



*****FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE***
May 29, 2020**

BxD Union Press Inquiries: bxduunion.press.inquiries@gmail.com
Alexi Shalom, Organizer, UAW Local 2325: ashalom@alaa.org

The Bronx Defenders Workers Announce Campaign to Unionize

Bronx, New York – We, the employees of The Bronx Defenders, a nonprofit providing public defense to low-income Bronx residents, announced our intent to join the Association of Legal Aid Attorneys - UAW Local 2325 on Friday, May 29th. After an overwhelming majority of our office signed cards indicating support for unionization, we are calling for The Bronx Defenders management to recognize our union and begin bargaining immediately.

As defenders, we have witnessed relentless attacks on the people of The Bronx by the criminal, family, immigration, and housing legal systems. We have fought alongside Bronx families whose safety is jeopardized by policing, family separation, housing insecurity, unemployment, jail building, and other systemic injustices. On top of these forms of oppression, the COVID-19 pandemic has wrought devastation upon The Bronx community that will only be compounded without further intervention. To tackle these complex and entrenched injustices, The Bronx Defenders has transformed public defense with an innovative holistic defense approach that advocates for clients throughout their lives and across legal systems.

We joined The Bronx Defenders because of our commitment to holistic defense. However, as our office continues to grow in size and influence, the organization has failed to stay true to that mission. Too often, power and prestige are prioritized over client-centered representation and the dignity of our staff. As a public defense office that occupies land and absorbs resources in The Bronx, we recognize that our commitment to the people of The Bronx requires an internal redistribution of power. We believe that The Bronx Defenders' promise of holistic defense can only be fulfilled by an organization that centers staff members who are longtime Bronx community members and those whose daily work engages most directly with the people of The Bronx.

In order to realize our vision of a better Bronx Defenders, we demand:

- To take bolder positions and actions to fight alongside Bronx families against economic oppression, the prison industrial complex, and state-sponsored violence.
- Hiring, promotion, and workplace policies that prioritize employees who are Black, Latinx, people of color, queer and trans people, and Bronx locals.
- Just compensation and better benefits for our workers as we work towards decarceration, family unification, housing security, and economic justice.
- A worker-centered power structure, which is necessary for client-centered representation, and employee-elected representation on the board of The Bronx Defenders.
- Dignity and respect for all workers, regardless of identity or role in the office.

To these ends, we ask for immediate recognition so that we can avoid time-consuming legal battles and instead focus our energy on our fundamental purpose: fighting for the people of The Bronx.

This announcement carries special significance for The Bronx Defenders, whose founding in 1997 undermined bargaining efforts by the union we now seek to join. In the years since, we have recognized that our organization can only live up to its stated values when we stand in solidarity with our fellow defenders. We are proud to join them in the nation's oldest public defenders' union. We declare our union today with a vision for a better Bronx Defenders and an unflagging commitment to zealous advocacy that affirms the humanity and dignity of everyone who walks through our doors.



@bxduunion

