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**RESOLUTION TO SUPPORT A GREATER INSTITUTIONAL  
COMMITMENT TO IMPROVING PUBLIC HEALTH IN EAST BALTIMORE**

JHSPH is widely recognized as a leader in public health both domestically and internationally. Yet the East Baltimore neighborhood where the school is located is one of the least healthy in Baltimore City and the nation. The JHSPH student body recognizes that longstanding socioeconomic and political factors have contributed to the poor health of East Baltimore residents, and that JHSPH supports many activities that work to promote health in the community. However, our current efforts are not commensurate with the scope of the public health concerns. We believe that *JHSPH has the resources and the social responsibility to undertake more visible and effective efforts to improve the health of its neighbors.*

We therefore call upon the administration to adopt an institution-wide commitment to help improve the health of East Baltimore residents, by undertaking a process to build sustained, reciprocal community-academic partnerships, beginning with the following three steps:

- 1) **Coordination** – Create a strategic planning group to develop goals for how JHSPH can help to improve the health of East Baltimore residents, both by coordinating existing resources and by creating new resources.
- 2) **Representation** – Designate seats for JHSPH students and meaningful East Baltimore representatives on the proposed strategic planning group and on all existing JHSPH decision-making bodies that impact the health of East Baltimore residents.
- 3) **Communication** – Create a permanent infrastructure for continual communication among the administration, students, and East Baltimore residents about the school’s activities to improve the health of the East Baltimore community.

The Student Assembly will support the administration in implementing the above resolution through facilitating ongoing dialogue among students, administrators and East Baltimore residents.

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## BACKGROUND INFORMATION

### Why is SPARC Proposing this Resolution?

This resolution has been proposed by Students for a Positive Academic paRtnership with the East Baltimore Community (SPARC). SPARC is a group of JHSPH students that advocates for a greater institutional commitment to East Baltimore. SPARC has proposed this resolution to call upon the administration to respond to the concerns of the student body regarding the school's responsibility to become more engaged with the East Baltimore community.

These concerns were highlighted in a student survey SPARC conducted in spring 2005. An overwhelming majority of respondents (90%) agreed or strongly agreed that JHSPH has a responsibility to be more involved with the East Baltimore community, and 92% agreed or strongly agreed that community involvement is an integral component of public health education. In addition, nearly three-quarters (73%) thought that JHSPH's lack of emphasis on community involvement is contrary to the philosophy of public health. Nearly all (97%) were in favor of more courses incorporating community involvement, and 90% supported courses that focused on East Baltimore. By supporting this resolution, the Student Assembly will call upon the administration to act on the concerns expressed in the student survey.

### Why Should JHSPH Commit to Improving Public Health in East Baltimore?

In the late 1990s East Baltimore had the highest age- and sex-adjusted rates of morbidity and mortality from cardiovascular and cerebrovascular diseases in the city, the highest rates of sexually transmitted diseases in the country, and the highest rate of syphilis in the developed world. East Baltimore residents also were affected disproportionately by diabetes, cancer, HIV-related illnesses, violence, and substance abuse.<sup>1</sup> Social and environmental conditions in East Baltimore contribute to the ill health of the population. These include high rates of unemployment, poverty, dilapidated and aging housing, lead paint hazards, and residential demolition.<sup>2</sup>

The field of Public Health is dedicated to promoting the health of populations, and particularly of underserved populations. Institutions across the nation embrace social responsibility as part of their missions. We therefore believe JHSPH should make improving the health of East Baltimore residents a central institutional goal.

### What has JHSPH Already Done? What More Can it Do?

JHSPH supports many initiatives, at multiple levels, that contribute to the health of East Baltimore residents. These include the work of the JHU Urban Health Institute (UHI), faculty members' community-based research and practice in East Baltimore, for-credit service learning opportunities, volunteer activities such as the student consulting service offered through SOURCE, and various courses that offer community involvement.

However, current efforts are fragmented and therefore are not as effective as they could be. Students and East Baltimore residents are not represented on decision-making bodies that affect the wellbeing of the community. Further, there is no established infrastructure for communication among the JHSPH administration, students and East Baltimore residents about the school's activities to improve the health of the surrounding community. The proposed resolution addresses these issues by providing concrete steps to increase **coordination**, **representation**, and **communication**, with the overall goal of adopting an institution-wide commitment to help improve the health of East Baltimore residents, through the development of a community-academic partnership characterized by equal representation, joint decision-making, capacity building in the community, and sustainability.

*If you have questions about the resolution or this background paper, please contact SPARC co-chairs Susan Ghanbarpour and Kamila Mistry (sghanbar@jhph.edu; kmistry@jhsph.edu). To find out more about SPARC or to access the survey results, go to: <http://www.jhsph.edu/source/sparc>.*

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<sup>1</sup>Fox CE, Morford TG, Fine A, Gibbons MC. 2004. The Johns Hopkins Urban Health Institute: A Collaborative Response to Urban Health Issues. *Academic Medicine*, 79(12): 1169-1174.

<sup>2</sup>Farfel MR, Orlova AO, Lees PJS, Rohde C, Ashley PJ and Chisolm JJ Jr. 2003. A study of urban housing demolitions as sources of lead in ambient dust: Demolition practices and exterior dustfall. *Environmental Health Perspectives*. 111:1228-1234.