

# INVEST IN HOLISTIC, PREVENTATIVE, AND SYSTEMIC SOLUTIONS

The leaders we spoke with recognize that the challenges facing black men are systemic in nature and call for systemic solutions. At the same time, much of the existing work focuses on individual-level or single-issue interventions that do not take into account the larger, interconnected context of black men's lives. Likewise, many direct service organizations focus on supporting black men and boys as they face the consequences of policies that have resulted in poor educational outcomes or disproportionate rates of incarceration.

While such interventions are critical and necessary, several interviewees expressed a desire to see greater investments in organizations that help tackle root causes, rather than symptoms. This includes investing in programs that offer holistic services, given the interconnectedness of issues like education, workforce development, and family preservation. Similarly, greater attention needs to be paid to prevention and early intervention approaches that can enhance life opportunities for black males, as well as policy solutions that can change the structures that limit opportunities for African-American men.

## HOLISTIC APPROACHES

"You don't improve fatherhood without there being good job prospects. You probably don't improve the employment issue without some schooling involved. Everything is linked to everything," says University of Michigan professor Alford Young, Jr. The interdependence of these outcomes underscores the need for programs that support black men in multiple dimensions of their lives.

The success of Harlem Children's Zone—which focuses on individuals and on the entire community and provides a wide range of resources, services, and support to families—is frequently cited as a model to emulate. President and CEO Geoffrey Canada cautions that it took nearly 10 years and a huge investment to build out its model. He advocates for taking initiatives like his to scale but also stresses the need to think carefully about how to leverage the return on investment. Rather than trying to start new programs, Canada believes that funders should buttress existing programs with a strong track record by adding resources for a specific emphasis on black men and boys.

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## PREVENTION AND EARLY INTERVENTION

Coupled with holistic approaches, early intervention and prevention models are also crucial investments as the field works toward more positive life outcomes for black males. Emmett Carson, president and CEO of the Silicon Valley Foundation, states, "Life is a progressive trail. It's hard to catch somebody up if they start out behind." Citing medical research

that 85 percent of learning pathways are created in the first five years of life, Carson advocates for a focus on early child development and systematically looking at key intervention points.

Indeed, the California Endowment and Annie E. Casey Foundation's focus on grade-level reading (one that is also adopted by My Brother's Keeper) is predicated on the notion that an investment in early childhood education can improve the probability of positive life outcomes. As Canada points out, in the end, public and private investments in holistic, preventative, and early intervention approaches are "a lot less expensive than the alternative, which are jails and prisons."

## POLICY

In the past year, advocates have achieved policy victories that will increase opportunities

for black men and boys. In January 2014, the Departments of Education and Justice jointly released guidelines encouraging school districts to end punitive disciplinary practices. Efforts by the Dignity in Schools Campaign and Advancement Project, among others, have led to local and statewide policy changes that reduce suspensions and arrests in schools and implement positive approaches to discipline.

While these accomplishments were applauded, several interviewees criticized the overall lack of policy advocacy efforts within the field of black male achievement. Judith Browne Dianis of Advancement Project observes that it is important to address the roots of the challenges faced by black men. "There are not a lot of people in the [field] that are necessarily doing systems change. To have lasting impact on a large scale, there must be more focus on eliminating the structures and policies that act

## MARYLAND HOUSE BILL 333, COUPLES ADVANCING TOGETHER PILOT PROGRAM

Joe Jones of the Center for Urban Families knows what it takes to vault direct service work into a systemic solution through policy change. He helped develop the Maryland bill "Couples Advancing Together," which transforms how state agencies address couples in committed relationships. For years, Jones observed low-income couples with children falling into a pattern of poverty and family breakup. He believed the public sector was complicit in facilitating this outcome given the structure of the state benefits system, which focused almost exclusively on mother and child, interacting with the father only to collect child support.

In a talk before business and civic leaders, Jones argued against this approach, suggesting that the state alter its policies to help couples strengthen their relationship and find family-friendly employment that supported them as a unit. His proposal piqued legislator Sandy Rosenberg's interest. Together, they crafted a bill that Rosenberg introduced to the Maryland General Assembly in January 2012. The process was not without its setbacks: The bill was quickly rejected the first time around. But when Rosenberg reintroduced it in 2013, it made its way to the desk of Governor Martin O'Malley, who signed it into law.

With funding for evaluation from the Annie E. Casey Foundation, a pilot collaboration between the Center for Urban Families and the Maryland Department of Human Resources is rolling out Couples Advancing Together in three Maryland communities. The passage of this bill has profound implications, having the potential to galvanize similar action in other states and ultimately impact thousands of families as the practice becomes institutionalized.

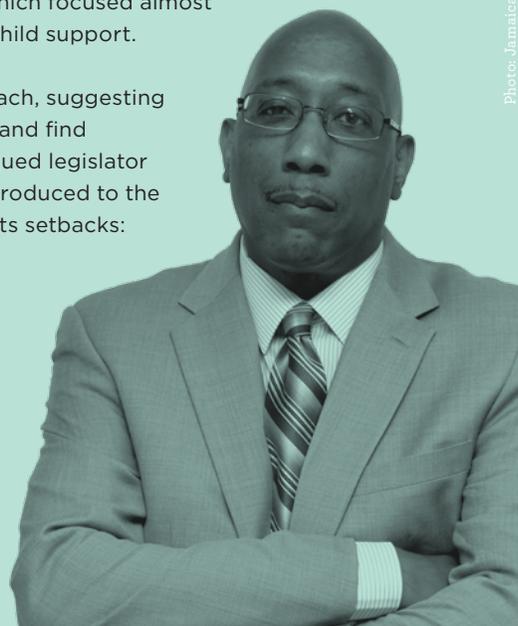


Photo: Jamaica Gilmer & Frontline Solutions, LLC

as barriers to opportunity.” Indeed, the IBMA member survey finds that while members do engage in systems change-related activities, such as policy advocacy (27 percent) and community organizing (37 percent), only 14 percent focus on one of these as their *primary* activity.<sup>14</sup>

Yet, the disparities between public and private funding underscore the need for systems-level change. “Philanthropy spends \$1 billion on education, compared to \$600 billion at the federal, state, or local level,” notes the Schott Foundation’s John Jackson. “So if the policies that are in place are not advantageous to black males and males of color, we’re out-resourced trying to build the public and political will to change the tide.” The Foundation regularly engages elected officials in its education work

to promote district- and state-level change. This type of outreach with elected leaders to change policies and practices can have broad-reaching and long-lasting effects.

As an outgrowth of its direct service work and trainings, Black Family Development, Inc. in Detroit has been working with community-based organizations, school districts, the courts, and the police department to review practices and policies to ensure that black boys are fairly and appropriately treated. Similarly, the Center for Urban Families in Baltimore backed into policy work and organizing efforts as a part of its direct service work with families. In 2013, the Center played a critical role in passing state legislation that creates supports for family preservation (see sidebar on p. 51).

## RESOURCES



### Advancement Project

Civil rights organization works nationally to strengthen social movements and achieve high-impact policy change, including dismantling the school-to-prison pipeline for young men of color.



### Advocacy Funding: The Philanthropy of Changing Minds

*GrantCraft*

Guide offers resources and strategies for advocacy funders on topics such as working with grantees who lobby, building a case, cultivating a constituency, and preparing for opposition.



### Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP)

Research and policy organization focuses on policies to improve the lives of low-income people. Its work includes improving outcomes for young black men, as well as young men of color.



### City Leadership to Promote Black Male Achievement

*National League of Cities*

Municipal action guide presents strategies for reducing the disparities between black males and their peers.



### Mayor’s Commission on African-American Males: Recommendations Report

*City of Philadelphia, Mayor’s Commission on African-American Males*

Report presents a series of policy recommendations to improve conditions for Philadelphia’s African-American men and boys.



### We Dream a World: The 2025 Vision for Black Men and Boys

*2025 Campaign for Black Men and Boys*

Report lays out a comprehensive policy agenda for addressing the problems that hinder black males.

For additional resources, visit: [bmafunders.org/beloved-community](https://bmafunders.org/beloved-community)

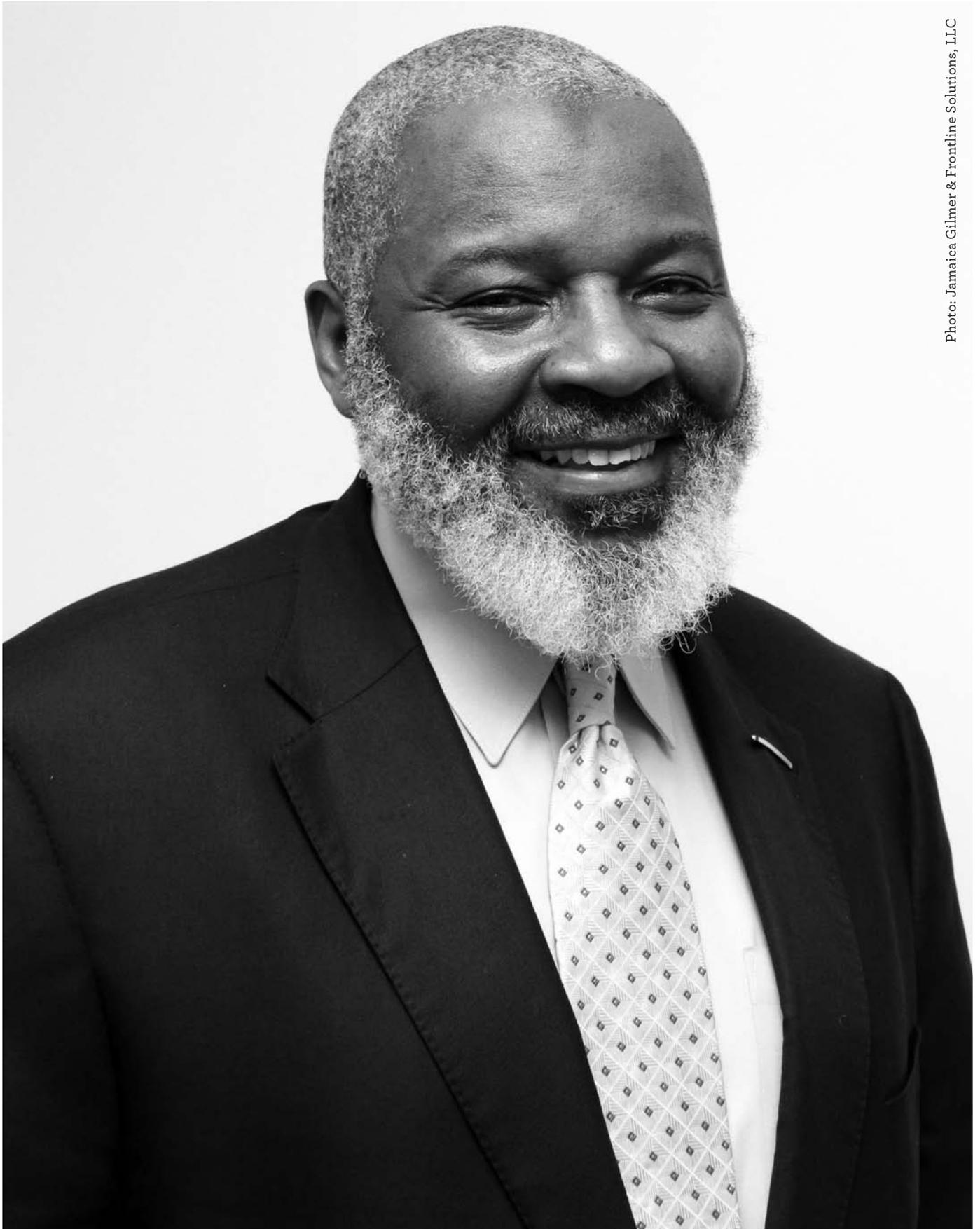


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