



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

SUMMER ISSUE

JULY 9, 2026

THE NEHEMIAH ACTION 2026: TWO WINS, ONE PLAN IN PROCESS, AND ONE CALL TO ACTION

The 30th annual Nehemiah Action on May 12th demonstrated the strength of B.R.E.A.D.'s people power. With nearly 1,500 attendees at the Celeste Center, we saw how the work of our network, members, congregations, and action committees are bending the arc toward justice in our region.

The evening kicked off with exciting news about two recent B.R.E.A.D. victories. First, this May's election saw the passage of the **Columbus Community Crisis Response Amendment**, creating a non-police crisis response team integrated into the city's 911 system dedicated to mental health and behavioral emergencies. The second win came with Columbus City Council's approval of legislation for a **city-wide Rental Registry** to protect renters from predatory landlords and unsafe conditions. The registry program includes proactive property inspections to ensure that building-wide systems (water, heat, AC) and structures are consistently maintained and up to code. These are tremendous wins for our community!



COUNCILMAN NICK BANKSTON, LEADER OF THE CITY'S EFFORTS TO ESTABLISH THE RENTAL REGISTRY, SPEAKS AT THE NEHEMIAH ACTION

We then moved to the business of ongoing B.R.E.A.D. initiatives. Over the past year, our Livable Wage committee has worked to identify solutions to **better pay for residents who experience unsustainable wage gaps**.



W.D. SMITH AND DR. ANGELA CHAPMAN, CCS SUPERINTENDENT, CELEBRATE HER COMMITMENT AT THE NEHEMIAH ACTION

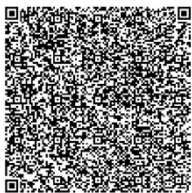
They decided to focus on students, one of the most affected groups. Columbus City Schools has established three high school "Career Academies," which enable students to access career training combined with an academic curriculum in high school. Dr. Angela Chapman, CCS superintendent plans to expand the Career Academy program to ten high schools by the 2028-2029 school year.

At Nehemiah, Dr. Chapman committed to share annual plans, meet quarterly with B.R.E.A.D., and include us on the planning committee, so that B.R.E.A.D. can hold the Superintendent accountable to ensure that the Career Academy model leads more students to careers paying a livable wage.

Columbus's **deficient tree canopy and its negative health impacts** have been the focus of the Environmental Justice committee. The city's own research showed that tree canopy protection would mitigate problems like asthma, COPD, and other breathing issues. What's more, the city consultant recommended in March 2025 that Columbus enact a code protecting trees on private land under development (not on residential property). To date, the city has taken no action.

THE NEHEMIAH ACTION 2026, CONT.

Tom Tichenor, steering committee member, urged all in the audience to send a prepared message to Mayor Ginther, asking him to draft an ordinance to preserve trees on private land under development and protect the health of our residents (You can still send that message to the Mayor and City Council by scanning the QR code here.)



Attendance at the Nehemiah Action exceeded last year’s by 168 people, but we did not meet our goal of 2,250. While our people power yielded much to celebrate, every network member must recommit to bringing at least 3 other people to Nehemiah next year and grow our turnout to achieve even greater wins toward a more just community.

VICTORIES!

PROTECT RENTERS NOW

With a burst of long-awaited momentum, City Council passed the Rental Registry on April 20 — a major, hard-won victory that will bring new transparency and protection for renters across Columbus.



RIGHT AFTER THE VOTE: B.R.E.A.D. STANDING STRONG AT CITY HALL, CELEBRATING A VICTORY FOR RENTERS ACROSS COLUMBUS.

COLUMBUS SAFETY COALITION:

With a surge of community energy, Columbus voters passed Issue 5 on May 5, securing a major step toward a more compassionate, accountable crisis-response system!!



B.R.E.A.D. MEMBER HELEN ANNE SWEENEY AND COUNCIL PRESIDENT SHANNON HARDIN CELEBRATE THE PASSAGE OF ISSUE 5, CELEBRATING COLUMBUS’S MOVE TOWARD A NON-POLICE CRISIS-RESPONSE SYSTEM.

KEEPING THE MOMENTUM GOING

As we close out another powerful B.R.E.A.D. year, we celebrate the stories, relationships, and victories that came from listening deeply to our community. This fall, we’ll begin again with our house meetings—the heart of B.R.E.A.D.’s organizing. These small gatherings are where we hear what families are facing, build new connections, and shape the issues we will take on together. **Enjoy the summer and get ready:** our next season of listening starts soon, and your voice will help set the direction for the year ahead.

ISSUE UPDATES

“TREES PROTECT US! WE PROTECT TREES!”

This spring, B.R.E.A.D.’s environmental justice committee increased pressure on the Mayor’s office and City Council to legislate private property tree protection. Columbus’s low tree canopy, 22% versus 40% for comparable cities, significantly impacts health including higher levels of lung diseases such as asthma, heat stress and mental illness. The community’s disinvested neighborhoods have the lowest tree canopy and highest negative impacts.

A public tree ordinance was passed in 2024, but 70% of Columbus’s trees are on private property. The committee is focused on passing an ordinance to protect trees on property being developed. (No impact to established property of any type, particularly residential.) The Mayor’s administration has the next steps, but they are delaying and won’t say why.

The committee met with:

- The Mayor’s Chief of Staff, Deputy Chief of Staff and Director of Recreation and Parks
- Councilmembers Wyche, Dorans, Green, and the staffs of Day-Achauer and Hardin

They also:

- Gave testimony at two Columbus Recreation and Parks Commission meetings
- Issued a call to action at the Nehemiah Action, resulting in over 400 emails sent to the Mayor and copied all City Councilmembers
- Held a public forum on Earth Day with experts from MORPC, Franklin County Health, Charlotte N.C. forestry, and others

They will continue to aggressively pressure the Mayor’s administration and others.

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

Are you excited about all these wins? 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>

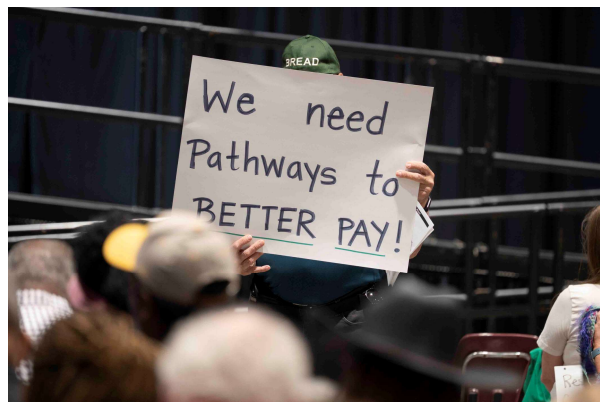
If you have any questions about investing, please contact the B.R.E.A.D. office at 614-220-9363 or via email to: breadcolumbus@gmail.com

“A BRIGHTER FUTURE STARTS TODAY! WE NEED PATHWAYS TO BETTER PAY!”

After extensively researching the lack of livable wages in Columbus, the committee decided to focus on **creating pathways from high school to livable wage jobs**.

We had learned that Columbus City Schools Superintendent Angela Chapman had a goal of expanding “Career Academies” to 10 high schools. The Career Academy combines both academic and career technical education, so that all students graduate from high school prepared for higher education, trade school, or jobs. We want to make sure that students are prepared to pursue jobs that pay a livable wage, instead of those paying poverty wages. To achieve our goal, we need to hold the Superintendent accountable to follow national best practices and to track students’ progress after they graduate.

At the Nehemiah Action, with 1472 people present, Superintendent Chapman agreed to provide us with detailed annual implementation plans, including specific plans to secure partnership with business and industry; to include us on the Career Academies Design Team; and to meet with B.R.E.A.D. quarterly. We will also meet with the district’s consultant from the National Career Academies Coalition.



**DO YOU KNOW OF ANYONE WHO MIGHT
BE INTERESTED IN JOINING B.R.E.A.D.?
LET YOUR ORGANIZER KNOW!**

THIRTY YEARS OF DOING JUSTICE: B.R.E.A.D.'S LEGACY OF IMPACT IN CENTRAL OHIO

For thirty years, B.R.E.A.D. has organized people across Central Ohio to confront injustice with persistence, faith, and collective power. As we celebrate this milestone, it's worth remembering that today's momentum was built on decades of earlier victories — wins that shaped the city, protected families, and proved that ordinary people can change systems once thought immovable.

This anniversary is not only about what B.R.E.A.D. is doing now. It is about the foundation laid long before 2026 — the early campaigns that taught our community how to rise together.

Laying the Cornerstone: Housing Justice in the Early 2000s

One of B.R.E.A.D.'s earliest and most transformative victories came in 2001 with the creation of the **Affordable Housing Trust Fund**. At a time when affordable housing was barely on the city's radar, B.R.E.A.D. pushed Columbus leaders to invest in families who were being priced out of safe, stable homes. The Trust Fund went on to produce more than **500 units** of affordable housing — a legacy that still shapes the city's housing landscape today.

B.R.E.A.D. also championed the expansion of the **Franklin County Land Bank**, securing **\$11 million** to address vacant and abandoned properties. This early work helped stabilize neighborhoods long before housing justice became a headline issue.

These victories weren't just policy changes. They were proof that organized people could force the city to prioritize those most often ignored.

Transforming Schools and Protecting Youth

Throughout the 2000s and 2010s, B.R.E.A.D.'s education campaigns reshaped how schools treat students — especially those most vulnerable to punitive discipline.

- The **KEY Truancy Reduction Program** helped hundreds of students improve attendance through supportive, not punitive, interventions.
- B.R.E.A.D.'s advocacy led Columbus City Schools to **end suspension for truancy**, keeping thousands of students in classrooms instead of pushing them out.
- Out-of-school suspensions dropped by **3,000 students**, a shift that changed the trajectory of countless young lives.

These early wins established B.R.E.A.D. as a champion for youth, paving the way for later work on restorative practices and Career Academies.

Economic Justice: Taking on Predatory Lending

One of B.R.E.A.D.'s most celebrated statewide victories



came with **payday lending reform** — a fight that took years of organizing, testimony, and pressure on legislators. Before the reform, payday lenders charged **391% interest**, trapping families in cycles of debt.

B.R.E.A.D.'s persistence helped reduce those rates to **28%**, protecting thousands of Ohioans from financial exploitation. This victory remains one of the most significant economic justice reforms in Ohio's history — and it began with B.R.E.A.D.'s willingness to confront powerful industries.

Environmental and Community Inclusion Wins

Long before environmental justice became a national conversation, B.R.E.A.D. was pushing Columbus to protect vulnerable neighborhoods. Early campaigns strengthened the city's **tree code**, ensuring that environmental protections reached communities historically overlooked.

These victories demonstrated B.R.E.A.D.'s commitment to dignity — ensuring every resident could participate fully in community life.

A Legacy That Made Today Possible

The last few years have brought major wins — from violence reduction to crisis response to rental protections — but none of these victories happened in isolation. They stand on the shoulders of decades of earlier campaigns that taught B.R.E.A.D. how to build power, hold officials accountable, and stay committed for the long haul.

Celebrating 30 Years — and Rising Forward

As B.R.E.A.D. marks its 30th anniversary, we honor the leaders who stood up in church basements, community halls, and crowded assemblies long before today's headlines. Their courage built the foundation for everything B.R.E.A.D. is achieving now.

And as we look ahead to the next decade of justice work, we carry their legacy with us — a legacy that reminds us that organized people, grounded in faith and united across difference, can transform our city again and again.

B.R.E.A.D....rises. And because of those early victories, we rise stronger than ever.

B.R.E.A.D.'S SUPERPOWER: A FOUNDER'S REFLECTION

By REV. DR. TIM AHRENS

30 years!

B.R.E.A.D. has been doing justice in Columbus and beyond for more than 30 years. This is an amazing testament of interfaith justice. My roots with B.R.E.A.D. go back to the earliest hours and days. I remember my first one-on-one with a young rabbi who I barely knew – Rabbi Harold Berman. We were talking, getting to know each other and working through the questions at hand. When we came to the question of whether to begin such an effort, he responded, “What harm could it do? It could only be for the good because **we don’t have anything like this now.**” Beautifully said.

We have done no harm – only good. From research to action; holding ourselves and public officials accountable, we have moved through more than three decades guided by the mandate of Micah 6:8 – “Do Justice, Love with tender love and walk humbly with God.” That is hard to do as an individual. It is even harder with thousands of individuals from a multitude of backgrounds and beliefs working across the ever-changing landscape of economic, cultural and political changes through the past thirty years.

Years ago, in a clergy caucus I shared with my friends and colleagues this thought: “**Columbus without B.R.E.A.D. is like Gotham City without Batman.**” I still believe this is true! We are the conscience of this city. We are the moral compass of justice in this region.

Some people don’t like seeing us coming. But, those folks need to take a look at themselves and ask why we are coming. We are coming to redistribute resources to the poor and vulnerable. We are coming to put into action better, more fruitful uses of city and county resources to assist people in greatest need. Rabbi Berman was right. We have shown up and done good and done it well.

Congratulations B.R.E.A.D. and stay in the fight for justice for the next 30 years and beyond. May our merciful, loving and just God guide us ever forward.

“We have shown up and done good and done it well.”

THE B.R.E.A.D. 30-YEAR CELEBRATION

At the B.R.E.A.D. Celebration on June 22, we honored 30 years of justice work, celebrated major wins like the Rental Registry and non-police crisis response, recognized congregations and network members who met their people-power goals, thanked photographer Jon Groner for his years of generous service, saw the brief return of the notorious payday-lending “Loan Shark” only to emphasize his long-ago defeat and unwelcome status, heard from the Columbus Violence Reduction team, and closed the night with a joyful sparkling-grape-juice toast.



NETWORK MEMBER SPOTLIGHT: SISTER GEMMA DOLL

Sister Gemma Doll has been part of B.R.E.A.D. since moving to Columbus in 2009. What began as simply attending the Nehemiah Action soon grew into deeper involvement. Over the past five years, she has served on committees, led house meetings, and helped strengthen the network's commitment to justice. "My belief in the teachings of Jesus Christ drives me to work for justice within the community where I live," she shares.

As a nurse practitioner, Sister Gemma became increasingly aware of the social determinants of health—and the painful reality that something as simple as **the presence or absence of trees can shape a person's lifespan**. "I was pained to know that lack of trees was causing illness, suffering, and shortened life spans in my neighbors," she says. While natural beauty is a gift in itself, she emphasizes that trees also purify the air, absorb floodwaters, and cool dangerous heat zones. "Planting and protecting trees are win/wins for residents and developers."

She hopes more people will understand the **full health benefits of trees**. Many already know that trees can lower electric bills and increase property values, but far fewer realize how deeply they impact respiratory health, heat-related illness, and overall well-being.

"...trees can shape a person's lifespan"

Her three years on B.R.E.A.D.'s Environmental Justice Committee have brought both frustration and hope. She has seen moments when City Council and the Mayor's Office appeared more attentive to developers than to residents. Yet she is energized by the growing number of professionals, faith-filled leaders, and young people who are passionately committed to planting trees and protecting mature ones.

The passage of the Public Tree Code in 2024 was a major victory—but with 70% of mature trees located on private property, Sister Gemma stresses that **the work is far from finished**. "We need everyone's voice and influence to convince the City to enact a Private Tree Code. This can be done while still pushing for needed housing."

Her call to the network is simple and powerful: **show up**. Attend fall budget hearings when you can. Participate in Zone-In meetings as they are scheduled. "**Just your presence is powerful**," she reminds us.



SISTER GEMMA DOLL
SPEAKING AT THE 2026
NEHEMIAH ACTION

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

B.R.E.A.D. Office
404 S. 3rd St.
Columbus, OH 43215
(614) 220-9363
<https://BREADcolumbus.com>
breadcolumbus@gmail.com