

# **An Open Letter: Memphis Nonprofits Demand Action**

We have come together as black leaders in the nonprofit space to amplify the cries and demands heard in our streets and around the country. Joined by our non-black colleagues in leadership, we demand more of our city's leadership. We see the direct impact of systemic racism and oppression daily. The community members our organizations partner with and serve are the direct targets of police brutality, over-policing, poverty wages, subpar education, and systemic racism. As the protests in Memphis have taken place, we stand in solidarity with the organizers and activists leading the charge.

For far too long, nonprofits have been a stop gap solution to systemic issues. Our city is set up for many of our residents to be oppressed. National comparisons tell the tale of high poverty rates, health inequities, broad racial wealth gaps, and a dearth of opportunities for young adults, to name a few. We call for a new day and new way of doing business in our city. Expecting nonprofits and public goodwill to solve these challenges is not enough. Relying on nonprofits to fill the gap and fix issues that are hundreds of years in the making is not enough. We believe we can have a city where everyone thrives, but it will take bold action to get there.

This fight has been building for a long time. The deaths of Breonna Taylor, George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery and so many others have brought us to today. These are not isolated incidents - we witness daily police violence and over-policing in our very own city, along with the unresolved investigations from local police shootings such as Darrius Stewart and Martavious Banks. Most recently, the law enforcement response to peaceful protests has been egregious. A fellow nonprofit Executive Director, Victoria Jones, was targeted and attacked with zero accountability for those actions by police. We call on Memphis leaders to honor the following demands:

1. Release all of the peaceful protesters that were arrested in any and all marches and drop all charges; Investigate law enforcement brutality and misconduct during recent protests with public reporting of findings and a commitment to hold officers accountable for any wrongdoing
2. Reallocate funding from the police department to fund alternatives rooted in community health and crisis response
3. Ban chokeholds and strangleholds by Memphis Police Officers and Sheriff's Deputies
4. Require de-escalation as a first response by Memphis Police Officers and Sheriff's Deputies
5. Develop a Duty To Intervene policy that requires officers to intervene when witnessing another officer using excessive force for the Memphis Police Department and the Sheriff's Office
6. Require reporting by officers and deputies any time they point a firearm at a citizen

7. Give the Civilian Law Enforcement Review Board (CLERB) the power it needs to investigate and ensure accountability for police conduct and provide clear avenues for CLERB's input on MPD training, policies, and procedures
8. Include grassroots black and brown leaders and activists on the search and selection committee for the next MPD Chief

The systemic issues that shape people's lives go beyond police brutality and over-policing. Our black and brown residents face some of the highest inequality and poverty in the country. From education to wages, we have constructed and perpetuated a system that keeps our residents in poverty. We call on leadership in all sectors - government, nonprofits, and corporations - to adopt an agenda that addresses these issues. It will require doing business differently and centering the lives, dreams, and concerns of all of our residents. In order to get to a new vision for Memphis and Shelby County, we demand the following:

1. Combat poverty by tracking companies paying a living wage and having corporations sign on to a living wage pledge and commitment to give temporary employees health insurance and benefits
2. Renew investment in K-12 education in the City of Memphis budget, including support for early literacy, high school success, trauma-responsive supports, and increased access to tech, art and music education
3. End money bail and stop predatory, ballooning penalties for traffic tickets, court costs, and other fines
4. Enact a citizen participatory budgeting process at the city and county level beginning with FY22 budgets in partnership with Memphis City Council and County Commission that prioritizes neighborhood-level investments
5. Release a clear plan for funding a more effective MATA transit system by August 2020, overseen by a community-appointed team

Words are not enough. Commitments to meet or form a task force are not enough. Good intentions are meaningless when year after year we continue to have the same dismal outcomes. We believe deeply that the leadership in our city wants a city where all residents are treated with dignity and humanity and are provided opportunities to thrive. For us to get there, we ask that the leaders in government and business respond to these demands with clear commitments to ACTIONS. What will your legacy be? We represent thousands of your constituents and they are demanding more. Four years ago, Memphians marched on the Hernando DeSoto Bridge and there were calls for change. Four years later, little has changed. We ask that we not let more lives be lost to violence, to poverty, and to systemic racism. It is our hope that in four years, rather than lamenting the same challenges, we are celebrating the results of these changes.

For questions, please reach out to [MemphisNonprofitsDemandMore@gmail.com](mailto:MemphisNonprofitsDemandMore@gmail.com).

**Signed By:**

Amber Hamilton, Executive Director, The Memphis Music Initiative  
Sarah Lockridge-Steckel, Chief Executive Officer and Co-Founder, The Collective Blueprint  
Natalie Mckinney, Executive Director and Co-Founder, Whole Child Strategies Inc.  
Cardell Orrin, Memphis Executive Director, Stand for Children Tennessee  
Eric Robertson, President, Community LIFT  
Justin Merrick, Executive Director, Center for Transforming Communities  
Dr. Catherine Cushinberry, Executive Director/Vice-President, City Year Memphis  
Dana Wilson, President and CEO, BRIDGES  
Brandon Arrindell, Board Chair, BRIDGES  
Meka Egwuekwe, Executive Director and Co-Founder, CodeCrew  
Dr. Earle Fisher, #UPTheVote901  
Mark Sturgis, Chief Executive Officer, Seeding Success  
Dr. Bobby White, Founder/CEO, Frayser Community Schools  
Amy Schaftlein, Executive Director, United Housing  
Yetta Lewis, CEO and Co-Founder, Gestalt Community Schools  
Jeffrey Higgs, Executive Director, LeMoyné-Owen College Community Development Corporation  
Quincey Morris, Executive Director, Klondike Smokey City CDC  
Adriane Johnson-Williams, Ph.D., Co-Founder and Board Chair, Whole Child Strategies, Inc.  
Marti Tippens-Murphy, Executive Director, Memphis Region, Facing History and Ourselves  
Michael Rhodes, Director of Community Transformation, MCUTS@Union University  
Cornelius Sanders, Executive Director, Promise Development Corporation  
Joe Caldwell, Dean/President, Memphis College of Urban and Theological Studies (MCUTS)  
Lisa Moore, President and CEO, Girls Inc. of Memphis  
Larry Lloyd, CEO, Memphis Leadership Foundation  
Dr. Kendra Ferguson, CEO, KIPP Memphis  
Kevin Dean, CEO, Momentum Nonprofit Partners  
Jared Myers, Executive Director, Heights CDC  
Britney Thornton, Executive Director, JUICE Orange Mound  
Lar'Juanette Williams, Executive Director, Memphis Black Arts Alliance, Inc.  
Justin Entzminger, Executive Director, Innovate Memphis  
Ruth Abigail Smith, Executive Director, AngelStreet Inc.  
Stephen Moten, Area Director, Young Life Memphis  
Janet Boscarino, Executive Director, Clean Memphis  
Sonji Branch, Chief Executive Officer, Communities In Schools of Memphis  
Molly Rose Quinn, Executive Director, OUTMemphis  
Cassandra H. Webster, Executive Director, Memphis Challenge  
Nadja Marion, Executive Director, A Fresh Start to a New Beginning  
Kayla Gore, Executive Director, My Sistah's House  
Margaret Cowan, Founding Keeper, I Am My Sister's Keeper

Jen Andrews, CEO, Shelby Farms Park Conservancy  
Mark Hackett, Executive Director, Operation Broken Silence  
Nikki Gibbs, Executive Director, A Step Ahead Foundation  
Josh Spickler, Executive Director, Just City  
John Paul Shaffer, Executive Director, BLDG Memphis  
Steve Lockwood, Executive Director, Frayser Community Development Corporation  
Antwoine Clark , Founder/CEO, South Side Wildcats Organization  
Triena Winbery, CEO Gilda's Club Memphis, Gilda's Club Memphis  
Diane Duke, Executive Director, Friends For Life  
Cheryl Muhammad, President, NAREB Memphis Realtist  
Dottie Jones, Founder and Chairman, Wraparound Shelby  
Sean Lee, President, Porter-Leath  
Candis Saulsberry, Executive Director, Freeman Outreach Center  
Marquiepta Odom, Executive Director  
Rebecca Terrell, Executive Director, CHOICES. Memphis Center for Reproductive Health  
Dr. Krista Johnson, Executive Director, ALLMemphis  
Elizabeth Cawein, Executive Director, Music Export Memphis  
Gary Shorb, Executive Director, The Urban Child Institute  
Tina Sullivan, Executive Director, Overton Park Conservancy  
Victoria Jones, Executive Director, The CLTV (Collective)  
Devin Kirkland, Arkwings Foundation  
Whitney Hardy, Founder, 3RDSPACE  
Cheryl Muhamma, President, NAREB Memphis  
Seth Harkins, Executive Director, Alcy Ball Development Corporation  
Sally Joyner, Interim Executive Director, Mid-South Immigration Advocates  
Orisha Bowers, Executive Director, Orixia Healing Arts Wellness and Spiritual Centre  
Tenikki Sesley, CEO/Founder, Apple Seeds, Inc.  
PJ Moore, Executive Director, World Relief Memphis  
Melanie Schild, CEO, Girl Scouts Heart of the South  
Eli Cloud, Executive Director, Thistle and Bee Enterprises Inc.  
Mark Fleischer, Founder and Publisher, StoryBoard Memphis  
Noah Gray, Executive Director, Binghampton Development Corporation  
Renée Wilson, Simmons, DrPH, Executive Director, ACE (Adverse Childhood Experience)  
Awareness Foundation  
Karen Minnis, Executive Director, Landmark Training Development Company  
Mark Fleischer, Founder and Publisher, StoryBoard Memphis  
Justin Miller, CEO, Slingshot Memphis, Inc.  
Todd Richardson, President, Crosstown Redevelopment Cooperative  
Gwendolyn D. Clemons, Executive Director, Relationship Unleashed  
Sally Jones Heinz, President and CEO, MIFA  
Megan Banaszek, Executive Director, Carpenter Art Garden  
Dr. Darnell Gooch Jr., Executive Director, Cathedral Foundation

DeAndre and Vinessa Brown, Founder/Director, LIFEline to Success Inc  
Dr. Davin D. Clemons, Executive Director, Tri State Black Pride  
Brett Batterson, President & CEO, Orpheum Theatre Group  
Elizabeth Rouse, President & CEO, ArtsMemphis  
Anna Mullins Ellis, President & CEO, New Memphis  
Meggan Kiel, Interim Lead Organizer/Executive Director, MICAH  
Dr. Stacy Spencer, President, MICAH  
Natalie Wilson, Executive Director, The Levitt Shell  
Phillis Lewis, CEO  
Robert Fockler, President, Community Foundation of Greater Memphis  
Jana Wilson, Executive Director, Arkwings  
Lurlynn Franklin, Board, Arkwings  
Robby Grant, Executive Director, Crosstown Radio Partnership  
Brittany Cooper-d'Orsay, Board Chair, Memphis Youth Symphony Program  
S. Maureen Griner, Executive Director, Dorothy Day House of Hospitality, Inc.  
Angie Johnson, Interim Executive Director, Emmanuel Center, Inc.  
Terence Patterson, President and Chief Executive Officer, Memphis Education Fund  
Carol Miraglia, Interim Executive Director, Ballet Memphis  
Mary Schmitz, Executive Director, Welcome To Memphis  
Christine Weinreich, Executive Director, Memphis Library Foundation  
Ellen Zahariadis, Executive Director, The Humane Society of Memphis and Shelby County  
Katrina Dorse, Executive Director, Big Heart Fund  
Darrell Cobbins, Board Chair, 100 Black Men of Memphis, Inc.  
Thomas Pacello, President, Memphis Medical District Collaborative  
Marcia Kaufmann, Executive Director, Iris Orchestra  
Philip Walkley, Executive Director, Service Over Self  
Leslie Lynn Smith, President and CEO, Epicenter  
Michael Phillips, Executive Director, Su Casa Family Ministries  
Karen Christian, CEO, Mid-South Development  
Terri Lee Freeman, President, National Civil Rights Museum  
Meagan Cloutier, Director of Memphis Programs, Project Transformation Tennessee  
Steve Barlow, President & CEO, Neighborhood Preservation, Inc.  
Lori Brunson, Board President, Humane Society of Memphis & Shelby County  
Larry Fondation, Executive Director , United Parents and Students  
Rev. Lisa Anderson, Founder/Executive Director, Room in the Inn-Memphis  
Ekundayo Bandele, CEO, Hattiloo Theatre  
Mike Bland, National Director of Leaders of Color Initiative, Education Reform Now  
Meagan Cloutier, Director of Memphis Programs, Project Transformation Tennessee