

**Testimony of the Honorable Jamael Tito Brown
Mayor of Youngstown, Ohio
Senate Committee on Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs
Hearing entitled “The Coronavirus Crisis: Paving the Way to An Equitable Recovery”
February 18, 2021**

Thank you Chairman Brown and Ranking Member Toomey for inviting me to testify before the Senate Committee on Banking, Housing and Urban Affairs. I am Jamael Tito Brown the Mayor of the City of Youngstown, Ohio. We are a small city in the Midwest of a population of nearly 67,000.

This year marks 44 years since the closure of steel mills in the City of Youngstown. As a legacy city, we have faced a history of corporate corruption and political corruption causing governmental mistrust amongst our community. My administration has had to overcome many obstacles. Inadequate educational resources and a lack of livable wage jobs have always been historical problems for our community. A further hindrance in our efforts for recovery is the decline of our housing stock and transportation for those who need access to employment.

The current global pandemic has hit our community harder than most. Covid-19 has been a great revealer of the health, social, economic and racial disparities of our community. Small to medium sized businesses are also feeling the impact of the pandemic, especially minority-owned businesses, many of whom did not have an established relationship with a banking institution prior to the pandemic.

The needs of the City of Youngstown are no different from other communities across the nation. When a city is barely rebounding from 50 years of economic decline because of outside forces beyond our control, those rebounds have been further eviscerated by Covid-19. Whatever federal assistance is provided must be a long-term coordinated strategy to get the resources we need to address the public health impact of COVID-19 and assure that housing, transportation, and small business efforts are included in a federal rescue plan. If any component is ignored the entire community structure will likely fail.

Ohio cities in particular have been hard hit by the economic downturn brought on by the pandemic. This is because cities in Ohio rely on a municipal income tax as our primary source of revenue. This tax source is much more susceptible to economic conditions as opposed to more stable sales or property tax revenue

streams.

Youngstown has seen this impact first-hand. We are the county seat and our county, Mahoning County, has one the highest unemployment rates in the state – ranking 75th out of Ohio’s 88 counties. When unemployment is up, tax revenue is down and these economic challenges have ripple effects all across our regional economy - from housing, to public transit, and the economic activity that sustains our small businesses.

In order to truly recover from the pandemic, relief has to help our neighbors and our community to not only survive but also thrive so our city does not flounder for another 50 years.

A federal rescue plan must include assistance to help build back better legacy cities like Youngstown, Ohio. It should include, as outlined by President Biden: assistance for the production and distribution of COVID-19 vaccines; rental assistance for families; transit assistance to keep buses running so essential workers can continue to get to work; and small business support so hardworking business owners can keep their workforce.

The relief effort should be flexible and free of bureaucratic red tape so that the pace of recovery is not stymied by federal mandates. Transparency of local government spending should be a guiding mandate to reinforce accountability and build trust with our communities.

Small cities need assistance. Small cities need assistance quickly. Small cities need assistance desperately.

The impacts of COVID-19 are still affecting many of my citizens. Families are still hurting. We need immediate relief during these difficult times. I urge you to think of this as part of a long-term sustainable recovery plan to build back and create thriving communities.