instill this community-oriented mindset where they can come back to their communities and give back and rewrite this whole idea of you got to make it out, instead of trying to make out, just come back and fix the problem and be a part of the community. But, yeah, that's how I'll start off.

Thank you. Thank you. Greg?

Everyone, thank you so much for inviting me today. To give you a little background, I was just elected last year, so this is my seventh month in office. And my previous career and prior life was in community and labor organizing. So I think that in many ways I had similarities with folks on this panel and in this crowd that, you know, wasn't just issues with our health-care system or workforce development or jobs with criminal justice system, but that those were all symptomatic and affected by institutional issues, institutional problems, whether they be—in class or race or what have you, in our economy and in our political culture and in our media culture, and that the best way to address those was by especially folks of color themselves being able to organize and transform those institutions.

And so I ran for office, you know, talking about how my community in the district that I represent, which is overwhelmingly people of color, that not only was my district and my community not a problem, and not only was my community and district not—and the young men of color therein not only an asset, but that we are the community.

And, unfortunately, even in Texas, where everybody talks about demographics changing so swiftly that Austin is the most Anglo city in Texas, by the way, but we are still majority, minority, whatever—I know it's a confusing term in itself, I never say it, I don't know why I say it now—the idea being that, you know, white folks aren't a majority in Austin. We're the most Anglo city in the country. We're rapidly changing. But our political institutions have not changed at that rapid of a rate and are still struggling to change.

So just to give you an example, my district is over 70% Latino. It's the second most African American district in the City of Austin. And we worked our tails off. We had more volunteers on the street than any other city council campaign. We raised a lot more money than people thought we were going to raise just to get the electorate to be 15% Latino in a 70% Latino district. And that's partly because there are so many of us that are under the age of 18. That's partly because there are so many people that are not U.S. citizens.

But, just to give you an idea, 50% of my district can't even register to vote in the first place. And then layer on top of that all of the other barriers that people have had to political participation, you know, it takes that sort of time and effort and I think that—and hopefully—I'm testing this out. I don't know if it's worked yet or not, but I'm working on elected officials participating in that community organizing, participating in building that civic infrastructure so that young men of color and people of color in general, and folks that want to participate in that struggle can get our institutions to get a little closer to catching up. And so that's a bit of what I'm going to be talking about is, you know, there are, of course, lots of policy solutions to the individual symptoms and problems, but how do we get people involved enough to be able to create that change?

Great. Excellent. And so I'm in the rear to talk a little bit about, you know, the role of public policy. And so Olivia started her comments basically, and you mentioned the changing demographic, and so that is really important to stay on that point. You know, the most recent census data talks about, for those who are under 20, 48% are persons of color; right? And so it's not just young people of color, both young women and young men are our future. They're, like, literally our future.

And so what does that mean? We know, again, about the data, but this is our future labor force. Our current labor force, which will make our country economically viable, but they have some of the lowest level of educational attainment. And so it really will direct us not to just focus on young people who are outside of the system and pathways, but also young people like Dariel who are thriving. And so it's an either/or, it's and/or approach.

But then that policy, especially federal, state, and local policy, really needs to be intentional, as Rhonda said, about how is it intentional, how does it really target communities using data? And, again, we could take a page out of Louisville's book, but really rising it up. And federal policy should enable places like Louisville, states that want to do the right thing, to do the right thing and to remove those structural barriers and to allow for innovation of things that we know work, but also trying out new things, thinking about cross-system approaches.

And so from past history, you know, the term "A rising tide lifts all boats," we know that's not true. After recession after recession, we know communities of color, even now in the African American community, unemployment still is at the high of rate recession of overall unemployment and it still is a crisis. So, again, you have to have targeted and intentional policies that take and account the unique needs of young men of color.

Thank you, Kisha. So our forum today is really focused on lifting up solutions that we are seeing that work. So I'm going to ask Anthony and Jason to share with us what are some of the positive policy or community-wide changes that you all have seen in Louisville and Columbus, and what has been the role of cross-sector partnerships in making some of those things happen?

You want me to start?

Yeah.

Thank you. So, in Louisville, I serve on a couple of policy changes that Mayor Fischer and others have really put forth. One is when you think about young people in general but young men of color and mentorship really saying we need to connect them to caring adults and make sure. We saw that we had a gap; right? We had about 700 young kids on a waiting list, and sometimes they were on waiting lists for a year to a year-and-a-half. Some of them actually aged off the waiting list and never got to have a mentor.

So Mayor Fischer created a policy, a citywide policy that allows all city employees two hours a week to go mentor. We get two hours of paid time a week to go mentor. And what we did with that policy is we selected mentor organizations and partners who really needed that support; right? So we worked with Big Brothers Big Sisters, who have traditionally had a wait of about 400 young people on it, majority of them men, majority of them boys of color.

And then we were running a new program called Right Turn. And Right Turn was geared for young people 16 to 19 who had a juvenile record but had not had an adult charge, but who were disconnected, wasn't going to school and wasn't working. So we wanted to get them back on track but we also wanted to connect them to mentors. It's hard to find people to mentor that age group than it is to find people to mentor young people who are in Big Brothers Big Sisters. So we really wanted to push our city employees that way; right?

So we created this policy. We've got about 6,000 employees. The goal is to get about 10% of them mentoring for this year and then keep adding onto that. So the goal is to get everybody out. And it also—not just people go out and become a mentor and spend time with kids. They also are ambassadors for the city so that these young people see that there's roles that you can do inside the city that you probably never thought were there. So we wanted to make sure we did that.

Then we're also—Kentucky as a whole is one of the few states that does not automatically give voting rights back to folks who have served their time and are returning home. You got to petition the government to get your voting rights back. We've been working on House Bill 70 for the last at least six or seven years in Louisville, really trying to get House Bill 70 passed and pushed. Our city council actually created a resolution that says Louisville as a city support that, and Mayor Fischer signed off on it. So we sent that up. It didn't pass, but it's getting more and more support. So Louisville did it this year, Lexington, Louisville and Lexington did it this year. And I think other cities are going to come on because we've got about 186,000 folks who are disenfranchised from being able to participate in the election process, and they've already served their time. So we've been trying to do that.

And then, when you talk about community-based, we've created—so when we look at the data and we look at the different things taking place in Louisville, we also identified five neighborhoods where we were having the highest number of homicides and shootings of young black men, and we've designated those "zones of hope." We work in partnership with the Mayor's Office, our local Urban League, and then also "interdenominational" ministerial coalition, which is a faith-based.

And then about 60 other community partners have come together to say let's target our resources and time here so that we can make sure we create better outcomes for these young black men and boys and their families in those neighborhoods. And we worked with a local foundation who actually gave us money to start that, the

James Brown Foundation seeded money for us to start that into the foundation for us. We're going through our first year.

We were able to hire some organizers who were like feet on the street, going to where the young men go, but they don't come to the meetings that we hold; right? None of them. They never have and they never will. So we just go to get better at going out to them. So we're creating this opportunity for some young folks who live in that neighborhood to actually go out in the neighborhood and play a peer role with their peers and get them connected to the resources that we need them connected to.

And the last thing I'll talk about is we just finished budget cycle. So Mayor Fischer, one of the things we know we needed to do, we got 18- to 24-year-olds who had got some criminal background. They haven't committed a felony yet, but they still find it hard to find a job and to get back into education. So we set aside enough money to recruit about 100 young people from two targeted neighborhoods that we're going to work with and put some career planners right in their neighborhood and work with them one on one in their neighborhood so that they can get the services they need. Our goal is to make sure all 100 of them either get a job or are in training. It was just a way to do a pilot program because my goal next year, if we get this right, is to go back and ask for more funding for the other neighborhoods. But it's a way to get us out of our silos and out of our best practices and push us out into the community. So that's a couple of things we're doing.

That's amazing.

Thank you.

That's amazing. In Columbus, we have had the benefit of some really tremendous leadership in this regard. At the Ohio State University we have the Todd Bell Center, which does a tremendous job under the leadership of Dr. James Moore really building leaders among our cohort of African American men at the university. And they have tremendous success in creating a supportive environment for young men at OSU, and really creating an environment where they can thrive. And institutions like the Bell Center are just a phenomenal resource to have at the higher ed level.

Communitywide we've had great leadership from our county government. Early on, our county commissioners and the head of our Jobs and Family Services department, Anthony Trotman, decided that they had to act. And we have worked in collaboration with them and other partners to launch a program called More Than My Brother's Keeper, which works with a group of boys age nine to about 15 in one challenged neighborhood in Columbus, a neighborhood I actually live in.

And what we sought to do with this program is really try to push that envelope of innovation and said well what we want to do is create a supportive environment around these boys, we want to meet them where they're at, and we want to give them the tools that they need to thrive. And so what we've been doing is really building these strong relationships with these youth with our staff, spending every Saturday with these boys, all day, opening up experiential learning activities for them, helping them and their families with various needs, taking them into experiences really that they've never had the opportunity to experience before.

So, for example, as we started, we had 40 of these youth who lived next to one of the largest universities in the United States, had never set foot on the OSU campus. Now we take them to OSU on a monthly basis and almost really just normalize the idea of being on a college campus and the opportunities that exist there. The next phase of this project, based on some of the early success we've had, will expand into another neighborhood, but also expand our partnerships.

And what was referenced earlier about breaking out of silos is very important because Columbus, like a lot of communities, has tremendous institutions, tremendous programs. What we often don't do is work together in a very nuanced way and in a way that really can help those communities that have some of the biggest challenges. So what we do is we have an open door policy with partners that we bring into our program, Big Brothers Big Sisters, the Boys and Girls Club. Directions for Youth will soon be joining us to help us with clinical care and dealing with trauma that a lot of these boys have experienced in the neighborhood. Partners at Ohio State, small and local business where they do experiential learning, in addition to nationwide children's hospital, which has been a tremendous partner of ours as well, and other community-based organizations.

It's through this wide lens of partnerships that I think we can work together to help meet the needs of these youth to help them thrive. And in some ways I think the success of our program, to me, is not just the benchmarks of how the youth are doing better, which they are, but also their excitement about being part of this broader family. And now they're part of this cohort of about 40 young men that, as our director of jobs and family services has noted, he calls it "the good gang," right? So peers who kind of foster their resiliency in the community, where they get the benefit of having this strong social capital with this phenomenal group of young men.

One last piece of this project will be a leadership academy that we'll hopefully launch in the near future for young men who age out of our program. And, finally, our mayor, Mayor Michael Coleman, also has taken the My Brother's Keeper challenge. And, as of the end of this year, we'll have engaged probably about 3,000 or 4,000 people my estimate would be, around our community who have come out for community forums. About half of those have been youth in a series of youth forums that we've had. And we'll have a policy agenda that will come out at the end of the year.

So it's really through this coordinated action, big picture policy change, making sure we have institutions that support our youth, as well as programs that build that supportive environment around them. And that's really the solutions that we need to look to as a society.

Thank you. Thank you. As I listen to them talk about what's happening—yes, definitely—I listen to them talk about what's happening in Louisville and Columbus, it just reminds me of the importance of forums like these to get these stories out there for more people to hear because communities shouldn't feel like they're by themselves, having to think about different solutions. We can take some of these things and lift them from one community and carry them to another, and to begin to replicate some of these important endeavors.

Greg, I want to ask you, as you transitioned from doing community organizing work to now being an elected official, talk with us about what you now see as the role of an elected leader in being able to lift up the issues and challenges, and to push investments that can be made for boys and young men of color in your community?

Sure. So I always had the sort of suspicion when I was community organizing that, of course, elected officials are limited in many ways by their context, but that also people always think they're a little bit more limited than they really are. And I've found that to be very true in this job. Of course, we are in the State of Texas. The political climate is what it is. The Texas state legislature really is what it is. But even so, we can—elected officials always, at least the ones that I've interacted with, and especially I see this within myself and my colleagues, have that—there's always that little extra political capital. There's always that extra room to do work. There's always the ability to ignite an issue or a campaign if you're really going to stick your neck out there and do it.

And so, for example, affordable housing is a critical issue in Austin. Rents have gone up 50% in the last ten years. It's really a terrifying thing. And there is the conversation and there are the groups working on affordable housing issues. So I do think that I and my colleagues can really drive home that issue. I don't know if we're quite there. And there needs to be more of a push, but that's an issue people are talking about because everybody's feeling that and there's organized groups around it. But on issues like criminal justice there are lots of people that care about it, there are lots of organized groups that sometimes deal with the state legislature, but haven't really convened and come together to demand change from the city council.

And so I have a great staff person that had been asking me what we were going to do on this issue, a couple of friends in some of those groups, and we just said, you know what, let's start out with what we call "fair chance" but a lot of folks call "ban the box," not just for city employees but from the private sector, let's just ban the box in the private sector inside of Austin city limits, and let's call that meeting and see who wants in. And next thing you know, at least having that access to the inside track and to who the right staff people are that could craft that policy, and to sort of the convening power of elected office, and, you know, a good, positive message that I think this is something we can do and we can twist the right arms to get the votes on.

You know, we just had a meeting two weeks ago with our city staff to start crafting the policy, and we had representatives of 18 different organizations. They were all committed to pushing that narrative, making it a media—creating a media presence, and hopefully creating that context so that we can have the majority vote to do something that no other city in the state of Texas has tried to do before. In that context most people would say, "Oh, well, you know, we're in Texas and so we can't really step out of line that far to do it."

But the fact of the matter is if you—I think that it is incumbent on us as elected officials, especially in cities, to be a little bit more bold as we see gridlock in Congress. And I'm actually sort of thankful for the gridlock in the legislature; it could be much worse. And so that's sort of a role that I think we need to be pushed more to take part in is to convene those bold ideas and to create the context in cities that may not always be there in cities until we're ready to push them.

Definitely. Wow. I commend you. Just sticking your neck out on such an important topic, wow. Kisha, do you have anything you want to add?

Just that—I mean, you said it really eloquently, is that we can't underestimate the power of the bully pulpit at all levels of government. We just know that that's the first step, but it's a convening power. It gets the conversation

going. Obviously, this administration has used the bully pulpit in many different ways to really focus on these issues.

But we also—you mentioned criminal justice, and that's what everyone's talking about this week, but we also know that there's power in thinking about what are some issues that are bipartisan that you can get liberals and you can also get conservatives to really think about, and I think really think about how boys and young men of color can succeed. Criminal justice is one, but there's bipartisan support on early career and education. There's bipartisan support really tackling inequality and workforce and job training. I'll talk a little bit about the policy opportunities in a second. So that's just basically what I wanted to add. But the power of the bully pulpit and really thinking about what are those key opportunities that kind of transcend our political affiliations.

Yes, definitely. Thank you. So, Dariel, I want to turn to you. You know, all of the research that's out there around effective practices for young men of color talks a lot about the importance of there being culturally specific programming that's utilized to help to build self-esteem and to build cultural awareness, and to also build bridges with other cultures. And you have a really powerful story about your navigation through high school and some programs that were in place to help you with that. So can you share some of that with us, and also share a bit about the work that you're doing at Bard College now?

Yeah, absolutely. So, first off, it's a really humbling experience being on this panel. It really made me realize how much of a young kid I am in all this work. But, yes, so I guess I'll start off by saying I guess this is really the story of how you get a kid from the projects to a four-year—one of the most prestigious institutions in the country. And, you know, I'm from Harlem, the best place on the planet. And what's crazy is—so I'm the only guy in my group of friends who's in college, who pursued education. And most of my friends were older than me.

So when we talk about my story in high school, really starting in middle school where my friends in the neighborhood, the guys that protected me, the guys who gave me a dollar when I didn't have—gave me clothes when we were going to the parties, you know what I mean? Those guys had a larger influence on me than my parents did. It's something that's normal I think in almost every case in adolescence. And I think trying to be cool, trying to be down, that sort of developed those knucklehead years of mine, going into ninth grade.

Ninth grade, I found myself in a IEP class—or IEP cohort, and my IEP teacher, Mr. Washington, was the founder of the BOND Program, the Brothers On a New Direction program at my high school. And he snatched me up and asked me to come to the program on Fridays. And I think BOND was the start of a lot of things for me, right, self-reflection, realizing that I had a lot of social/emotional issues going on. My mom has been physically disabled since I was eight years old. My dad was working a lot. I had to grow up fast in a lot of ways. And there was this animosity and this anger going on that I was just tossing out to my peers, not realizing that I was blaming them for the same issues that my boys growing up with were also dealing with.

So joining BOND gave me this brotherhood where I was able to look around and say now we're all in this together, like, we're all going through this problem, how can we work with one another. And it also gave me an outlet where I was able to begin mentorship, right, and begin this mutually symbiotic relationship between me

and the younger kids, because I was learning from them just as much as they were from me. So BOND also put me with this thing called code-switching, which I'm still trying to get down.

But from there, after the ninth grade, I was able to—I got accepted into the J.P. Morgan Chase Fellowship Initiative program, which then bombarded me with a whole bunch of professional development, which is why I'm able to be dressed the way I am right now. But I say that to say I'm going along this track and I'm noticing that I'm being offered resources and opportunities that my boys aren't; right?

So I often feel like—I say this all the time—like I was sitting in the passenger seat and I'm just watching them take different routes, right, until I was, at some point, driving my own on another route. And those are still my friends; right? When I go home, those are the guys I still hang out with. And I think with that in the back of my mind it only fueled my passion for wanting to work with young people when I see a lot of the young guys in my own program, we have 15 boys, three of which were seniors, had just graduated from high school this June, when I see them, I see my boys, right, and there's nothing more rewarding than that.

And going to—I mean, understanding that I got to Bard, right, I'm from Harlem, all black, Latino, everything, low income, grew up in the projects, et cetera, and then you go to Bard, it's all white everything, money that I'd never seen before, and I'm like, get me out of here. You know, my first year I was—I couldn't take it. I'm only two-and-a-half hours away from home, so I was going back home just hanging out on the block with my friends every weekend, like just to feel home, just to feel that support that I felt at BOND or just to feel that support that I felt with my brothers at the Fellowship Initiative, because I didn't feel like I had that on my college campus.

So I had to reassess what has been the main contributor—or the reason why I've made it here today; right? And it wasn't me just pulling myself up by my bootstraps really. It's really me recognizing that it takes a village, and it took a village to get me here. And that village was the BOND program and the Fellowship Initiative and my household, obviously, and my school and my mentors. So I was like how can I get through college, man, because at this point I'm going home every weekend, I can't take it?

And I had to start the Brothers at Bard group on campus really for myself first, because I needed it. I think I needed it the most, right, because I was about ready to give up on Bard as a whole. And we started that and it just really started as a group of guys from similar backgrounds, coming together, having these conversations, supporting one another, same thing I've had my entire life that's gotten me here. And then, from there, we got active in the community, and the rest is history, so.

Wow. Thank you. I just have to say that I commend you for being in college and also thinking about—thinking critically about what you needed to support yourself, but then also wanting to extend yourself to others. And being at an institution that would actually provide some of the financial supports to allow you to do some of that, I think that's an important lesson for higher ed is that we have to put resources behind making sure that our young people have the social/emotional supports that they need while they're engaging in these academic pursuits. You know, giving them a scholarship to get there is not enough. Giving them the support while they're on campus is critical. Yes. Kisha, I'm going to switch to you.

Okay.

And I'd like for you to share—we've heard a lot here about some of the successes that are happening in various communities around the country. Talk with us about what you see as the role of federal policy or even state policy in being able to support these communities to do more of this at a larger scale.

Great. Thanks, Rhonda. And thank you for sharing your story, Dariel. I'm actually going to talk about a couple of immediate opportunities that I think really resonate throughout what was shared with the panel. Many of you probably know that over the last couple of weeks the Senate has been debating the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, ESEA. In the last ten years we called it No Child Left Behind, but we're going back to ESEA. And it presents an opportunity.

We don't know if it's a missed opportunity yet because they are still in debates, and hopefully there will be opportunities to strengthen the bill. But it's an opportunity to address education equity. Many of the issues, starting with Jason talked about suspension/expulsion, the work that we've been doing with some of Rhonda's to think about how do you help young people to be college- and career-ready and not just say it and use it as rhetoric, but that it's actually real.

The data shows that there are course gaps for young people who are attending high poverty schools, and they are disproportionately students of color. So how do you provide states and local districts the actual resources to address that? And so it's not just about saying we need this to happen, but there has to be one policy that rights and requires or directs those states and local districts to do that work, but also the actual resources, because we can't do this just by happenstance. So that's an opportunity.

And also an opportunity, as Dariel mentioned, that some of, you know, maybe his peers, maybe they graduate, maybe they didn't, an opportunity for young people to get back and reconnected to education. And so I'm really focusing on the middle and high school grades, and dropout recovery is very important. And so we need to see something like this in our federal policy, which, again, this particular policy grew out of civil rights legislation, and it really should be targeted to the communities, to the students who need it the most. So that's the first opportunity.

The other two is passed legislation, a Workforce Innovation Opportunity Act, WIOA. And so right now states and local areas are implementing this particular legislation, and it redirects funding to out-of-school youth. Out-of-school youth are disproportionately African American and Latino, about evenly split with young men and young women. But it's a leveraging point, not just funding, but also strategies, pre-apprenticeships, transitional jobs, the work that you were just talking about, the 18 to 24, Anthony. And so how does the city funding that your mayor is putting together couple with funding? And I happen that you're very, very connected to your workforce development board to not just, you know, create an opportunity for 100 people, because that's great, but we want to be creating opportunity for all young people in a given community that needs it. And so that's just a couple of pieces through WIOA, and we have lots of resources around that.

But the other piece, and you mentioned this, Dariel, and so I was just like, "This is so great," is about we have the Affordable Care Act, and we know Supreme Court made a decision a few weeks ago, and it's here to stay. And so—but what that does in the 30 states—now 30 states and the District of Columbia—that have taken up

Medicaid expansion is it allows for young people, young adults like yourself, opportunity not only to have resources for their own [inaudible] and behavioral health supports.

We know that many of our young people, including young men of color, who are living in high poverty communities are disproportionately impacted by toxic stress, by trauma. And the research is out there, so we don't have to debate that. But what we don't have is a system that allows them to, you know, access the resources, not just one-off, you know, opportunities to talk to a therapist and so forth, but something that is really integrated into their overall, you know, wellbeing. And so those are just immediate policy opportunities that I think will be important as states are making choices, advocates are out there thinking about how you want to build successful programs for young people to really take advantage of what's happening right now.

Definitely. Greg, I wanted to ask you a little bit about the issue of youth leadership Dariel mentioned in his early comment about how young people are best positioned to really be impactful and influential around this issue around boys and young men of color. Can you talk to us about, from your perspective, the importance and what are the opportunities for investing in youth leadership as change agents working on this issue?

Absolutely. And, you know, if I could I'd just [inaudible]. So I'll try to keep it short. But I think that so much of that voice is critical in, at least in Austin's politics, so that people aren't talking about young men of color, but young men of color are actually able to speak about what's going on in their own communities. So I remember there was a good point in what I was going to say under the last question, and now I think I finally have the chance to bring it back, the idea being that that organized group of folks working on criminal justice issues and on ban the box presently, I don't expect that ban the box is just going to dismantle the prison industrial complex in Austin overnight. But the idea being that that organized group of people, because they're working on that issue, and many of them are young people and directly affected folks with criminal histories that have had trouble getting employment, can then speak about other issues and take on, for example, the affordable housing question that right now is really being dealt with by a lot of technocratic folks that may not have sort of the authority to speak up when somebody's trying to push back on, again, some affordable housing policy because there's going to be too many cars parked in the street if we have some more affordable housing with some public money in it.

But when young men of color have the opportunity to speak up and push back against those implicit biases or those structural rules that we have that set up the segregation in our own city—we were recently ranked actually the most economically segregated city in the country by a recent report, even though we like to think of ourselves as such a progressive bastion inside of Texas—that there's really no other way, I think, that it is that we can do it.

I'll give you a really simple example of something we are working on that I'm really excited about. Past councils have had trouble dealing with landlords and high turnover, multifamily complexes that just let their trash dumpsters overflow. And if we were sensible we would have some reasonable requirement for those landlords to get that trash picked up and to pay the money that they're supposed to pay. Simple issue, but it really means a lot to a lot of the kids in some of the elementary schools nearby.

And I like to visit those schools, and when I actually tell them what the city council is which doesn't actually take that long to explain, one thing that regularly gets brought up to me is that there's a bunch of trash in the street and they have to walk by trash on their way to school. And we are working with, you know, community organizers and social workers and teachers in those schools to have some of those same kids come and present to the council about why we should pass those waste management policies. And I don't think the landlord's lobbyists are going to show up on that issue against them because, I mean, it would just be shameful. But without that, right, then it's just a couple of us theoretically against them. And when they're talking about jacking up rents because they're doing this thing, then, you know, it could die on the dios. And having the opportunity for those eight- and nine-year-old kids to come talk about how the landlords just evict people and then just leave their stuff on the sidewalk and how they've got to walk over mattresses and empty bottles. That can steer the conversation away from sometimes the parks and rec style, like, little work of city government to sort of get over that and start focusing on the issues that are really impacting communities.

Definitely. Wow. Dariel, do you want to share a little bit more about the work that you're doing with your Brothers at Bard and how you're impacting the community as young men exhibiting these leadership roles?

Sure. I think I'll start one of my mentees with saying—so, on the point of the importance of young men of color being the change agents themselves, when granted those support networks and those outlets, I remember one of my mentees was saying, like, "Yeah, like, sometimes we come across, like, the older heads, but they want to help but when they try to be down they're kind of corny." And I think, like, that's obviously a barrier you have to get through.

I think we should definitely pay more mind to the potential, not just the lack of "experience" just because—I mean, like, I've often been told, "How did you start this program" at work with the guys, and "You're only 19 and you don't have much working experience outside of college," or whatever. And I'm like, "Man, that's 19 years of the ghetto. I mean, I don't need no—experience," you know what I mean? Like, that's upfront. So, if anyone, I'll be able to relate to them on a completely different level than some of their teachers can.

But to be more specific, I think with the Brothers at Bard group, understanding that it really is "brothers" at Bard, like I would not be able to do anything without my team, first of all. [Inaudible] of black staff members in the building, period. And then most of the guys in my cohort are in single parent households. So you really start to question, I mean, where are they going to get these role models and mentors from; right? And is it going to be some 50-year-old, whatever, old-head that they can't even necessarily relate to—no offense—but that they can't necessarily relate to because that's a different [indiscernible]. But, you know, they can't necessarily relate to, you know? But we're talking about music, we can relate on that level, from any level. And we focus on character development with our cohort first, the same way BOND did with us.

So, instead of focusing on academic development like a lot of afterschool programs do, they come in, they do the tutoring, they do the reinforcing the lessons that were taught in the class, but really looking at why can't you really take in those lessons that were taught in the classroom; right? Instead of putting a Band-Aid and just tutoring—although tutoring is very—we need a lot of that as well. I know one of my mentees was like, "We're tutoring, but it's just a whole bunch of white college girls coming to tutor us, and we don't have any brothers to really come and do the mentorship side."

So we focus on, instead of putting Band-Aid, really cutting down to the issue, what's going on in their households. And they don't have people to talk to about these things; right? And you really cannot undermine the importance of really giving them a space, an open, safe space where they can just talk about these issues.

We also have, which is now doing the work that I've been doing I've come to really realize it a lot more, we have this, like, crazy zero tolerance policy in schools. I'm like, this makes no sense; right? Like, you suspend a kid for not coming to school, so you make him miss more school. Like, you know what I mean? Like, once you think about it, it makes absolutely no sense. And when you hear them vocalize on it, when you hear them talk about it, it really opens up the issue where it really makes you think they have a strong voice, they should be the ones talking about their problems, not the media or anyone else writing a narrative for them. So I think that's why—yeah, I mean, I'm biased of course, but I think the young people, we're where it's at.

Well said. Well said. So I would like to ask each of the panelists to talk a little bit as we wrap up the formal portion of the panel. You know, we say all the time that these young people matter, but we have to make that actionable. So what would you say to policymakers and to funders about what you think really needs to happen to move in a different and a more strategic direction to support boys and young men of color? Sure. We'll start with you.

All right. So, for the funders, I think a willingness to support those innovative solutions. Also then, a willingness to really stick to their investment. This is not something you invest in for 18 months and we walk away from. Even with our program, we've had a lot of internal discussion about how do we stick with these young men until they're young adults? And we're going to figure out how to do it, but traditional ways in which we fund programs and policies don't really allow that, even though common sense, as well as all the evidence, tells us that that's what we should do. So that sustained commitment is critical.

And then there are a lot of really easy policy fixes that we should—again, are common sense to a degree, from making sure trash gets picked up to making sure that those zero tolerance policies don't exist anymore, because we know they're bad. All the research, all the evidence tells us they're bad. And the last thing I would say is that, from an institutional perspective, we have a—you know, it's various institutions, and I'll speak as someone who works for an institution of higher ed, we have a responsibility to open up pathways to opportunity for these very resilient young men. We have to respond to their resiliency with an open hand and an open door, and the support that's needed for them. And that goes for any institution, whether it's city government or an institution of higher ed or a major business or employer.

We also need to look internally in terms of how are we interacting in engaging with young men of color? We work with a lot of school districts that we horrified when we open up their discipline data with them and they see the outcomes. And we tried to have this very delicate conversation with them as we don't want to get into intent, we want to talk about the actions. How do we remedy those actions? That's what's important. And all institutions need to look within to really question and remedy some of those situations, whether it's law enforcement, school districts, institutions of higher ed, or the public sector.

[Inaudible]

Yeah. So I think, you know, when you start talking about—I agree 100%—when you talk about funders and you start having the conversation with funders, it is about long-term investment and it's not an 18-month grant, it's not a 24-month grant. It's really about let's invest and get to the place where we're trying to get to because we don't live in those kind of cycles. One of the things I do love about what Obama and his administration has done is they really tried to break down silos with inside of their federal government, and I think that made other states and cities do some of the same work.

So when you start looking across the departments, you start figuring out how do we all work together and collaborate a little bit better. I think, one, you've got to have young men like this in your room and on the panels. I think you've got to continue to look for young people to be the solution. One of the things our school system is real good at is they created equity scorecards for what they're doing—what the school system was like, and then they've also created one for the middle schools and high schools that they're going to be rolling out. And it really takes a look at the data around disciplinary, advanced, who's in advanced classes, who's graduating, who's not graduating, and really look at it from an equity lens and saying how can we do different, how can we do better.

The school system actually joined along with other folks and signed a boys of color resolution. So they're really looking at all of their policies from—and how it impacts boys of color. We really spent a lot of time in the school system looking at their code of conduct and changing it from a punitive to more restoring the justice. We've got a long way to go, and then you've got to implement that; right? It's one thing to put the policy in place, but when you got 100+ schools you got to actually get that stuff implemented because us principals see things differently principal by principal, but you got to make it a culture and really push people to look at it.

One of the first things we started talking about when we talked to our school system was how many young boys of color are dropping out. And then the question I was asking is how many actually graduate each year, because I think that's where the answer is. We get 1,300 compared to 300, 1,300 walk across the stage every year, 300 drop out. Something's going okay with these 1,300. Where is the answer and what can we do differently there? But I think, you know, really just pushing everybody to think about how they do things different.

And I think our job at the city and our job as folks who are Gopher grants is having a relationship with funders and the federal government to get them to think about how do they do things different. And it's not just with the folks who are the program managers. Also the board of directors there at the foundation really saying to them the way we've done things have not really made that big of a difference for young boys of color. There's a lot of progress that's been made, but the data shows that we've been dropping out of school for a long time. I dropped out in the 80's and figured out how to get back in college, and that wasn't the first time someone in my family dropped out a young man. So it's been a tradition for us as a community, so now is the time that a lot of people are focusing on it and thinking about it, I just think we got to really push.

And I loved the idea when you talked about having outside folks push. I tell people consistently we're going to do the things that we think we're doing right, but if nobody pushes us and tells us we're not moving in the right direction, we're going to keep going that way; right? So outside folks, organizers and activists got to figure out

how to do this inside-outside game and really hold people accountable who they put in office, or we're going to keep getting the same thing we get.

So I think we just got to have people pushing, but really using the pulpit of the mayor's office to rally your United Way. Our United Way has put aside \$50,000 to start a Black Male Achievement Fund to help support the work that we're doing. So really just pushing people to do things differently, and even our school system, like putting new programs in the "Zones of Hope" program that's targeting young black men.

And the last thing I'll say is, you know, when we talk about innovation, we all know coding and making apps and all of that stuff is important. We actually put a coding class in one of our projects and we had 20 young men sign up, seven graduated. So these seven young men, high school young men are now running their own technology company; right? They called it Beach [ph] Technology, where they're actually developing websites and they're developing a marketing plan for people who are not on the website; right? So they're really targeting people in their neighborhoods. But these young men now have a skill and connection that they would have never had, and now they can go out and make money for the rest of their lives because they've got this new coding skill, so.

Yeah. I'll try to keep it short and sweet. So I think we need to focus on young men of color who are barred from opportunities and resources in low income communities, but then also focus on those young men of color who are in positions to fully take advantage of those resources on a different level. So what would have happened—I think Bard College is ahead of its time in providing these outreach and the structure in order for me to do outreach. But what would have happened if we had a student like me going to college and then not being able to find any avenues in order to get funding or be able to do the work that I do?

So I think we need to also look at how can we replicate something like Brothers at Bard, for example, on every college campus? I mean, like, that would be beautiful; right? So, also making a push for that or BOND programs at every high school, and really having faith in the community. Instead of saying, you know, "Let's bring the community to the table," the community needs to be the ones leading the conversation at the table, you know what I mean? Have faith that people in the community know what's best and that the young people know what's best for them.

And then also focusing on, like you were saying, skills, like not just "Let's sit down and talk," but also how can we equip you with certain skills. Like, I was obviously equipped with certain skills that allowed me to navigate through Bard and realize where I can tap into these resources. But focusing on just simple things like how to tie a tie. We expect young men to get employed one day, they don't even know about interview etiquette or, you know, how to give a proper handshake or what code-switching means, and those are very important things that I went through that I tried to also do workshops for my young men. So, like, even though on a simple level as well, just equipped in certain skills, but also giving resources on both ends for young men of color on all sides of the spectrum.

Greg.

I think plenty has been said here about investing in those people of color. And I feel like I've been beating one drum, sort of a messaging drum about change on the institutional level as far as the politics goes. And so I'll beat that drum one last time since it's the last question, which is that I'm sure in many people's towns and cities, their school boards and their city councils and their county commissioner's courts may not have been to the point where they're districted to the point of complete safety for incumbents.

And there's a lot of opportunities to get some people out of office. And there are just some opportunities for great young men of color or just great leaders to take office and to just get some people out of there because people do respond to media pressure and constituent pressure, and if you get together with the right kinds of folks, you can make a lot of change. There is—you know, there are the things that I've done in my office that get a lot of attention that people know about, but there is just day-to-day work that you do in local government that can have huge racial disparate impacts in a negative way that form people's lives in so many ways, just dozens of votes that you take.

A great example of it was just a month-and-a-half ago we were finally going to dedicate some city funds to buy out dozens of homes in an area that because of the way the city's developed is now a deadly floodplain. I mean, our professional engineers say people could die living there. Of course it's in a poor neighborhood that's primarily African American and Latino. And everybody was ready to—you know, there was a lot of debate about putting the money together. The money got put together to purchase these homes and move people out. And we found that the way the policy had been written we were basically going to be asking folks in this heavily Latino neighborhood their immigration status before we gave them [inaudible]. And, you know, I know most people on the council like to tell you things like people of color lives matter and black lives matter, but in this particular incidence, if you happen to be undocumented, like, you know, "We'll give your landlord some money, but, you, if you're undocumented, you don't get anything." Or you just stay there potentially, you know, face fatal consequences. And this is just a daily vote. It wasn't in the press. It wasn't—it was just one of our dozens of decisions that we make, and so it's so critical that you take a look at what political institutions you can change. And whether it's me or anybody else, if we're not doing our job and there's the potential to get rid of us, find a way to do it.

I'll be shore and sweet because I want to get to some of the questions, but clearly we said a lot of different things. Innovation matters. We know what works. We heard from the programmatic level, Dariel shared with us. And we also heard from the city level. But at our federal level budgets matter and the federal budget, we know we're in gridlock, and we know many of our programs that will help build pathways for young men of color and get them out of poverty are just woefully underfunded. They've been underfunded for decades and right now we're, again, facing really low budgets. So these things don't happen overnight, but they are decisions and choices that our policymakers make. And so what I would want to say is that we have to raise the bar on the types of decisions that they are making. We have the evidence. We have the data. And we just need a louder voice.

Thank you. Thank you all so much. We have a lot of questions coming in, and more coming as we speak. I want to make a quick announcement for those who are watching via the webcast. If you're experiencing any issues with the webcast, please just refresh your browser and that should correct the issue that we're having.

We're going to jump in to some of these questions to make sure we have time. I'm going to start with a heavy-hitter question, how about that? One of the things that has not been brought up is the issue of sexuality when we talk about the issue of boys and young men of color. And one of the questions that was posed is how can we ensure that young gay and transgender—excuse me—men of color have access to quality care, and also are valued both for their gay and transgender identify as well as young men of color? So if any of you are dealing with that in your communities or in the work that you're doing, I welcome you to address that topic.

Well I'll just start just on the policy level. Again, I mentioned the opportunities that we have when we're thinking about elementary and secondary education, and that's not only opportunities to think about equity. We have also opportunities to think about safe places, safe schools, and those particular investments and programs and policies that would help to support LGBTQ young people.

And then, again, really with the implementation of the Affordable Care Act, there's also opportunities not only to think about practices that happen in terms of training, training youth development professionals, training across systems, folks who interact with young people, but also how do you build the resources and supports and the systems, the structures that help those LGBTQ young men and women, you know, to deal with some of the issues that they're uniquely facing.

[Inaudible] our school system has just went through that whole, you know, create a transgender policy for restroom use and how—you know, so I think the school system's talking about it and putting the policies together and really thinking about it. And also the city itself has also created a transgender policy as well to make sure that folks are not discriminated against and folks can keep their jobs. We talk about it when we talk about our young men of color work, but it has not risen all the way to the top. But I think it's part of the conversation and I think we've got to be open and ready for all of that because if you start talking about all lives matter, than all lives matter, it's not just black lives, it's not just black males' lives, it's everybody's lives matter. So we've got to have that conversation, but it just has not risen all the way up. But it's always in the background and is one that I think we need to have probably a more direct conversation about but we just haven't [inaudible] yet.

Our next question is about the issue of cultural competency in the states of education. So how do we add cultural competency to some of these conversations and how do we motivate young men of color in schools where there are no administrators of color in those spaces to work with them and to push them?

Good question. I can start with this one.

Sure. Thank you.

This definitely comes up in our work around discipline disparities and issues of implicit bias. Again, some of the fundamentals, you know, cultural competency isn't just a training. It is really about a perspective that an organization embraces and that they're supporting cultural competency for individuals throughout their professional development. Also then, we have to think about outcomes. This is why we talk about the need to look at discipline data because what we're learning from a lot of the implicit bias work is that many of these actions that we see are fueled by biases that folks aren't consciously aware of. An implicit bias training is very

helpful in that regard to teach educators to look at their outcomes and then ask those deep questions in terms of why did I react in a particular situation that way?

I also think a related issue that we must think about is competency not just in terms of cultural competency, but competency when dealing with kids of all colors and genders in terms of those who have dealt with trauma. Our school systems aren't very good at dealing with trauma. And too many times we treat behavior that's trauma-related as a disciplinary issue, not as an issue of mental health and the need for support.

Yeah, I mean, I would just second that, especially the last part. Because of the lack of cultural competency we sometimes look at students misbehaving in the classroom and then are quick to discipline them in a certain way without looking at what are the issues that are going on for that student, whether it be in the community or in the household. I think—I mean, this is obviously where programs like mine come into play, programs like BOND, et cetera, come into play because when you have a school that's all white, all white teachers, all white staff, and they have a large percentage of minority students in their classrooms, there needs to be obviously, on a structural level, more cultural competence training, but then they also need to get some kind of exposure to groups and organizations like ours. So it's really looking at partnering up entities within the community on a grassroots level who don't necessarily need the same kind of cultural competency training because that's their culture, that's who they are, and bridging that with getting more involved with the school on a structural level as well.

And just, very briefly, as far as what we're trying to do at the city to elevate not just cultural competency but elevate the culture and art of folks of color. I had mentioned that we're a very economically segregated city. A UT study recently came out and proved what everybody sort of knew and was feeling in Austin, that we are the only rapidly growing metro that's not just losing African American as a percentage of our population but just absolutely losing African Americans in numbers. And, you know, you talk to lots of Latinos and they say it's a more difficult city to live in culturally than, say, Dallas or Houston.

And so, as a city, we're trying to take our hotel occupancy taxes and put a higher proportion of those into events that elevate the art and work and the ideas of communities of color, and investing more and more parks' bond dollars not just into renovating the same old parks that everybody loves as timely in Austin, but also building cultural centers that really are impressive and create that level of connection for young people to not only feel that their culture is respected but that it's elevated by the city and within the city so we can do our best to push back at something the city ultimately did cause through our own redevelopment and gentrification and damage to communities, and we can try to create that space for people to have community and feel proud.

And, following up on that, Greg, there's actually a question that was posed directly to you. How do you begin to bridge the disconnect between young men of color and public officials who they feel typically don't see them as people and they don't typically trust their elected officials? So how are you working to bridge that gap?

Yeah, I can talk a little bit about how I'm working to do it. I don't have the magic formula for how to do it for others. But, you know, my experience has been at city hall that there is just sort of a firehose of information and decisions to be made. And you can just slowly start drifting away from reality.

And so I regularly just go to elementary and middle schools in my district, and that's the most sort of grounding, ensuring experience that I can have because when you—you know, I've had a group of students, I explain to them that I'm on the city council and what that is, and then there's always just truth that comes out that those young people are willing to voice. They know what their rent is, and that the rest is too high. And they know their parents are treated poorly at work or they know that the police aren't their friends in their neighborhood, or that's how they feel. And I think that it has to start at some level like that where we are close to our constituents and real people.

Until this year we were the largest city in America that did not have districts in their city government. And so only this year did we finally get to have those districts. So with an entirely at-large system, you know, elected officials were flying at 80,000 feet, and I couldn't even hardly blame them for not getting a chance to go to their local schools and really to get to know young people. So I guess that would be, you know, one way that I'm trying to do it.

But, you know, I think maybe my answer to the very last question is sort of my only real response that I have right now for how to get others to do it is that there are people who do see young people of color and young men of color as people, that many of them just don't hold elective office, but they could, you know, through various reforms, whether it's intermediate institutions or institutions of higher education. I mean, my gut is that there are more people that think young people of color are people than don't. The leader group I guess is just overrepresented in public officials. And so there's that problem that we have to solve, which isn't easy.

And it's not like just getting an independent redistricting commission is going to do it. It's not just that getting a few political activists. But the question is how do we make sure we're taking steps that get us towards that goal of—it sounds like a pretty modest goal. Go get more people who think people of color are people elected to office, but it's necessary.

Thank you. Anthony, I'm going to pose this question to you. This individual is the founder of a new youth organization and expresses that it's been difficult to get the program off the ground because of not being able to build relationships with existing organizations who don't tend to listen to their suggestions. So what suggestions or solutions do you have for creating networks or bridges between organizations that are trying to do this work?

So, yeah, I think that's the key point for the work that we're all doing. I think you've got to find somebody who's well established in that field and let them be your mentor, because I think the nonprofit is almost as hard to get into and get ideas and programs up and running than in the corporate world. But I think, you know, there's somebody in the city, and in the city where that young person is, or the person who started the program is who would help them get into a program.

And I think sometimes it's really good just to go volunteer your time and services at maybe the youth detention centers. You got a youth detention center that needs programming, or if you have a community center. We have 13 community centers that are heavily understaffed; right? So the staff can't do everything that they want to do. They would love to have somebody come in and run a program. And you got to build your name and build it up that way.

So I think sometimes you got to volunteer a little bit so that people can know who you are and see some outcomes from your program. But one of the things I'm also clear about, too, is I can't ask everybody to volunteer when I know people got to eat; right? So I'm never shy about that when I work with young people, it's that I can only ask them to volunteer for so long and then we got to create something for them to start making money or we're going to lose them to a field that we don't need them in; right? So I think it's got to be real clear, one, find a mentor; two, find a place where you can go volunteer and spend some time there just so that people can see who you are and show you a program. But then also don't volunteer for too long. Give yourself a timeline and figure out how you make money doing that program.

And then just one more quick thing, too, as far as when you think about nonprofits and you—I'm more about trying to get people to think about social entrepreneurship, create opportunities where you can actually make money and do good, because I think we do—Louisville has way too many nonprofits. They're all doing great work, but we don't need another one. So I tell people that all the time, please don't come to me asking me to help you with 501(c)(3) paperwork because that's not going to be the thing that we need. I think we need people thinking about how to do things a little bit different than we've done before because there's too much competition for those small grant dollars. And I think people can generate more dollars and still do good outside of the traditional way.

Thank you. Kisha, I'm going to pose a question to you. Someone would like to know what are some policies that target boys of color at an earlier age or during the formative early childhood years?

So, that's something that we work on a lot at CLASP. And so I'm going to beat a dead horse, but, again, there's opportunity to really think about Elementary and Secondary Education Act. But, at the same time, something that we've been working on is the Child Care and Development Block Grant, which was passed last year the bipartisan way. And right now states are implementing that law as well.

And one of the things we've been talking about at CLASP is not only opportunity to think about the young children and young boys, but we have a paper coming out about access to childcare for young people of color, but also to think about the needs of their parents. And so we've heard this echoed a lot of times. And in our programs we see a lot of strategies that do that, but we don't see a lot of strategies at the policy level that really thinks about two-generation approaches or family approaches. And so there's clearly some, you know, policies that really target young people at the earlier years, Child Care Development Block Grant, Head Start, which—just had its 50-year anniversary and also grew out of, you know, civil rights legislation really targeted to poor and low income families. So we know what works, we have the research out there. I think we just have to really maximize the opportunities. And right now we have a really key opportunity in states who can make really good decisions that will dramatically impact young people in their early years.

Yes. And there's a lot of information on class websites specifically about that early childhood issue that people can access as well.

Yep.

Please join me in thanking our panel for their tremendous sharing today. Each of you are doing amazing work in your respective locations and are definitely to be commended. And we hope that the lessons that you all have shared today are things that people can implement into the work that they're doing, either at the federal level or in communities, particularly for those of you that joined us via our webcast and are doing work at the local level.

I'm pleased right now to be able to have Linda Rodriguez to come and provide some closing remarks for us. As she comes to the podium, she's the executive director of the Fellowship Initiative at J.P. Morgan Chase, and has been a partner with CLASP in some of this work.

Great. Thank you.

You're welcome.

A few weeks ago when Kisha and I talked about this event, she mentioned that she thought there was someone on the panel I might be familiar with. And I had no idea it was Dariel. And I was really pleased to see him up here, and sad to say that we had nothing to do with it at all. It was such a good idea, but it was all his idea. And I kind of love that because it's evidence of what happens when you provide young people with the opportunities to build skills and access resources, they almost always exceed your expectations and surprise you and inspire you in the most wonderful way. So I want to thank you for being such a great ambassador for our work, but also, more importantly, generously sharing and honestly sharing your personal experiences in a way that motivates other people to get involved.

I also would like to thank CLASP for involving us in the conversation today. We really appreciate your leadership on this issue, and, in particular, your focus on lifting up solutions that work. I know I will certainly, from this conversation, one of the many things I'll take away is one small policy change in Louisville—and Anthony, it's good to see you again—can result in 600 new mentors. I mean, that's extraordinary. So I just applaud the work that's being done there.

I was asked to offer closing reflections on two questions, why J.P. Morgan Chase is investing in supporting young men of color and why we should all focus on this issue. And at J.P. Morgan Chase corporate responsibility has always been central to how we do business. Our focus on supporting young men of color really started in 2010 with the launch of the Fellowship Initiative in New York City where a group of staff in the firm had been going to meetings and hearing over and over again, like, the really demoralizing statistics, right, and we've all heard them. So I'm actually really grateful that we didn't spend today talking about that; right? We were really focused on solutions.

And so there was a desire to do even more than fund the outstanding nonprofits that are coming up with innovative ideas in this space. This is kind of a unique program for us in that our staff help run it and we also have over 130 staff who have volunteered to serve as mentors within the program. And it's a fairly significant commitment. The mentors work with the fellows every week, and they work with them for over three years. So it's really unique in that way. And we think it's contributed to the program outcomes that, I mean, Dariel can tell

you all about, but include things like over \$8 million in scholarships earned by that first class of fellows from, you know, outside scholarship organizations.

TFI compliments other initiatives launched by the firm, such as New Skills at Work, our five-year, \$250 million commitment to closing the skills gap, which also includes a number of different initiatives that focuses on creating economic opportunities for young people around the world. And, in particular, for young men of color there are quite a few programs that focus on that group.

Beyond direct services for young men of color are investments or related investments, including things like being involved in organizations like the MBK Alliance. We also provide some funding for the Campaign for Black Male Achievement. So, beyond direct services, we're really interested in how do we continue to think about supporting organizations or doing the work of field building so that we are getting smarter about how we do this and getting better at doing this work all the time.

So the big question was why; right? So we support innovative solutions to providing youth, especially young men of color, with education and employment opportunities because we know that our country needs all of its young people to contribute to our future, all of them; right? And if we don't do this, then such a waste, right, in terms of the talent, the potential of the young people in our neighborhoods. And because we believe in economic opportunity, right, that the neighborhood, your family income, your race, your ethnicity, those things should not define or limit what's possible for any of us.

As this forum comes to a close I just want to offer one final thought based on conversations with the fellows. Dariel may not remember this, but my first week on the job we took a really long flight to L.A. together to interview the group of the first class of L.A. TFI fellows. And I'm sure he was planning to probably watch a movie, maybe two. He had, like, books and music. Instead he ended up being seated next to me and serving as, like, my focus group of one with, like, all of my questions; right? What part of the program works, is it mentoring, is it—how do you cultivate brotherhood, is it something about you?

And I don't know at what point—I mean, he, at some point, probably should have just told me to shut up, but he's so polite, he didn't do that. But he did say something that stayed with me, which was young men of color have dreams, too, and he's said that in different forms. And it's a simple but profound statement. And I think the part of it that stayed with me was the addition of the word "too," right? Like, why wouldn't we assume that that's the case; right? Do you remember saying that?

Absolutely.

Okay. And recently I was reminded of it actually because we had, like, celebrations with the new class of fellows. And one of them said he didn't really know how to fully describe all of the components of the program. So what he says to his friends is that he's in a program where he has his very own group of dream supporters. And so as we reflect on the conversation today and think about solutions that we can come up with, I urge us all, public and private partners, young people, policymakers, educators, to think about how we can be dream supporters for young men of color in whatever space we have influence in, that we all have a chance to play a

role in coming up with solutions. So I just want to thank CLASP again for including us in the conversation and turn it back over to Kisha.

The event has ended. If you would like watch the video from the webcast today, it will be posted to our event page next week. Enjoy your day.