

Nonprofit Announces Baltimore Youth Programs

By Shernay Williams
AFRO Staff Writer



Members of the Argus Project stand with U.S. Rep. Elijah Cummings, D-Md., during a Valentine's Day press conference announcing funding for youth programs in Baltimore City.
(Photo by Webster Phillips III)

At a media conference Feb. 14, city leaders announced the Milton S. Eisenhower Foundation will sponsor programs for teenage dropouts and ex-offenders seeking employment, current high school students desiring college preparatory training and school-age children looking for an after school safe haven.

Lauding the program as a "faith event," U.S. Rep. Elijah Cummings, D-Md., said the foundation's tri-fold efforts will fortify youth through holistic services. "We have to take these programs and make them a model for the nation," he told reporters at the media event.

Mayor Stephanie Rawlings-Blake said the initiatives will ensure "we have fewer people falling through the cracks," adding that the city must do a better job to promote such forward thinking programs throughout the city.

The foundation's Argus program encourages 20 young ex-offenders between the ages of 14 and 18 to prepare for the GED and develop job training skills five days a week at the Druid Hill Community Development Corp.

Some 30 students at Augusta Falls High School in West Baltimore will take advantage of the Quantam program, receiving opportunities – for individualized tutoring, career planning and job shadowing – designed to boost graduation rates.

The Greater Homewood Community Corporation will oversee the final effort, the Barclay Youth Safe Haven, in partnership with Baltimore City Schools and the police department.

The program will offer afterschool services to 50 elementary students from the Barclay community. Officials say the program will incorporate mentorship, academic enrichment and social support services.

The Eisenhower Foundation will spearhead similar endeavors in 14 other cities including Albuquerque, N.M., Boston, Mass., Jackson, Miss. and Oakland, Calif., via \$9.1 million in grant awards from the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention of the U.S. Department of Justice.

Alan Curtis, president and CEO of the foundation, said the initiatives will help mitigate problems that lead to teenage pregnancy, crime and poverty. "This is the kind of investment that yields an important return to our communities and our nation in the growth of our economy and human potential," he said in a written statement.

"We have scientifically evaluated what will bring communities out of poverty and ensure that all Americans have the opportunity to realize America's promise."

For decades, the organization has led programs targeting "at-risk" youth from troubled neighborhoods throughout the country. An estimated 55 percent of their program participants improve their grades and 24 percent are less likely to become teenage parents, according to foundation documents.

"We trust Baltimore will have the same outcomes," said Omalora Fafore, the foundation's vice president of Program Management and Capacity Building. She said the organization has commenced three programs in Baltimore in the past, citing partnerships with housing, parks and recreation and police in South Baltimore.

"Our mission is to replicate what works," she added, calling the Eisenhower programs distinctive for "targeting extremely low income communities no one else wants to." Travian Taylor, a 19-year-old Baltimorean, who was accepted into the Argus program, said the tutors "take the extra step for you."