Baltimore

The Greatest City in America
UMB Post-Freddie Gray: Our Role in Restoring a City

It’s been several months since Baltimore was rocked by violence following the death of Freddie Gray. The cameras that descended on the city during April’s riots are gone now; the spotlight has shifted elsewhere.

But here in Baltimore, the struggle to rebuild remains. And so does the suffering of our West Baltimore neighbors. Many of us who live, work, and study in the city are focusing our attention on the poverty and injustice endemic in the communities beset by violence—conditions that have held generations of Baltimoreans hostage to crumbling neighborhoods, scarce services, poor health, high crime, and widespread incarceration.

Anchor institutions such as the University of Maryland, Baltimore (UMB) have a central role to play in lifting populations out of poverty. And I’m proud of the work that’s under way on campus to do exactly that.

The University is establishing a Community Engagement Center in West Baltimore, where we’ll provide direct services to our neighbors—tutoring for local students, health screenings and referrals, GED preparation, leadership training to spur community development. Our Human Resource Services department will have an outpost at the center to show residents the jobs available at UMB, to prepare them for the work, and to help them apply.

We’re studying our nascent programs to determine whether they merit scaling—a mentoring program that prepares students for high-paying jobs in the health sciences; a program that connects students’ parents to the job market; a training program that helps local businesses compete for millions of dollars in UMB spending. And we’re engaging our neighbors in shared problem-solving, exploring the complicated issues that underpin inequity and helping residents advocate for policies that will end it for good.

Maryland Carey Law has a long and strong history of community-engaged scholarship and service and has stepped up its leadership as the University mobilizes students, faculty, and staff to make a demonstrable difference in West Baltimore.

The law school’s engagement with the community—low-cost legal advice; expungement workshops; tax clinics for low-income earners—is essential to dismantling the systemic barriers to opportunity that our neighbors face every day. And the school’s new course, “Freddie Gray’s Baltimore: Past, Present and Moving Forward,” is a deeply thoughtful way of introducing students to those barriers, persuading them to action, and equipping them for it.

I thank all of our alumni and friends who’ve asked to join UMB and Maryland Carey Law in this work. Your partnership is critical, because I know that the problems of poverty and injustice—seemingly intractable given individual effort—can be turned around under our collective strength.