



THE DOUGLASS PLAN: A Comprehensive Investment in the Empowerment of Black America

The decisions we make in the next four years will determine America's path for the next forty. And a great deal of the progress we make—on everything from increasing economic freedom to confronting climate disruption—will depend on whether we tackle racial inequality in our lifetime. For all our country's forward movement, Black people in America are still disproportionately excluded from systems of social protection, economic uplift, and representative democracy while facing shorter lifespans,¹ lower educational attainment,² and dramatic overcriminalization and incarceration compared to their white counterparts.³

This is why Mayor Pete Buttigieg is proposing **The Douglass Plan, a comprehensive and intentional dismantling of racist structures and systems combined with an equally intentional and affirmative investment of unprecedented scale in the freedom and self-determination of Black Americans.**

Inspired by American hero Frederick Douglass and comparable in scale to the Marshall Plan that rebuilt Europe after World War II, the Douglass Plan dismantles old systems and structures that inhibit prosperity and builds new ones that will unlock the collective potential of Black America. This includes reforming broken criminal justice and health systems, strengthening access to credit and injecting capital into the Black community, and taking bold steps toward fulfilling long-broken promises of true equity.

It remains morally and economically incumbent upon America to fix what our policies consciously and deliberately wrought over centuries. Additionally, in a democratic capitalist society, the direct investment in communities traditionally precluded from asset ownership and economic opportunity will broadly lift the economy, providing benefits to all Americans, regardless of race. Economic uplift and wealth creation must combine with legal and social change to create a more equitable America.

In committing to a comprehensive plan that focuses on Black Americans, the goal of the Douglass Plan is not to ignore the specific histories and experiences that have impacted other communities of color in the United States. Mayor Pete understands that racism is not a black and white issue, and that we also need to address the unique challenges facing other communities—from Native communities confronting poverty and dispossession to the Islamophobia impacting Middle Eastern, Arab, and South Asian communities, to

¹ Xu, Jiaquan, M.D., Sherry L. Murphy, B.S., Kenneth D. Kochanek, M.A., Brigham Bastian, B.S., and Elizabeth Arias, Ph. D. "Deaths: Final Data for 2016." *National Vital Statistics Reports* 67, no. 5. July 26, 2018.

² Hansen, Michael, Elizabeth Mann, Diana Quintero, and Jon Valant. "Have We Made Progress on Achievement Gaps? Looking at Evidence from the New NAEP Results." Brookings. April 17, 2018.

³Sawyer, Wendy, and Peter Wagner. "Mass Incarceration: The Whole Pie 2019." Prison Policy Initiative. March 19, 2019.

dehumanizing immigration policies that stereotype Latinos and overlook their vital contributions to our economy. America’s racist structures were built to justify and perpetuate slavery, and by achieving greater equity for Black Americans we lay the groundwork for achieving greater equity for other people of color as well.

The Douglass Plan reflects a fundamental belief about racial justice in America: not only that it is right to remedy centuries of dehumanization and discrimination in and of itself, but also that when Black Americans live in freedom and justice, *all* Americans have greater opportunities to live in freedom and justice. When Black America experiences economic justice and opportunity, we all benefit. When our democracy works for Black America, it is a better democracy for all of us. When we place Black women at the heart of the struggle for reproductive justice, the lives of *all* women are made healthier and freer. When young Black men have equal employment opportunities, *all* of America benefits from their economic contributions. The Douglass Plan is a specific plan for Black America—but it also establishes a deep and solid foundation for racial and economic justice for all communities of color and for all Americans.

After the accumulated weight of slavery and Jim Crow, America cannot simply replace centuries of racism with non-racist policy; it must intentionally mitigate the gaps that those centuries of policy created. Mayor Pete has already committed to creating a commission to propose reparations policies to Congress. The Douglass Plan, which is a complement to any potential reparations proposals, aims to provide the scale and scope necessary for true nationwide restorative justice. Its policies touch every facet of American life, and like the values animating Mayor Pete’s campaign, reflect the principles of *Freedom, Security, and Democracy*.

FREEDOM

“The thought of only being a creature of the present and past was troubling. I longed for a future too, with hope in it. The desire to be free, awakened my determination to act, to think, and to speak.”

– Frederick Douglass

You aren’t free if your zip code, name, and race determine your quality of life and health outcomes or employment opportunities. You aren’t free if you’re disproportionately policed, surveilled, and locked up. You aren’t free if the schools you attend function as a pipeline to prison. Freedom means *freedom from* the government treating anyone differently on the basis of race, and it also means the *freedom to* seek out the same opportunities as all Americans, from a fair and just starting point.

To secure these freedoms, we will implement a health policy package that emphasizes anti-racism and is supported by a corresponding investment in education and sustainable infrastructure to enable it all. We will act to end the hyper-criminalization and mass incarceration of Black Americans and we will undo the prison-industrial complex.

Health Equity & Justice

True freedom also means the freedom *to* live the healthiest life possible in order to pursue your dreams, and the freedom *from* having your quality of life or lifespan determined by the color of your skin, gender, zip code, or job. Yet Black Americans are burdened by daunting social conditions that impact health and receive lower quality healthcare due to institutional racism and implicit bias, and thus disproportionately suffer worse health outcomes. In practice, this means that Black Americans are more likely to be unstably housed or homeless, to live in unhealthier housing, to be unemployed or to receive lower wages for the same work, and to be limited to accessing lower quality food systems—all of which negatively impact health and disease. It means that a Black mother's emotional pain after giving birth isn't taken seriously by her doctors, so her postpartum depression goes undiagnosed. Or that a Black man who visits an emergency room is undertreated with pain medication, or that his chest pain is less aggressively monitored and investigated.

In America, Black mothers are 3-4 times more likely to die during or after childbirth and Black infants are more than twice as likely to die as white infants.^{4,5} Black Americans also face significantly higher rates of diabetes, heart disease, cancer, HIV/AIDS, and a host of other conditions.⁶ Moreover, ending health disparities can lower medical expenditures by trillions of dollars. From 2003-2006, eradicating disparities would have cut medical care expenditures by roughly \$230 billion and other health-related costs, including premature death, by over \$1 trillion.⁷

A Buttigieg Administration will center the lives of Black Americans in our nation's healthcare and public health systems by launching an interagency National Health Equity Strategy. This strategy will prioritize anti-racism and is undergirded by the belief that quality health outcomes should be the norm for every American, regardless of race, place, income, or even access to healthcare.

To achieve this:

- **We will designate and fund Health Equity Zones to address communities' most pressing health disparities,** especially in communities with histories of redlining and economic and social marginalization. These Health Equity Zones will support the identification, development, implementation, and monitoring of plans tailored to address local health inequities. Building from early models like Accountable Communities for Health,⁸ these Health Equity Zones will create multi-sector coalitions focused on health equity and closing health disparities, and reflect the fundamental economic, social, and political determinants of health in a community. Continuing funding to a Health Equity Zone will be conditional on the presence of concrete, executable plans to address high-priority health disparities in the local community, with a specific emphasis on racial and demographic health disparities.
- **We will address the underrepresentation of Black Americans in the health workforce and train our current health workforce to combat bias—especially racial bias—when treating patients,** while transforming our institutions to ensure that they are prepared to engage with communities in culturally, linguistically, and historically appropriate ways. We will develop and codify the frameworks, systems, data collection and analysis,

⁴ ["Pregnancy-Related Deaths."](#) Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

⁵ ["Infant Mortality."](#) Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

⁶ ["African American Health."](#) Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

⁷ LaVeist, T. A., D. Gaskin, and P. Richard. ["Estimating the Economic Burden of Racial Health Inequalities in the United States."](#) *International Journal of Health Services* 41, no. 2 (2011): 231-38.

⁸ ["Accountable Communities for Health."](#) Prevention Institute.; ["Accountable Health Communities Model."](#) Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services.

and protocols for this work at the highest levels of government, and ensure that our health providers and systems can readily access these tools and support.

- **We will revitalize the Office of Civil Rights in the Department of Health and Human Services** to ensure that frameworks are in place to address health inequities, promote equal access, and prohibit discrimination; that agencies explicitly consider racial impact in their regulatory decisions and rule-making; and that legal recourse and enforcement is readily available to people and communities in order to protect these basic human rights.

Schools of the Future

America needs to create an educational system that trains and empowers the next generation of Black scientists, artists, writers, college professors, lawyers, tech entrepreneurs, doctors, software engineers, police officers, teachers, and so much more. Yet today, too many children of color are being denied educational justice. From a lack of adequate resources, to critical teacher shortages, to discriminatory disciplinary policies that reduce instruction time and feed the school-to-prison pipeline, students of color are far too often not afforded the same educational opportunities as their white peers. And when the intellectual lives of students of color are diminished, America loses.

This opportunity gap causes over \$500 billion in lost economic growth annually,⁹ and is one of the most significant contributors to the perpetuation of the Black-white wealth gap. Most people’s wealth is built through well-paid work¹⁰, but many Black students have been denied equal access to excellent education and in-demand job skills. The Schools of the Future Plan is our commitment to providing the resources needed to ensure every American child gains access to the skills they need to meet the economy of the future.

- **We will invest in an equitable public education system by massively increasing federal resources for students at Title I schools.** Schools that serve students who come to school hungry, who lack access to high-quality healthcare, who experience homelessness, and who know firsthand the indignity of racial discrimination need more resources—not less—if they are to experience opportunity equal to their peers. A Buttigieg Administration will dramatically increase Title I funding to support higher teacher pay and supplemental services for low-income students above and beyond state and local funding resources.
- **We will issue new regulations to diversify the teaching profession.** By 2024, a minority of students in our public schools will identify as white, but 82% of teachers still identify as white.¹¹ Studies show that same-race teachers can have an enormous impact: Black students with at least one Black teacher in grades 3-5 are much more likely to graduate high school and attend college.¹² That is why we will require new transparency around teacher hiring procedures: states will disaggregate their applicant and hiring by race and document teacher diversity initiatives as part of their Every Student Succeeds Act school improvement plans. We will also set new guidelines around the use of Title II funds to invest in recruiting, training and supporting the next generation of school leaders of color.

⁹ Auguste, Byron G., Bryan Hancock, and Martha Laboissiere. "[The Economic Cost of the US Education Gap.](#)" McKinsey & Company. June 2009.

¹⁰ Smith, Matthew, Danny Yagan, Owen M. Zidar, and Eric Zwick. "Capitalists in the Twenty-First Century." *Quarterly Journal of Economics*. Forthcoming 2019.

¹¹ "[The State of Racial Diversity in the Educator Workforce.](#)" U.S. Department of Education.

¹² Seth Gershenson, Cassandra M. D. Hart, Constance A. Lindsay, and Nicholas W. Papageorge. "The Long-Run Impacts of Same-Race Teachers." NBER Working Paper 25254.

- ⦿ **We will invest in high-quality state and local educational programs.** We will increase federal investments and incentivize state and local investments in middle school, high school, and college programs to increase readiness and competitiveness for Black women and men in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) and fields of growing employment opportunities, especially health professions, software, finance, and alternative energy.

While higher education remains a clear pathway for much of the middle class, for too many—particularly for Black students—those paths are littered with hurdles. Today, only one in three Black young adults has an associate degree or higher, compared with over half of white young adults.¹³ Black students are disproportionately likely to enroll in expensive and low-value for-profit colleges. And given historic wealth disparities, they are disproportionately likely to face challenges in affording college, leaving them at greater risk of dropping out of college with debt and no degree.

- ⦿ **We will invest in college students' futures by making public college tuition free for low-income students and ensuring the lowest-income students can cover living costs without taking on student debt through increased investments in the Pell Grant program.** We will ensure all student loan borrowers have affordable and safe ways to manage their debt.
- ⦿ **We will cancel the debts of borrowers in low-quality, overwhelmingly for-profit programs** beginning with those that failed federal “gainful employment” rules designed to ensure students receive an adequate return on their investments where the federal government should never have allowed students to enroll. We will hold those colleges accountable for their predatory actions.
- ⦿ **We will increase dedicated resources by \$25 billion for Historically Black Colleges and Universities and other Minority-Serving Institutions,** which have played an extraordinary role in educating Black students, developing remarkable leaders, and helping build a burgeoning Black middle class. HBCUs were largely formed as a response to patterns of exclusion for Black Americans in our country’s educational system. A portion of those funds will be set aside for a fund to support, test, and scale promising practices to improve college completion at these institutions. Significantly increasing the resources available to HBCUs and MSIs to help level the playing field between them and other world-class institutions in the U.S. is about a commitment to restorative justice.

Promotion of the Education and Celebration of Black History

Freedom is seeing your history and culture accurately taught, reflected, and celebrated. Black history, in general, and slavery, in particular, is poorly taught throughout the United States.¹⁴ For example, slavery was cited as a central reason for the Civil War by only eight percent of high school seniors.¹⁵ This is largely due to our nation’s failure to reconcile our history and reshape how it is taught to be more accurate, honest, and inclusive. This history of Black people in the United States did not start with slavery, and it did not end with the Civil Rights Movement. We are committed to correcting the record and developing a strategy for inclusive ongoing representation and commemoration of the contributions of Black people in the United States.

¹³ ["Percentage of Persons 25 to 29 Years Old with Selected Levels of Educational Attainment, by Race/ethnicity and Sex."](#) Digest of Education Statistics.

¹⁴ ["Teaching Hard History: American Slavery."](#) Southern Poverty Law Center. 2018.

¹⁵ ["Teaching Hard History: American Slavery."](#) Southern Poverty Law Center. 2018.

Promoting the education and celebration of Black history is critical to the maintenance of ongoing dialogue about racism and race relations in the United States.

- **We will increase funding to the National Endowment for the Arts and create targeting grant funding aimed to promote the ongoing documentation of Black history and promotion of Black culture in the United States.** Freedom means seeing your history and culture accurately represented in museums, libraries, and other cultural representations on an ongoing basis. It is not just remembering the past, but also acknowledging great talent and cultural contributions in the present.
- **We preserve cultural and historic sites documenting the history of Black people in the United States.** We will prioritize grant funding through the Institute of Museum and Library Services to assist in the collection of materials, as well as the diversification of current museums and libraries.
- **We will write “Dear Colleague” letters outlining best practices for the content and instruction inclusive of Black history and the contributions of Black Americans.** These letters will provide guidance to schools on how to incorporate Black history throughout the K-12 curriculum, and not just into a certain unit during certain months or grade levels.

Criminal Justice Reform

At every level of the criminal justice system—from over-policing, to over-prosecution, to over-sentencing, to conditions while incarcerated, to reintegration upon release—Black Americans are subject to systemic racism.¹⁶ To excise the injustices of racism from this system, we must address every stage of the criminal process, recognize the ways they interact with each other, and invest in social programs to mitigate the harmful effects. We must ensure less contact with an over-reaching criminal justice system. Once people are released from incarceration, we must ensure they are free to reintegrate into society and have the support to do so.

Ensure more people are free by significantly reducing the number of people incarcerated in the United States at both the federal and state level by 50%. Experts agree that far too many people are locked up unnecessarily.¹⁷ As a result, the United States has the highest incarceration rate in the world.¹⁸ It is nearly five times the rate of incarceration in the United Kingdom, and over 10 times that of the Netherlands.¹⁹ If we were to reduce this rate by 50%, we would still have the 28th highest incarceration rate globally—just after Nicaragua—and we would still have a higher rate than nearly every country.²⁰ In some cases, incarceration actually leads to an *increase* in crime.²¹ It’s not just a matter of closing down prisons; we also need to invest in social services and diversion programs, and allow people to rehabilitate. We need better ways to address crime and poverty, both in the criminal justice system and in society.

¹⁶ Elizabeth Hinton, LeShae Henderson, and Cindy Ree. [“An Unjust Burden: The Disparate Treatment of Black Americans in the Criminal Justice System.”](#) Vera Institute of Justice. May 2018.

¹⁷ Austin, James, Ph. D., Lauren-Brooke Eisen, J.D., James Cullen, B.A., and Jonathan Frank, J.D. [“How Many Americans Are Unnecessarily Incarcerated?”](#) Brennan Center For Justice. 2016.

¹⁸ [“Highest to Lowest - Prison Population Rate.”](#) Institute for Criminal Policy Research.

¹⁹ [“Highest to Lowest - Prison Population Rate.”](#) Institute for Criminal Policy Research.

²⁰ [“Highest to Lowest - Prison Population Rate.”](#) Institute for Criminal Policy Research.

²¹ Stemen, Don. “The Prison Paradox: More Incarceration Will Not Make Us Safer.” Vera Institute of Justice. 2017.

- **We will double funding for federal grants for states that commit to criminal justice reform, and prioritize funding for programs aimed at pretrial reforms, decarceration, and expansion of alternative to incarceration (ATI) programs. It is not enough to simply reduce the number of incarcerated people. We must address the root causes of racism, poverty, and crime—and doing so will require resources.** These grants will allow states to reduce their incarcerated populations while investing in programs that make communities safer, including drug rehabilitation, affordable housing, and subsidized transportation. It will also triple funding for technical assistance and training efforts. Such incentives will help states reform their systems, while grant requirements will hold states accountable to follow through.
- **We will, on the federal level, eliminate incarceration for drug possession, reduce sentences for other drug offenses and apply these reductions retroactively, legalize marijuana and expunge past convictions.** Despite equal rates of use, Black Americans are nearly four times as likely to be arrested for using marijuana.²² Research shows that incarceration for drug offenses has no effect on drug misuse, drug arrests, or overdose deaths.²³ In fact, some studies show that incarceration actually *increases* the rate of overdose deaths.²⁴ We cannot incarcerate ourselves out of this public health problem.
- **We will eliminate mandatory minimums.** In 2017, 13,577 people were convicted of an offense carrying a mandatory minimum penalty.²⁵ The average sentence length for someone subject to a mandatory minimum penalty that year was 138 months, compared to 28 months as the average sentence of people convicted of an offense that did not have a mandatory minimum sentence.²⁶ Eliminating mandatory minimums and decreasing overall sentence length for a significant number of crimes is critical to our ensuring that people are not incarcerated when there is no reasonable public safety purpose.
- **We will commute the sentences of people who are incarcerated in the federal system beyond what justice warrants by establishing an independent clemency commission that sits outside the Department of Justice.** Historically, clemency was more commonly used than it is now, and was done on a collective scale.²⁷ An independent clemency commission, with diverse professional backgrounds and lived experiences, will make the process more streamlined and comprehensive.
- **We will fight the profit motive in the criminal justice system, including by abolishing private federal prisons.** Private prisons make more money when more people are incarcerated.²⁸ This has contributed to a ballooning incarceration rate and has no place in our criminal justice system.

 - ◇ We will abolish private federal prisons and significantly reduce the use of private contractors by incentivizing states to stop their services in areas such as health care, food services, communications, diversion, and supervision.
 - ◇ We will support states that are eliminating the for-profit bail industry, which generates millions for a small number of insurance corporations, and work to eliminate wealth-based incarceration by making sure bail is never set beyond an individual's ability to pay.²⁹
 - ◇ We will work with states to cap the amount of revenue cities and counties receive from fines and fees so

22 ["The War on Marijuana in Black and White."](#) American Civil Liberties Union. June 2013.

23 ["More Imprisonment Does Not Reduce State Drug Problems."](#) The Pew Charitable Trusts. March 8, 2018.

24 Pearl, Betsy. ["Ending the War on Drugs."](#) Center for American Progress. June 27, 2018.

25 ["Quick Facts: Mandatory Minimum Penalties."](#) United States Sentencing Commission.

26 ["Quick Facts: Mandatory Minimum Penalties."](#) United States Sentencing Commission.

27 Barkow, Rachel E. and Mark Osler. ["Restructuring Clemency: The Cost of Ignoring Clemency and a Plan for Renewal."](#) University of Chicago Law Review. 2015.

28 ["Banking on Bondage: Private Prisons and Mass Incarceration."](#) American Civil Liberties Union. November 2011.

29 ["Selling Off Our Freedom."](#) American Civil Liberties Union. May 2017.

that police can focus on protecting public safety rather than raising revenue. The Department of Justice will coordinate collecting data on these fines and fees and make it publicly available.

- We will reduce the criminalization of poverty and its link to incarceration. Stories of Ferguson’s use of fines and fees shocked our conscience, but this issue is not just a Ferguson problem. Criminal justice-related debts are estimated to be in the tens of billions of dollars, with over 10 billion owed in California alone.³⁰ In a recent study in Alabama, 83% of individuals said they gave up necessities such as rent, food, and medical bills to pay their court debts—and 38% admitted to committing another crime just to be able to pay.³¹ These targeted fines and fees are most often imposed in and negatively impact Black communities.³²
- ◇ We will push to eliminate arrests and incarceration as punishment for failing to pay legal financial obligations, require states to account for a person’s ability to pay before levying fines and fees, and end practices that create additional economic burdens, such as suspending driver’s licenses for failing to pay criminal justice debts.
- **We will appoint people deeply committed to achieving this goal.** We will appoint an Attorney General, Deputy Attorney General, and U.S. Sentencing Commissioners who are committed to the fundamental transformation of the criminal justice system. We will ensure that the federal bench includes more women and people of color. We will also prioritize deepening the experience of the bench by appointing former public defenders and civil rights attorneys who share a commitment to the protection and expansion of civil rights and civil liberties.

Protect people’s freedom from draconian criminal justice practices and safeguard their freedom to reform and rehabilitate while incarcerated. Freedom is not binary. Just because the state has taken away someone’s freedom in certain ways does not mean it has the right to subject people to inhumane conditions while they are incarcerated.

- **We will support a Constitutional amendment to abolish the death penalty.** Black people comprise 42% of those currently awaiting execution, and 34% of total executions since 1976.³³ Abolition is the only way to address the blatant prejudice in our application of the death penalty.
- **We will reduce the over-reliance on solitary confinement and abolish its prolonged use,** bringing the United States in line with international human rights standards, which view the use of solitary confinement in excess of 15 days as *per se* torture.³⁴
- **We will ensure people who are incarcerated have access to education, healthcare, and rehabilitation.**
 - ◇ **We will restore Pell Grant access to people who are incarcerated.** Studies show that access to postsecondary education while incarcerated increases the likelihood of finding jobs upon release and decreases recidivism rates.³⁵ Because so many people in the criminal justice system lack high school diplomas or GEDs,³⁶ we will also double Title I funding from the federal government for states that commit to supporting K-12 education of justice-system-involved people.

30 Taylor, Mac. "[Improving California's Criminal Fine and Fee System.](#)" Legislative Analyst's Office. January 2016.

31 "[Under Pressure: How Fines and Fees Hurt People, Undermine Public Safety, and Drive Alabama's Racial Wealth Divide.](#)" Alabama Appleseed Center for Law and Justice et. al.

32 "[Targeted Fines and Fees Against Communities of Color.](#)" U.S. Commission on Civil Rights. Sept. 2017.; Kopf, Dan. "[The Fining of Black America.](#)" Priceonomics. June 24, 2016.

33 "[Death Row U.S.A.](#)." NAACP Legal Defense and Education Fund. Spring 2019.

34 "[International Human Rights Law on Solitary Confinement.](#)" Human Rights First. Summer 2015.

35 "[Investing in Futures: Economic and Fiscal Benefits of Postsecondary Education in Prison.](#)" Vera Institute of Justice. January 2019; Davis, Lois M., Robert Bozick, Jennifer L. Steele, Jessica Saunders, and Jeremy N. V. Miles, [Evaluating the Effectiveness of Correctional Education: A Meta-Analysis of Programs That Provide Education to Incarcerated Adults.](#) Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2013.

36 Harlow, Caroline Wolf, Ph. D. "[Education and Correctional Populations.](#)" Bureau of Justice Statistics. April 15, 2003.

- ◇ We will remove the Medicaid exception for incarcerated people. An unjust criminal justice system means an unjust health care system. Currently, correctional health care is neither paid for by federal health dollars, nor subject to quality controls and oversight that would accompany these funds. The result is a separate and lower standard of care in jails and prisons that has deadly implications for people suffering from opioid use and substance use disorders, mental health issues, and chronic illnesses.³⁷ This rule also creates avoidable gaps in care during re-entry into the community, such that people released from prison are 12 times as likely to die within the first two weeks after release,³⁸ and up to 130 times as likely to overdose from opioids,³⁹ as the general population. We will ensure that those who are incarcerated receive the same, high-quality standard of treatment that all Americans deserve.
- ◇ We will provide funding to empower states to provide better opportunities for individuals to prepare for life after incarceration. States are already working on reforms that provide better opportunities for incarcerated individuals, and we want to encourage, support, and greatly expand these reforms. For example, programs like South Carolina’s Second Chance Program⁴⁰ could be expanded across the country to help people who are incarcerated prepare for employment once they return home.
- ◇ We will ensure that the cost of fundamental services and programs is not the financial responsibility of people who are incarcerated or their family members—including adequate nutrition, phone calls to family members, doctor visits, money transfers, and access to public defenders, probation, parole, and incarceration itself. Too often these costs are borne by Black women and contribute to the financial burdens of Black families.⁴¹

Protect the freedom for people with criminal convictions to fully integrate into society by providing the tools necessary for success, while reducing government intrusion in peoples' lives.

- **We will significantly reduce the use of supervised release** on the federal level by limiting it to two years, cutting burdensome requirements and technical constraints, and making it harder to be sent back to prison for small violations of the terms of release.⁴² Through the use of grants and allocated matching funds, we will incentivize states to improve probation and parole practices, including implementing a presumption of release on parole and eliminating discretionary violations of terms of release or supervision (e.g., missing a check-in, being late for curfew, or substance use)⁴³ as a basis for returning someone to confinement.
- **We will ensure that people with convictions have the freedom to access education, jobs, housing, and healthcare.**
 - ◇ **We will support ban the box** initiatives and other ways to ensure that people with criminal records have equal access to employment. In order to avoid unintended consequences of these kinds of programs, we will direct the Department of Labor to issue guidance and model policies aimed at reducing implicit bias and encourage private employers to adopt these practices.⁴⁴

³⁷ Vasan, Ashwin. "['Medicare for All' Is Missing a Vital Group: The Incarcerated.](#)" The Marshall Project. March 21, 2019.; Editorial Board. "[It's Time to End the Callous Policy of Inmate Medicaid Exclusion.](#)" The Washington Post. May 12, 2019.

³⁸ Binswanger, Ingrid A., M.D., Marc F. Stern, M.D., Richard A. Deyo, M.D., and Patrick J. Heagerty, Ph. D. "[Release from Prison — A High Risk of Death for Former Inmates.](#)" *The New England Journal of Medicine* 356 (January 11, 2007): 157-65.

³⁹ Binswanger, Ingrid A. "[Mortality After Prison Release: Opioid Overdose and Other Causes of Death, Risk Factors, and Time Trends From 1999 to 2009.](#)" *Annals of Internal Medicine* 159, no. 9 (November 5, 2013): 592-600.

⁴⁰ "[Second Chance Program.](#)" South Carolina Department of Employment and Workforce.

⁴¹ Morris, Monique W. "[Are Black Women Paying the Costs of Incarceration?](#)" *Ebony*. September 18, 2015.

⁴² "[Number of Offenders on Federal Supervised Release Hits All-Time High.](#)" The Pew Charitable Trusts. January 24, 2017.

⁴³ Jones, Alexi. "[Correctional Control 2018: Incarceration and Supervision by State.](#)" Prison Policy Initiative. December 2018.

⁴⁴ Doleac, Jennifer L. "[Increasing Employment for Individuals with Criminal Records.](#)" The Hamilton Project. October 2016; Craigie, Terry-Ann, [Employment After Incarceration: Ban the Box and Racial Discrimination.](#) The Brennan Center. October 13, 2017.

- ◇ **We will increase the availability of tax credits and bond insurance** for employers who hire formerly incarcerated people.
- ◇ **We will lift barriers that prevent formerly incarcerated people from accessing public benefits, including housing credits and SNAP.** We will also incentivize state and local government to end similar restrictions.
- **We will restore the right to vote for all formerly incarcerated people immediately upon release from confinement—not contingent on any payment of fines or fees and not contingent on the completion of supervised release—as part of the 21st Century Voting Rights Act.** Over 6 million Americans cannot vote due to a felony conviction.⁴⁵ One out of every 13 Black Americans is prohibited from voting due to a felony conviction, more than four times the rate of white Americans.⁴⁶ We will also ensure that people who remain in their communities after a conviction never lose the right to vote.

Protect the freedom of Black people in America by bringing fewer people into the criminal justice system in the first place and minimizing police overreach. Black people have a higher likelihood of arrest by age 28 than white people, and Black people with disabilities have an even higher likelihood.⁴⁷ There is no national database of officer-involved shootings, but available data show that Black people are disproportionately subject to excessive force—including deadly force—from police officers. This disparity is even worse when considering unarmed people killed by the police.⁴⁸ We need accountability, training, and enforcement to ensure that no more Black people are unjustifiably arrested and that no more Black lives are wrongly lost at the hands of police officers.

- We will establish comprehensive measures to hold police accountable to their communities.
 - ◇ We will establish a comprehensive federal database both documenting use of force and tracking officers who are fired from their duties, and develop corresponding accountability practices for police use of force.
 - ◇ We will develop incentives to encourage states to make public data related to the use of force, line-of-duty deaths, policing activities (including traffic stops), officer safety and wellness, officer misconduct, arrests and charging, and crime. As a precondition for federal grants, we will require law enforcement agencies to publish documents like protocols and manuals that promote transparency – especially related to use of force investigations, technology, surveillance, and intelligence.
 - ◇ We will bolster funding to increase the number of police departments that use body-worn cameras and develop a national analytics process for public safety processes and results.
 - ◇ We will reinvigorate the Department of Justice’s Civil Rights Division and direct it to investigate law enforcement agencies that have a pattern or practice of violating civil rights and the Constitution, including by racial profiling, and reinstitute the Collaborative Reform Initiative in which the Department of Justice supported communities working to do the right thing.
- We will promote legislation that raises the legal standard under which officers are justified to use lethal force and offer incentives for states and localities to adopt more restrictive policies. Too many states and cities use a “reasonableness” standard for use of force; some lack any laws governing use of force. Many law enforcement agencies lack substantive guidance past the “bare minimum” constitutional standard.⁴⁹ Stricter policies regarding

⁴⁵ "Felony Disenfranchisement." The Sentencing Project.

⁴⁶ "Felony Disenfranchisement." The Sentencing Project.

⁴⁷ McCauley, Erin J., M. Ed. "The Cumulative Probability of Arrest by Age 28 Years in the US by Disability Status, Race/Ethnicity, and Gender." *American Journal of Public Health* 107, no. 12. November 8, 2017: 1977-981.

⁴⁸ Lopez, German. "There Are Huge Racial Disparities in How US Police Use Force." *Vox*. November 14, 2018.

⁴⁹ Obasogie, Osagie K., Ph. D., and Zachary Newman, J.D. "Police Violence, Use of Force Policies, and Public Health." *American Journal of Law & Medicine* 43 (2017): 279-95.

use of force correlate with fewer deaths at the hands of police.⁵⁰ We will promote policies and training that require de-escalation efforts and limit lethal force to circumstances when it is absolutely necessary.

- **We will work to eliminate unfair and discriminatory practices**, such as broken windows-style policing, that are shown to be biased against people of color. This will require us to train officers and departments to prioritize the most serious offenses while creating diversion opportunities such as Seattle’s LEAD program and the Los Angeles Neighborhood Justice Program, for less serious offenses.
- **We will support departments that actively strengthen community relationships and implement community policing, and we will encourage other departments to follow their lead.** This includes departments that have recruited a diverse police force that reflects their communities, encourages hiring of police officers who live in communities they serve, and departments that have effectively responded to officer misconduct. Such departments have selection and promotional policies that reward officers not simply on enforcement.
- **We will promote effective, informed independent civilian oversight of state and local law enforcement agencies.** We will support such local civilian oversight bodies where they exist, and incentivize states and localities to create civilian oversight bodies if lacking. We will provide incentives for civilian oversight bodies to have transparent policies so communities can better understand the policies governing the police.
- **We will invest in community-based healthcare, especially mental health services, and other front-end social supports** that will minimize the need for police officers to serve as de facto social workers and allow them to resume their primary role as guardians of public safety.

SECURITY

“I had a wholesome dread of the consequences of running in debt.”

– Frederick Douglass

You aren’t secure without economic security, which is closed off to many who have been excluded from accessing the wealth engine that is American capitalism. The racial wealth gap is the most visible economic consequence of our long history of discrimination against Black Americans. The legacy of slavery is a legacy of stolen labor and stolen wealth. For every \$100 in wealth a white family has, the average Black family only has \$5.04—and nearly three-quarters are dissatisfied with the current economic state for Black communities.⁵¹ Slavery, segregation, redlining, predatory lending, and other systemic discriminatory practices created this dynamic, and the Douglass Plan will take deliberate steps to dismantle those systems while providing the necessary capital and tools to mitigate wealth and opportunity gaps.

Equal Employment and Business Opportunity

A third of Black Americans report either owning a businesses or expecting to start one within the next five years, yet 57% of this group say they frequently worry about not being able to secure a loan.⁵² After the Great Recession, minority-owned businesses added 1.3 million jobs to our national economy.⁵³ Black and Latinx entrepreneurs respectively comprised 14% and 8% of entrepreneurs in 2015, though their combined revenue

⁵⁰ Sinyangwe, Samuel. [“Examining the Role of Use of Force Policies in Ending Police Violence.”](#) Use of Force Project, September 20, 2016.

⁵¹ Molyneux, Guy, Mario Brossard, and Corrie Hunt. [“Black Americans’ Views on an Economic Agenda for the Black Community.”](#) Black Economic Alliance. June 5, 2019.

⁵² Molyneux, Guy, Mario Brossard, and Corrie Hunt. [“Black Americans’ Views on an Economic Agenda for the Black Community.”](#) Black Economic Alliance. June 5, 2019.

⁵³ [“Survey of Business Owners and Self-Employed Persons.”](#) United States Census Bureau.

was less than 2% of the total \$33.5 trillion in revenue from all entrepreneurs.⁵⁴

The Walker-Lewis Initiative aims to triple the number of entrepreneurs from underrepresented backgrounds within 10 years. Inspired by Black business pioneers Madam CJ Walker and Reginald Lewis, the goal of this initiative is to create up to 3 million new jobs in minority communities and across the country overall. This initiative has four main elements:

- **We will create the federal Walker-Lewis Entrepreneurship Fund to invest in entrepreneurs from underrepresented backgrounds.** Modeled on Maryland’s successful TEDCO Builder Fund, this fund would co-invest in funds with the explicit goal of investing in entrepreneurs from underrepresented backgrounds, particularly based in low-income and minority communities. The government would co-invest up to \$10 billion within five years, which will activate another \$10 billion of private capital. Additionally, there would be corresponding investments in increasing access to capital, entrepreneur training and development, and rigorous measurement and data tracking.
- **We will introduce the Walker-Lewis Debt-for-Jobs Plan to help students start businesses.** Every student who was eligible for Pell Grants while in school will have his or her college loans deferred and forgiven over a five-year period if they start and maintain a business employing at least three people within five years of leaving school.
- **We will launch the Walker-Lewis Promise to aim to award 25% of federal contracting dollars to small business owners from underserved communities** in urban and rural areas, including minority-owned firms (currently nearly 10%) and women-owned firms (currently at 5%).⁵⁵ Overall federal contracting in 2017 was over \$500 billion.⁵⁶ Awarding more contracts to business owners who are economically and socially disadvantaged would inject over \$100 billion in underserved communities.
- **We will convene a Walker-Lewis Task Force to identify additional ways to reach our entrepreneurship goals** and report back to the President within the first 100 days of the Buttigieg Administration. Appointed by the President and chaired by the Secretary of Commerce and a prominent minority business leader, this taskforce will be a highly diverse and credentialed collection of entrepreneurs and will represent the federal government’s deepest collaboration with the minority business community. This commission will also work to secure additional private sector commitments to increase minority entrepreneurship.

In addition, **we will supercharge investment (5X) in minority-held depositories.** Community Development Finance Institutions (CDFIs) have been lending to low-income, low-wealth, and overlooked communities for decades. They are connected to and understand the needs of communities. We want to increase the ability of CDFIs to invest in entrepreneurs, nonprofits, and businesses in their communities. The Douglass Plan would provide five times the community reinvestment act (CRA) credit or “super credits” to banks who invest more capital in minority-owned CDFIs.

Based on decades of systemic racism and exclusion, Black Americans continue to be disproportionately unemployed and underemployed, especially young African American men. In most occupations and professions, Black Americans continue to be underrepresented, especially in executive, management, and leadership positions. The gaps in promotion and pay are even larger for Black American women in the

⁵⁴ "The State of Inclusive Entrepreneurship: By the Numbers." The Case Foundation. October 1, 2018.

⁵⁵ Janetsky, Megan. "Women- and Minority-owned Businesses Receive Only a Small Fraction of Federal Contracts." OpenSecrets.org.

⁵⁶ Janetsky, Megan. "Women- and Minority-owned Businesses Receive Only a Small Fraction of Federal Contracts." OpenSecrets.org.

workforce. There are numerous, inter-connected reasons for this persistent employment gap that require both short-term and long-term solutions. We will therefore:

- Vigorously enforce civil rights laws ensuring equal opportunity through the Department of Justice, Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, and Department of Labor.
- Raise the minimum wage to at least \$15: Black workers are disproportionately likely to earn less than \$15 per hour,⁵⁷ so increasing the minimum wage will especially empower Black Americans.
- Support career mentorship, employee resource groups, and peer support programs and initiatives across multiple industries and occupations; convene White House Summits on equal employment opportunity by sector, e.g. by the Department of Health and Human Services to address the persistent underrepresentation of Black Americans in medicine, dentistry, and nursing.

Finally, we will appoint Cabinet Secretaries, presidential appointees, and White House staff that include Black Americans and reflect the diversity of America. We will appoint Black Americans and other people of color to Presidential commissions, task forces, and advisory bodies. Our Office of Public Engagement will establish and build relationships with community leaders and stakeholders from across Black America—teachers, health professionals, business leaders, faith leaders, artists, professional athletes, community organizers—to make sure there are seats at every federal government table to listen to and be more accountable to Black America.

The Community Homestead Act

Seventy-four percent of neighborhoods that were redlined in the 1930s remain low-income to this day, and 64% remain majority-minority.⁵⁸ Meanwhile, policies from the New Deal to the G.I. Bill to the Federal Housing Administration of the 1950s and 1960s directly invested in white homeownership while purposely excluding Black Americans.⁵⁹ This investment has compounded over generations and combined with centuries of conscious and intentional discrimination to entrench the racial wealth gap. It is estimated that equalizing homeownership rates amongst races would reduce the racial wealth gap between white and Black families by 31%.⁶⁰

The Douglass Plan proposes a 21st Century Community Homestead Act to launch a public trust that would purchase abandoned properties and provide them to eligible residents in pilot cities while simultaneously investing in the revitalization of surrounding communities. Building on work from the University of Georgia’s Professor Mehrsa Baradaran, this plan will attack the racial wealth gap by directly fostering asset ownership among those previously prevented from accumulating capital, while simultaneously investing in the communities around them. Contrary to traditional private incentives for urban revitalization, this plan directly invests in the American people instead of further enriching private investors.

⁵⁷ “Characteristics of Minimum Wage Workers, 2018”. Bureau of Labor Statistics. March 2019.

⁵⁸ Mitchell, Bruce, Ph. D., and Juan Franco. “HOLC “redlining” Maps: The Persistent Structure of Segregation and Economic Inequality.” National Community Reinvestment Coalition. March 20, 2018.

⁵⁹ Perry, Andre M., Jonathan Rothwell, and David Harshbarger. “The Devaluation of Assets in Black Neighborhoods.” Brookings. November 27, 2018.

⁶⁰ Misra, Tanvi. “Why America’s Racial Wealth Gap Is Really a Homeownership Gap.” CityLab. March 12, 2015.

Under the 21st Century Community Homestead Act:

- Cities would place bids through the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) for comprehensive financing provided by a new “Homeownership Fund”.
- The HUD Task Force would choose cities based on factors such as available employment, new employment to be created, public spaces, the amount of land and property available, the magnitude of affordable housing needs, the prospect of revitalization, community participation in the plan, and the environmental effects of revitalization.
- An eligible grantee would be a resident who has less than the area median income (AMI) over the last five years and is 1) a current resident of the pilot area who has lived in the area for a period of at least three years during the previous decade; or 2) a current resident of any historically redlined or racially-segregated area or a resident of such an area for at least three years over the previous decade.
- Participating homeowners would be granted absolute ownership of the land, with a 10-year forgivable lien to promote the rehabilitation of the home and its use as a primary residence. The entire value of the home’s appreciation would be enjoyed by the homeowner.
- Each pilot city would create a plan to work with local organizations and entrepreneurs to build facilities, infrastructure, and/or technology to spur job creation. The Homeownership Fund would fund infrastructure, facilities, or a jobs program that suits the profile of the region.

In addition to helping families across the nation, the investment in these communities would provide greater services and infrastructure for new industries and sectors to thrive, creating a multiplier effect of jobs and prosperity for local residents.

Public Health, Infrastructure, and Environmental Justice

Public health is a fundamental part of our nation’s infrastructure. Just as we depend on government to provide transportation and public safety, we need good government to protect us from disease, environmental threats, natural disasters, and bioterrorist attacks. However, only about a third of local public health systems are able to deliver all core public health functions,⁶¹ and funding for the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention—which is responsible for supporting state and local public health departments—has decreased by 10% in the last decade.⁶²

These shortcomings in our current public health systems and infrastructure disproportionately affect communities of color and the poor. For example:

- **Water:** Flint is not alone. A 2017 Reuters study indicated that almost 4,000 communities had levels of lead in water or homes twice as high as Flint’s.⁶³ In 2015, more than 18,000 water systems—serving 77 million people—violated federal water quality regulations.⁶⁴
- **Housing:** Up to 40 million homes—primarily in poor communities—have one or more health and safety hazards, such as lead, mold, asbestos, or poor indoor air quality. These health and safety hazards result in higher rates of asthma and other chronic conditions, injury, and poor mental health.

⁶¹ “Measuring Public Health System Capital.” Systems for Action.

⁶² Faberman, Rhea. “The Impact of Chronic Underfunding of America’s Public Health System: Trends, Risks, and Recommendations, 2019.” Trust for America’s Health.

⁶³ Pell, M. B., and Joshua Schneyer. “Reuters Finds 3,810 U.S. Areas with Lead Poisoning Double Flint’s.” Reuters. November 14, 2017.

⁶⁴ Fedinick, Kristi Pullen, Mae Wu, and Erik D. Olson. “Threats on Tap: Widespread Violations Highlight Need for Investment in Water Infrastructure and Protections.” Natural Resources Defense Council. May 2, 2017.

- **Air:** Those living in poverty are 35% more likely to live in a neighborhood with poor air quality; Black Americans are 54% more likely to live in such conditions.⁶⁵

We can make measurable progress towards mitigating negative health impacts that disproportionately impact communities of color through the following actions:

- We will expand enforcement of environmental protections and invest in solutions to environmental threats, particularly focusing on communities of color and working families who face disproportionate health effects from pollution, tainted water, and inadequate infrastructure.
- The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) will once again lead with science in developing regulations to protect Americans from environmental hazards. The EPA will be required to consider environmental justice in all its regulatory decisions.
- As part of rebuilding the nation's infrastructure, a coordinated effort among EPA, HUD, and CDC will be undertaken to address lead-based paint in aging housing stock. Current federal investments will be increased and consolidated in a Lead Paint Mitigation Fund to ensure all communities in need have the resources required to address this health threat.
- As a part of rebuilding our public health infrastructure, we will create a 21st-century public health data system that expands on existing environmental health tracking networks⁶⁶ to provide an early warning system, down to the neighborhood level, of health threats—from the effects of climate change and other environmental changes to clusters of chronic and infectious disease.

We will ensure expanded and equitable disaster preparedness and relief, so that all communities get the resources they need to prepare for and recover and rebuild from disasters, whether due to hurricanes in Puerto Rico, Texas, or Florida; wildfires in California; or flooding and tornadoes in the Midwest.

This will require a departure from “business as usual” between the executive and legislative branches to ensure:

- Stable and predictable funding for public health infrastructure to prepare for and mitigate disasters.
- Rapid deployment of federal assets to assist communities and emergency reserve funds for public health disaster relief and rebuilding, so that communities do not have to wait for Congressional action. Lack of presidential and federal government leadership during Hurricane Katrina took over 1,800 lives, disproportionately Black residents of New Orleans and the Gulf Coast.⁶⁷ And the most recent delay while Congress and the President argued over hurricane relief for Puerto Rico not only cost lives and slowed recovery,⁶⁸ but also held hostage other communities in need of critical assistance.

Many of these solutions require integrating resources from across the federal government, including from the Departments of Health and Human Services, Homeland Security, Housing and Urban Development, Agriculture, Transportation, and the Environmental Protection Agency. It will also require new investments along the lines described in the LIFT America Act,⁶⁹ which takes a comprehensive approach to rebuilding

⁶⁵ Ihab Mikati, Adam F. Benson, Thomas J. Luben, Jason D. Sacks, Jennifer Richmond-Bryant, “Disparities in Distribution of Particulate Matter Emission Sources by Race and Poverty Status”, *American Journal of Public Health* 108, no. 4 (April 1, 2018): pp. 480-485.

⁶⁶ “[National Environment Public Health Tracking Network](#).” Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

⁶⁷ “Hurricane Katrina Statistics Fast Facts.” CNN. August 30, 2018.

⁶⁸ Schwartz, Emma. “[Hurricane Maria’s New Death Toll Estimate Is Higher than Katrina’s](#).” *Frontline*. August 28, 2018.

⁶⁹ *Leading Infrastructure for Tomorrow’s America Act*, [H.R. 2479](#), 115 Cong. (2017).

our nation’s infrastructure, including creating a new pathway for funding comprehensive public health capabilities.⁷⁰

DEMOCRACY

“Are the great principles of political freedom and of natural justice, embodied in that Declaration of Independence, extended to us?”– Frederick Douglass

The quest to build a more perfect union is bound in the struggle to build a democracy that includes every citizen. For Black communities, that struggle has involved a civil war, the armed terror of white supremacists, and a shameful century of Jim Crow laws. Yet even after the Voting Rights Act of 1965, the promise of equal access to the ballot is still unfulfilled. Ten years ago, Black voter turnout surged to unprecedented levels, but this historic moment sparked a renewed era of discriminatory voter suppression.

Since 2010, 25 states have enacted laws making it harder to vote—including voter purges, discriminatory voter ID requirements, cuts to early voting, voter registration and absentee ballot restrictions, and the disenfranchisement of returning citizens.⁷¹ Unscrupulous election administrators have manipulated election procedures to further target communities of color, subjecting them to shorter voting periods and longer waiting times. Political operatives and even foreign adversaries like Russia have used disinformation campaigns to suppress the Black vote.⁷² And even when Black voters overcome these hurdles, their voting power is too often diminished by gerrymandered legislative districts. Meanwhile, Republican leaders in Congress have refused to renew the Voting Rights Act even after the Supreme Court dismantled some of its key protections.

The Douglass Plan proposes a 21st Century Voting Rights Act that will use every resource of the federal government to end all types of voter suppression, expand voting access, and create a democracy where the rights of each citizen no longer depend on the color of their skin, the community they live in, or for whom they want to vote.

We will make democracy inclusive by expanding access to the ballot. Approximately one in five eligible voters are not registered to vote.⁷³ Registration must be made easier, by automatically registering eligible voters using information the government already has, allowing online and same-day registration, and making registration portable within states. Voting must be made easier and more accessible by allowing early voting and vote-by-mail, making Election Day a national holiday, and by setting and enforcing standards for poll workers and the distribution of voting machines. Voting must also be made accessible to all, including through accessible registration materials and other language access provisions, and greater accessibility at polling places.

⁷⁰ U.S. House of Representatives. "[Pallone Unveils Comprehensive Infrastructure Package.](#)" News release, May 17, 2017. Congressman Frank Pallone, Jr.

⁷¹ "[New Voting Restrictions in America.](#)" Brennan Center For Justice. May 6, 2019.

⁷² "[State of Black America.](#)" National Urban League. 2019.

⁷³ "[Why Are Millions of Citizens Not Registered to Vote?](#)" The Pew Charitable Trusts. June 21, 2017.

We will protect the right to vote by using the full power of the federal government to combat voter suppression. Weaponized voting laws and the discriminatory administration of elections cannot be allowed to continue disenfranchising Black voters. We need to authorize a new preclearance procedure under the Voting Rights Act to enable the federal government to block racist voting laws *before* they take effect. We need to create and enforce standards for voter roll maintenance to stop discriminatory voter purges, neutralize the effects of restrictive voter ID bills by allowing people to vote with a sworn written statement of identity, and increase and enforce criminal penalties for people who try to interfere with a person’s right to vote. And in the era of Facebook and unaccredited news sites, we need to work with tech companies and develop policies that limit the spread of false information online.

We will replace the Electoral College with a National Popular Vote. The Electoral College artificially dilutes the power of minority communities, especially Black Americans living in Southern states.⁷⁴ Due to projected demographic trends, this problem is likely to get worse over time. We need to abolish the Electoral College and replace it with a National Popular Vote so that every citizen has a say in electing our president.

We will give full political representation to the people of D.C. If it were a state, Washington, D.C. would have the highest proportion of Black citizens—approximately 50%—of any state. Indeed, it would be the only state in the union where Black Americans were not a racial minority.⁷⁵ We need Congress to redefine the District of Columbia to include only government buildings in the city center and create a new state, “New Columbia,” from the remaining territory. This would give D.C.’s roughly 700,000 residents the full representation afforded to every state: one congressperson, two Senators, and three Electoral Votes. The newly redefined District of Columbia would still be entitled to three electoral votes by the 23rd Amendment, which we propose awarding to the winner of the National Popular Vote. This would eliminate the possibility of an Electoral College tie, which at present would allow Congress to decide the winner of a presidential election regardless of the popular vote..

We will reduce the power of big money in politics and elevate ordinary voices. The economic imbalance in our campaign finance system sustains a racial bias because wealthy donors are overwhelmingly white, with policy priorities often out of step with Black voters and the general public.⁷⁶ We need to create a strong public financing system that matches small donors so average citizens can run for office funded by their communities, not big donors. We need to appoint judges who understand that corporations aren’t people and money isn’t speech. And we must pass a constitutional amendment to overturn *Citizens United* and *Buckley vs. Valeo* to stop wealthy interests from dominating our democracy.

We will fix the harms caused by a politicized and inaccurate Census count. An accurate Census is a cornerstone of our democracy. It ensures that everyone has equal political representation and that every community receives its fair share of federal funding. Historically, the Census has undercounted Black Americans and other communities of color, undermining their right to equal representation and depriving them of critical resources for health care, education, and infrastructure. We will closely examine the conduct of the 2020 Census to determine whether Black voters were undercounted, and will work with federal

⁷⁴ Gelman, Andrew, and Pierre-Antoine Kremp. ["The Electoral College Magnifies the Power of White Voters."](#) Vox. December 17, 2016.

⁷⁵ ["African American Population by State."](#) Black Demographics.

⁷⁶ Lioz, Adam. ["Stacked Deck: How the Racial Bias in Our Big Money Political System Undermines Our Democracy and Our Economy."](#) Demos. December 2014.

agencies and Congress to address the effects of any undercount on federal funding.

We will fight discriminatory racial gerrymandering. Historically, state legislatures have used the redistricting process to diminish Black America’s power and representation. These efforts have often built on other systemic injustices, such as exploiting residential segregation by “packing” Black voters into a handful of voting districts, or compounding the effects of mass incarceration by using “prison gerrymandering” to transfer political power away from Black communities. Since 2010, federal courts have struck down voting district maps in Alabama, North Carolina, Texas, and Virginia, as discriminatory, while lawsuits continue in Georgia, Mississippi, and Louisiana. But voters should not have to go to court and spend years to vindicate their voting rights. Even when successful, these lawsuits cannot undo the initial loss of political representation. We will address discriminatory racial gerrymandering and partisan gerrymandering—which often has the same effect—by ensuring that Congressional redistricting is conducted by independent, statewide commissions using fair and non-discriminatory redistricting rules.

Frederick Douglass once noted that “Power concedes nothing without a demand. It never did and it never will.” So let’s demand greater freedom, security, and democracy for communities that need it most. And while we do not pretend to have all the answers, a fully effective program for empowering Black America will require further listening to voices from communities themselves. The deep wounds of centuries will not be healed with a handful of targeted programs. But with the Douglass Plan, a Buttigieg Administration will make an unprecedented commitment to listen to and lift up those who have historically faced discrimination. This amounts to a commitment to replace racist systems with inclusive ones. It is a down payment on the future we hope to see. Done right, we will enrich not only Black America, but all of America.

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