



*Faithfully Bringing
Forth Justice*

Isaiah 42:3

VOICE-Buffalo Newsletter | July 2019



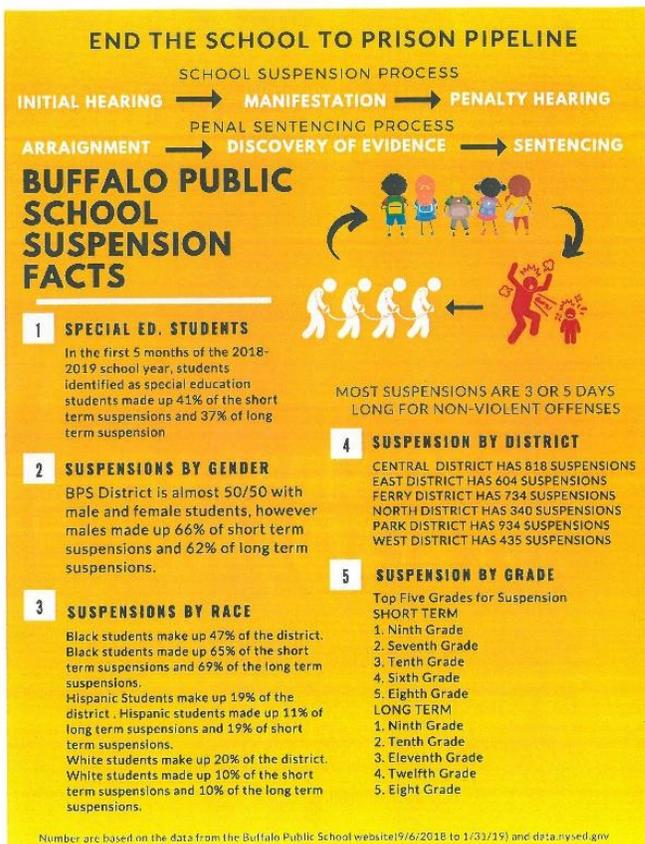
WE WANT YOU TO COME TO REGIONAL LEADERSHIP TRAINING!

At VOICE-Buffalo, we believe that every member of our community and various neighborhoods has a right to feel safe and powerful, living a quality of life that allows them and their families to thrive in the Beloved Community. However, people often feel alone in the struggle in our communities. This could be because of the impact of poverty, feeling targeted by police, an issue unfolding at their child's school, or some other injustice they are witnessing in their neighborhoods.

We believe that each individual has a unique set of skills that makes them a powerful member of the community and an impactful leader in the movement for social justice. When these leaders attend a leadership training, they experience an encounter that welcomes them into a brotherhood and sisterhood of neighbors, leaders, allies and advocates that will enhance and expound these skills, and help us to build a more powerful base to create effective change in our community.

In the words of one of our leaders, who attended Faith in Action National Leadership Training in Nashville earlier this year and came back ON FIYAAAAA: our trainer "reminded me that I do have a purpose. He reminded me it is OK to make waves. After all, it takes waves to move an ocean. So get ready for a ride." We want ALL of our leaders to have this kind of transformative experience and come back fired up to make waves.

We are calling everyone interested in this type of encounter to attend Faith in Action Northeast Regional Leadership Training - scheduled for July 31-Aug 3 in Wallingford, PA! Please RSVP by contacting your organizer as soon as possible so that we can get you registered. For more information, see our website for details on this training and [7 Reasons You Should Attend RLT.](#)



CRIMINAL JUSTICE TASK FORCE

We believe that every child should have the opportunity to learn and flourish in high quality schools that help to discover and nurture their potential.

Despite this standard belief, in Buffalo Public Schools, special education students, students of color, and specifically black male students, make up a disproportionate percentage of both short and long term suspensions, beginning as early as kindergarten. At our recent Truth Commission on May 2nd, we heard several students and parents tell their own stories of injustice at the hands of this system. A black teenage boy spoke about suspended for 45 days after being

accused by McKinley High School Principal of stealing \$40 on camera. The Principal refused to show him or his parents the alleged footage. As a result of his suspension, this high school freshman described being cut off from instruction for a month and a half. He was given only 6 days of alternative instruction, which was not enough to complete his work and stay caught up in order to pass his exams. In other words, he was denied his Constitutional right to a free, comprehensive education without due process or even a chance to see the “evidence” against him. And he is not alone. Nearly 14% of all BPS students have been suspended at least once. For black students, the rate is 19%. By comparison, the statewide suspension rate is 2.7%.

The VOICE Buffalo Criminal Justice Task Force believes that each child is more than the mistakes they allegedly make while in school. To uncover each individual’s needs and greatest potential, we believe in investing in children, teachers, and families using the foundation of restorative practices to create relationship and understanding where there has been miscommunication and harm done. We believe that this investment should be used to replace short term and long term suspensions that would typically happen for nonviolent offenses.

We are asking every parent, every ally, every faith leader, and ever advocate that shares these beliefs to join us in research action meetings with decision makers so that we can create restorative policies around school suspensions. If you stand with our beliefs, stand with us at the table. Reach out to whitney@voicebuffalo.org for more information.

If you are interested in learning Restorative Justice Practices, [CLICK HERE](#) for information about our Peace Hubs movement, and our monthly training sessions on Peace Circles and Peace Conferences.

CLERGY CAUCUS



As an interfaith organization, we believe that the Power of Faith unites rather than divides us and that our diverse faith traditions call us to act together to improve our communities.

Many Faith Leaders are wary of participating in social justice because of a deep-rooted fear of being labeled “liberal,” “progressive,” or “secular.” They don’t want to be associated with “secular” movements, and are

uncomfortable delving into issues that go beyond their cultural comfort zones.

For those in the Christian Faith Tradition, the Bible tells us that Jesus cared deeply about the social causes around him. Even though Jesus loves everyone, even to the point of dying for their sins, He went out of His way to intentionally help specific groups of people — the alienated, mistreated, and those facing injustice.

Yet despite this, Faith Leaders and Clergy often feel alone when facing injustices of their community or cut off from the larger social impact their presence can have.

Don't let this be you! Prioritize attending the Clergy and Faith Leader Training with Faith in Action, September 16th-18th in St. Louis, MO. VOICE Buffalo believes so much in this training and investing in you, our Clergy members, that we are willing to cover HALF the total cost.

If you are interested in going to this training, please reach out to whitney@voicebuffalo.org by July 30.



ACCESSIBILITY TASK FORCE

The VOICE Accessibility-Disability Task Force (ADTF) is pushing for accessible and equitable opportunities. We believe we have the right to the same opportunities as people that do not have disabilities.

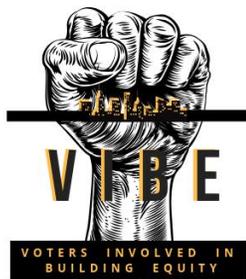
Despite a commitment from a local OPWDD representative at the 2018 Public Meeting to move OPWDD services to an accessible location in Buffalo, The Developmental Disabilities Services Office for the Western Region (also called OPWDD, Region 1) remains in West Seneca - out of reach for people with disabilities and unsafe for the people who work there. People with disabilities who wish to access the current site must take two buses and wait for a shuttle. The buildings, a former institution, is reminiscent of trauma for many people. Employees must contend with facilities that are in severe disrepair.

With this in mind, the ADTF setting a new path, identifying power players who are in direct relationship with Governor Cuomo and the Commissioner of OPWDD, as well as reaching out to union members that work at the DDSO. We will be contacting these individuals for “Research Actions”, to learn their position on our concerns, to develop powerful relationships, and to move our agenda forward. Members of the ADTF also see economic development opportunities with a move to the East Side of Buffalo and potential new allies who would benefit. Once we have made these powerful new connections, the ADTF will plan an action to

demonstrate the injustice with the current DDSO location and to highlight new solutions.

Through our work, we are engaging new people in leadership, encouraging all to find the power in their stories and to build relationships within and outside of our membership. We are hoping to send several people to the July/August Regional Training with Faith in Action, to grow our members into stronger leaders. If you are interested in the training or in joining the ADTF, please contact Lead Organizer, Brian Zralek at brian@voicebuffalo.org.

VIBE: VOTERS INVOLVED IN BUILDING EQUITY



VIBE (Voters Involved In Building Equity) is working to fight for systemic change and radically impact the voting system by shifting the way we engage eligible voters. We have to bring justice for the Black boys who make up 47% of the Buffalo Public School District but make up 65% of short term suspensions and 69% of long term suspensions. For the Boys who are labeled as a problem because they are expressive or need more mentorship paired with restorative practices. We vote because election results impact our children, our mothers, our fathers, our community.

**Organized People + Organized Money + An Organized Narrative + Organized VOTES =
POWER**

The equation is simple but requires us to activate our communities, our neighbors and loved ones. We must be serious about shifting monolithic power to collective power. The structure of oppression works because we believe in the notion that voting doesn't work and that our votes don't count. Well, guess what? Those who oppress us are winning because we have not made the conscious decision to turn out and then turn up. Here's our call to action to our community, IT'S US OR ELSE. IT'S OUR COMMUNITY, OUR TAXES, OUR CHOICE, OUR VOICE! We got next.

What can you do to get involved with our voter engagement team? Like us on Facebook @vibebuffalo, Follow us on @vibebuffalo, sign up to receive text messages by texting JOIN to 716-204-7910 or call your organizer at 716- 842-6571. Come catch the VIBE at VOICE. **#issavibe #vibewithvoice #letnyvote**

“Just listening to Pac ain't gone make it stop

A rebel in your thoughts, ain't gon' make it halt

If you don't become an actor, you'll never be a factor”

- Lupe Fiasco

Suggested Music: "The Joke" by Brandi Carlile
Suggested Read: *The New Jim Crow* by Michelle Alexander

Suggested Watch: *When They See Us* (Netflix)

BLACK ENTREPRENEURSHIP INITIATIVE



The Black Entrepreneurship Initiative (BEI) isn't some program to assist folks with their businesses. The BEI is modeled after collective collaboration, mentorship, ownership and the building of Black Economics. Modeled after "The Marathon Continues", it is grounded in the notion that this is a marathon not a sprint. Our work is based on the concept of shifting wealth and gaining ownership while supporting the community and building pathways to success is the base of the work of the BEI. It's a three-tier support system that provides connections through relationship building and think tank style strategic planning. Creative analyzing is going to be a way to grow economics in

disenfranchised communities. With either our Start Up, Boss Up or Winner Circle tiers, we offer the opportunity to be bold, think creatively and formulate a new way to develop a success story.

Suggested Read: *The Color of Money: Black Banks and the Racial Wealth Gap* by Mehrsa Baradaran

Suggested Watch: *Trigger Warning with Killer Mike* (Netflix)

A NOTE FROM OUR BILT PARTNERS



The Buffalo Immigrant Leadership Team (BILT) continues to pursue its work so all of Buffalo's residents can access the American Dream. Buffalo is a city of immigrants, including the waves of Italian, German, Polish and Irish communities that previously settled Western New York. The names of these families appear in places like schools, museums and on street signs.

Buffalo's new immigrants are mostly refugees from Burma, Bangladesh, Nepal, Congo, Rwanda, and Iraq - their children are English Language Learners in Buffalo Public Schools. When almost half of the ELL student population are dropping out of school and only a quarter graduate on time because our school district and others across New York state fail to hire the appropriate number of bilingual teachers, we are left with an unfair situation and an American Dream that is impossible to achieve.

BILT is working with statewide advocates, universities and colleges, refugee resettlement agencies and Buffalo Public Schools (pictured above: BILT leaders meeting with BPS Superintendent Kriner Cash earlier in June), to Raise the Rate! In particular, we want more funding for bilingual teacher training programs, and for the New York State Education Department to create alternative pathways for bilingual teachers to get their teaching certification.

BILT needs YOU to help us prepare for our October Public Meeting. And we need you to get trained! Please consider attending the Faith in Action Regional Training, from July 31 - August 3 in Walingford, PA. VOICE-Buffalo and BILT will arrange transportation. Contact Lead Organizer, Brian Zralek at 615-636-7197 or brian@voicebuffalo.org to learn more.

Finally, mark your calendars for the **2019 Community Celebration - Saturday, August 17 at First Presbyterian Church!** More information coming soon!

FUND DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE



Could YOU be our next Social Justice Fundraising Warrior?

Do you believe in VOICE's mission to faithfully bring forth justice? Do you believe in the power of community organizing to transform ordinary people into leaders and transform communities through civic engagement and collective action? Do you want to help us ensure that we can continue doing this work for years and decades to come?

Fundraising is changing as the economy and our culture change. The same old things we've always done aren't always going to work. And we literally can't afford to get complacent because, as you've read, we've got BIG work to do. VOICE's work is about people's lives, and our work in Fund Development is what sustains that mission.

Ensuring that our work is financially sustainable takes creativity, teamwork, strategy, persistence... and just like every other aspect of organizing, it takes a whole lot of relationship building: talking to people about why our mission matters, connecting over shared values, and inspiring them to take action. And, of course, all of that takes a dedicated team of leaders who are excited about VOICE's mission and willing to dive in and do what it takes to keep it going.

This is where YOU come in. The Fund Development Committee needs YOU! We need your ideas, your time, and your passion for social justice. Don't worry if you're not comfortable asking for money yet. We'll show you how to do it in a way that doesn't feel weird or icky. If you like talking to people, planning parties and other events (like our Awards Banquet: our 2019 Awardees pictured above), and especially if you like coming up with fun and creative ways to THANK people, you've got what it takes!

Contact our Internal Organizer, Leslie Nickerson, at leslie@voicebuffalo.org today to learn how you can be a part of our Fund Development Team!

For justice,

Whitney, Kartika, Brian, and Leslie

Your VOICE-Buffalo Organizing Team

VOICE-Buffalo
2495 Main St. #547
Buffalo, NY 14214
voicebuffalo.org
info@voicebuffalo.org

