



B.R.E.A.D. Quarterly Newsletter

Building Responsibility, Equality, and Dignity

Columbus, Ohio Affiliate of the DART Center

A National Network of Congregation-based Justice Organizations

SPRING ISSUE

MARCH 25, 2026

RALLY FOR JUSTICE: A BATTLE CRY

Showing up for the Rally and the Nehemiah Action isn't just symbolic—it is the engine that drives real change in our community. If we want to see action on the issues that affect our families and neighbors, then we must stand together in unity. Our collective presence is what creates the people power and energy that decision-makers cannot ignore.

This is our battle cry: **your voice and your presence are needed.** When you, your family, your friends, and your congregation show up, you help demonstrate that we believe in justice and that we are serious about securing solutions. Together, we send a clear message to our community leaders that we will continue to research, organize, and push until these issues are addressed.

This year, we are fighting for progress on three urgent campaigns:

- **Rental Registry** – ensuring safe, accountable, and dignified rental housing
- **Environmental Justice** – protecting our health of our neighborhoods and our tree canopy
- **Livable Wage** – making sure pathways are provided to livable wage careers.

Your participation at the Tuesday April 14 Rally and bringing 3 others with you to the Tuesday May 12 Nehemiah Action fuels this work. When we show up in large numbers, we make it unmistakably clear that justice is not optional—it is expected.



This is our battle cry: your voice and your presence are needed!

MARK YOUR CALENDARS!

RALLY:

TUESDAY APRIL 14, 2026

Corinthian Missionary Baptist
(3161 E. 5th Ave)

Ask your team about your caucus time

NEHEMIAH ACTION:

TUESDAY MAY 12, 2026

Celeste Center (Ohio State Fairgrounds)

Doors open at 6:00 PM

CELEBRATION:

MONDAY JUNE 22, 2026

Noor Islamic Cultural Center (5550 Britton Parkway, Hilliard, Ohio 43026)

MLK RETREAT: THE POWER OF AN INTERFAITH COMMUNITY FOR JUSTICE



Reverend Raymond Austin:
“Justice is not optional.”

On January 19th, B.R.E.A.D. held a half-day retreat to commemorate Martin Luther King Day and draw inspiration from his legacy. Team leaders, clergy, and B.R.E.A.D. staff got to know one another in small group discussions as we raised up ideas, resources, best practices, and personal motivators for the work of justice.

A retreat highlight was the testimony of four congregational representatives who powerfully voiced why they do justice and shared how their faith traditions guide their actions. Speakers included Reverend Raymond Austin from New Faith Baptist Church (pictured left), Rabbi Karen Martin from Congregation Beth Tikvah, Fadi Suleiman from Noor Islamic Cultural Center, and Paisha Thomas from First Unitarian Universalist Church. Their words reminded us that “justice is not just taught, but practiced,” leaving us reinvigorated to harness our people power for the benefit of Columbus residents.

**“TREES PROTECT US!
WE PROTECT TREES!”**

ISSUE UPDATES

**“STOP PREDATORY LANDLORDS!
PROTECT RENTERS NOW!”**

B.R.E.A.D.’s environmental justice committee has talked to many health systems and organizations these past few months concerning the tree canopy: Nationwide Children’s Hospital, Ohio Health, the Franklin County Public Health Commission, the Columbus Health Department, the Columbus Tree Coalition, the American Lung Association, and the Columbus Dispatch Editorial Board, to name a few.

The consensus from experts is clear: **residents living in Columbus neighborhoods with low tree canopy suffer direct negative health impacts.** Many health leaders had not considered the impact of low tree canopy on public health – neither has the public.

Why Private Property Matters

Although a public tree ordinance was passed in 2024, **70% of Columbus’ trees are on private property.** Per the city’s consultant’s recommendations, the focus of our campaign is on **private property being developed for new construction where trees are being cut down, NOT** on homeowners of single-family residences.

Earth Day Public Forum

To raise public awareness, the B.R.E.A.D. environmental justice committee is planning a forum to educate residents on the negative health impacts caused by low tree canopy, including:

- increased rates of asthma
- COPD
- other breathing issues

Trees filter out the air pollution before it gets into our lungs and reduce flooding which causes mold in our homes that can exacerbate health conditions.

Event Details

Date: Wednesday, April 22nd

Time: 10:00 am to 12:00 pm

Location: Congregation Tifereth Israel, 1354 E. Broad St., Columbus, OH 43205

Speakers from hospitals, public health, disease organizations, green organizations, and a forester will be featured. **B.R.E.A.D. members, city officials, and the public are invited to attend this educational forum.**

Nehemiah Action Invitation

City officials are also invited to the **Nehemiah Action on May 12, 2026, at the Celeste Center at 6:40 pm** to report progress and commitments on a private tree ordinance.

At our May 13, 2025 Nehemiah Action, Council Member Nick Bankston promised more than 1300 justice seekers to introduce legislation by the end of the year for a city-wide rental registry that would provide regular proactive rental inspections.

B.R.E.A.D. pushed for proactive inspections to remove the burden on renters for reporting a code violation to the City to get action from landlords who refused to repair serious problems like non-functioning heat in the winter and lack of cooling in the summer.

Following the Nehemiah Action, **we met monthly** with Council Member Bankston and his staff as well as with the key members of Code Enforcement to discuss details of the rental registry. There have been **3 public hearings** outlining various versions of a proposal for a new Rental Registry.

Key Features in the Current Proposal

The current proposal includes many features we pushed for to take the burden off renters for reporting unsafe conditions. It could be stronger but we believe it is a major step forward:

Opposition & Urgency

Meanwhile, at the last hearing, the biggest landlord attorney promised to challenge the rental registry in court when the rental registry legislation is introduced. **They are not letting up the pressure – neither can we.**

We expect the legislation to be introduced in late March and passed by the end of April. **To keep the pressure on until the Rental Registry is passed, we need B.R.E.A.D. members to show up at hearings and to contact every City Council member asking them to support the Rental Registry and protect renters now!**

Looking Ahead

We also hope to celebrate the successful passage of the Rental Registry and the leadership of Council Member Bankston at the **May 12th Nehemiah Action.**

B.R.E.A.D....Rises!

VOLUNTEERS ARE NEEDED FOR THE NEHEMIAH ACTION. CAN YOU HELP? PLEASE CONTACT THE B.R.E.A.D. OFFICE AT 614-220-9363.

LIVABLE WAGE

At the campaign's research kickoff, three groups most affected by the livable wage gap were identified: **returning citizens** (individuals reintegrating into society after incarceration), **senior citizens**, and **adult children**.

A key early step was **defining a livable wage**—the hourly income required to cover basic needs such as housing, food, transportation, childcare, healthcare, and taxes **without public assistance**. Unlike the state minimum wage (\$11.00/hour for non-tipped workers in Ohio), a livable wage reflects the true cost of living in a specific community.

What the Data Shows

Data from the **Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) livable wage model** for Columbus illustrates the gap:

- A single adult needs approximately \$18–\$20/hr
- A single parent with one child needs \$33–\$36/hr
- A household with two children requires \$41–\$45/hr

What We've Learned Through Research

Through **nine meetings with community organizations**, research has continued to narrow toward a focused and actionable solution.

Recent findings highlight the urgency:

- Columbus ranks **near the bottom** among major U.S. metro areas for inclusive economic growth
- In Franklin County, **1 in 7 residents** live in poverty
- Nearly **1 in 5 children** grows up below the federal poverty line
- Many young people lack clear pathways from high school to stable, livable-wage careers
- Children born into low-income families in low-mobility metro areas like Columbus are likely to remain low-income as adults compared to those in higher-mobility regions.

A Promising Direction

One possible solution has emerged through Columbus City Schools' vision to expand Career and Technical Education (CTE) via Career Pathways—programs designed to lead to livable-wage jobs.

While still under consideration and not yet finalized, this approach shows promise. The proposed expansion from **three to ten academies by 2029** could create new opportunities for students to access career training.

What's Next

Research is ongoing, and additional solutions are still being explored. This potential pathway offers hope as efforts continue toward identifying a meaningful and achievable local impact.

COLUMBUS SAFETY COALITION:

The **Columbus Safety Coalition** is leading a citywide effort to create a **non-police crisis response system**—a compassionate, public-health-centered alternative for residents experiencing mental health or behavioral health emergencies.

This work is rooted in community stories, including the tragic death of **Jaron Thomas**, whose 911 call for help turned fatal. His story continues to fuel a movement for responses that de-escalate, support, and save lives.

What the Ballot Amendment Does

The Community Crisis Response Amendment—headed to the **May 2026 ballot**—would:

- Integrate crisis response into 911
- Deploy trained non-police professionals
- Guarantee 24/7 coverage by 2030
- Establish independent oversight

Why It Matters

Non-police crisis teams reduce harm, connect people to care, and free police to focus on situations that truly require law enforcement. The amendment ensures these services become a permanent, accountable part of Columbus's safety system.

What's Next

With strong early public support and nearly **30,000 signatures collected**, the campaign is now focused on voter education and turnout. Community partners, congregations, and neighbors are joining together to make this historic change a reality.

INVEST IN B.R.E.A.D.!

When you choose to invest in B.R.E.A.D. you help to ensure we continue to win more justice in the future! Please consider making an investment in B.R.E.A.D..

You can choose your preferred payment method on the B.R.E.A.D. website:

<https://www.BREADcolumbus.com/invest>

If you have any questions about investing, please contact the B.R.E.A.D. office at 614-220-9363 or via email to: breadcolumbus@gmail.com

B.R.E.A.D. AND DART: A PARTNERSHIP THAT BUILDS POWER

B.R.E.A.D. is part of the **Direct Action and Research Training (DART) Center**, a national network of congregation-based justice organizations working to hold public officials accountable and win real change. While B.R.E.A.D. brings together Columbus congregations to choose and address local issues, DART provides the **training, structure, and support** that help our leaders organize effectively.

Through this partnership, B.R.E.A.D. gains access to:

- **Leadership development** that strengthens justice ministries
- **Research training** to investigate problems and craft solutions
- **Direct action strategy** for large, disciplined actions like the Nehemiah Action
- **A national learning community** where cities share successful models



Support from DART enables B.R.E.A.D. to learn from similar organizations and benefit from decades of organizing experience. This partnership has helped us win on issues like payday lending reform, restorative practices in schools, environmental justice, and affordable housing. **Together, B.R.E.A.D. and DART build the long-term people power needed to advance positive change in Columbus.**

B.R.E.A.D. Co-President, Melonie Buller, says: “DART offers the *most effective training programs for building community action skills*. You’ll meet fellow advocates, hear from other DART affiliates about how they organize to increase attendance and investment, and be totally inspired to deepen your commitment to the active pursuit of justice!”

NETWORK MEMBER SPOTLIGHT: WELCOMING SHIRLEY CARTER, B.R.E.A.D.’S NEW OFFICE ADMINISTRATOR

B.R.E.A.D. is pleased to introduce **Shirley Carter**, our new **Office Administrator**—a familiar face to many across the Network. Shirley first connected with B.R.E.A.D. years ago through **Genessee Avenue Church of Christ**, where she was drawn to the justice issues B.R.E.A.D. lifts up. “Each year, it seems the issues become more and more relevant to the underserved community,” she shared.

Her most meaningful B.R.E.A.D. experience has always been the **Nehemiah Action**. Shirley values hearing directly from City Council and watching how public officials respond to the concerns raised by the community.

Among all the issues B.R.E.A.D. works on, **affordable housing** is the one closest to her heart. “It is discouraging to see people work many jobs just to afford a decent place to live,” she said—a reality that fuels her passion for systemic change.

Shirley encourages anyone considering involvement with B.R.E.A.D. to take the step. “*You don’t know you should join until you do,*” she said. “*When you join, you learn how many needs exist in the community that you may not be aware of.*”

Please join us in welcoming Shirley to the B.R.E.A.D. staff team.



Shirley Carter working at the
B.R.E.A.D. office

OUR MISSION

“He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.” – Micah 6:8 (NIV)



CONTACT US

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