

D.C. Youth Discuss, Reframe 2020 Challenges

By **Micha Green**
D.C. Editor

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As the saying goes, "children are the future," and in the Aug. 11 virtual town hall, "2020/DC Youth Speak: COVID-19, George Floyd & Change," the youth of Washington, D.C. shared their concerns, hopes and ideas for an improved city and world, as well as solicited advice from some of the area's greatest leaders. Hosted by Do The Write Thing Foundation in partnership with MJT Television and City Dreamz Entertainment and featuring participants from the Marlon Barry, Jr. Summer Youth Employment Program (SYEP) and other youth, educational and community leaders, the virtual town hall reframed today's challenges and offered hope for a better tomorrow.

Panelists included, D.C. Mayor Muriel Bowser, former first lady Cora Master Barry, the SYEP students, Deputy Mayor of the District of Columbia for Education Paul Kihn; Associate Director, Office of Youth Programs for the Department of Employment Services (DOES) Thennie Freeman; Executive Director for the Office of the Mayor on African American Affairs Ashley Emerson; Principal Kortni Stafford from Kelly Miller Middle School; Vida Ali of Ben's Chiti Bowl and members of the D.C. Council.

Students shared their perspectives on the pros and cons of quarantine due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

"I think quarantine helped families to communicate more because now we're staying home and you spend more time together. For example, when we were all in school, you would spend maybe seven to nine hours a day at school, and some students may not go straight home because they have an after school activity so the problem in the family was communication," SYEP student Hope Payne said during the town hall.

"It presented more of an opportunity to sit around the dinner table and eat or not have everyone shut in their room all day," student Catherine Turner said. "But also I think it's important to keep in mind that there are families with abuse, and there are families who can't provide for their children. As we see with the schooling, not a lot of kids have Wi-Fi or the computer systems to do schooling online."

Despite the pandemic's challenges, Barry, the widow of former D.C. Mayor Marlon Barry, for whom the SYEP program is named, encouraged the students to look at the optimistic side of 2020's difficult times.

"Once you stop and look back and take perspective on this era, you're going to find that it grew you, it enhanced you, it empowered you like never before," said Barry, who is the founder of the Southeast Tennis and Learning Center (SETLC) and Recreation Wish List Committee.

"A lot of our young people [at SETLC] didn't graduate the way we traditionally do. So they were kind of down. And I said: 'Don't be down.' You just had a once in a lifetime experience. Everyone else will look back at their graduation, and they're going to see proms, and they're going to see walking across the stage like millions of us... You will look back and you will talk about your drive-bys, your amazing virtual graduations, all of the different things," the former first lady said reassuringly.

"We spent more time and attention on these graduates this year than we ever did before. So I'm just saying, look for a blessing and also look for a lesson because with the protests, there's a lesson," Barry added.



DO THE WRITE THING OF DC in partnership with
MJT Communications & City Dreamz Entertainment
PRESENTS

A VIRTUAL TOWN HALL 2020/DC YOUTH SPEAK: COVID-19, GEORGE FLOYD & CHANGE



FEATURING PSAs & POEMS BY MBSYEP PARTICIPANTS

MODERATORS: MARION INGRAM & MBSYEP TEENS MICHELLE TILLEY & DATHAN FENWICK

SPECIAL GUEST:
Mayor Muriel Bowser

PANELISTS:
Congresswoman Eleanor Holmes-Norton
Former DC First Lady Cora Masters Barry
Deputy Mayor of Education, Paul Kihn
Ashley Emerson, Director, MOAAA
Thennie Freeman, Associate Director, OYP
Kortni Stafford, Principal, Kelly Miller MS

MBSYEP TEEN PRODUCERS:
Gregg Spencer | Mark Rich
Hope Lehman Payne | Brooke Givens
Catherine Turner | Jasmine Marshall
Tyler Davis

SEGMENT 1: Effect of COVID-19 on Youth & Education
SEGMENT 2: Effect of COVID-19 on Family & Friends
SEGMENT 3: Effect of COVID-19 on the Overall Community
SEGMENT 4: Effect of George Floyd's Death & Racism

DATE: Tuesday, August 11, 2020
TIME: 11:30 AM - 1:00 PM
PLACE: Zoom Room
<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/85998493348>

Young people and community leaders met for the "2020/DC Youth Speak: COVID-19, George Floyd & Change," virtual town hall on Aug. 11. Courtesy Photo

After listening to the many perspectives and questions from the students, Mayor Bowser explained the vitality of the youth and such conversations in the betterment of the nation's capital and world.

"The words of the young people are going to be so important to how we recover from this virus."