

## THE LAURA FLANDERS SHOW

### CASH RELIEF FOR BLACK MOMS: THE SUCCESS OF GUARANTEED INCOME

LAURA FLANDERS: It's a bittersweet Mother's Day for American families this year, the second Sunday in May, traditionally a celebration honoring mothers, motherhood, and mothering coincides this time with the formal end of the National Covid-19 emergency, which since its enactment in March, 2020, has expanded healthcare coverage to some 15 million people who will now most likely be disenrolled and increased food stamp benefits and postpartum health coverage for new moms in many states. Poor parents will be taking another hit in a country where 37.9 million Americans already live in poverty, and that's according to the official numbers. In pockets and especially among single moms, the problem is much worse. It's not as if we don't know how to reduce those numbers in this, the richest country in the world. For six months at the height of the pandemic, the US experimented with an idea that is already common in many other wealthy nations, a monthly cash payment, no strings attached to help families raising kids. Those direct payments cut monthly child poverty by roughly a third before they expired at the beginning of last year, even 3.7 million children kept out of poverty wasn't enough to get that program renewed by Congress. But cash programs like this are gaining traction in place after place funded independently. Today we are going to talk about one such program, the first in the nation launched in 2018, the Magnolia Mother's Trust in Jackson, Mississippi provides a \$1000 a month to low-income families headed by African-American moms in affordable housing. Aisha Nyandoro leads the program as the CEO of Springboard Opportunities, Anquindria Moore former teacher and mother of three is a Magnolia mom. Dorian Warren is joining us too. You may know him from his appearances on MSNBC. He is co-president of Community Change and co-chair of the Economic Security Project where he has been watching all of this closely. Welcome all, I'm very glad we're having this conversation, and I should say Happy Mother's Day, it's that time of the year. Let's start with you, Aisha, what was the problem there in Jackson, Mississippi that The Magnolia Mother's Trust set out to address?

DR. AISHA NYANDORO: Well, thank you so much for questioning. Thank you for this segue from Anquindria's baby. The problem that we were seeking here to solve in Jackson, Mississippi with the Magnolia Mother's Trust, it's just not a jack for Mississippi problem, and it really is a nationwide problem as it relates to income inequities and really how do we go about addressing the gap between having enough cash and being able to address your needs. So it's a very simple equation. How do we go about making sure that families have the financial resources that they need to go about actualizing, not only their immediate needs within their household, but also making sure that they

have enough left over to dream and operate in the states of imagination rather than scarcity.

LAURA FLANDERS: Now, Anquindria shared some of her dreams at a fantastic storytelling event there in Jackson just very recently.

DR. AISHA NYANDORO: The event that you're talking about is our annual Night of Storytelling that we have done for the last three years, the first year we did it was via Zoom and Melissa Harris Perry was our dynamic moderator. And this year we had it and it was in person, and really what it is, this is an evening where we really do focus on changing the narrative around poverty, and the way that we do that with Springboard is by changing the narrator, really allowing the women, whose stories, in so many instances we're always asked to lift up, that these women have an opportunity to share, putting themselves, what their dreams are, who they are, who their families are. So that sparked something in me and I wanted to offer that same spark or feeling to children today. That's what led me to become a teacher.

LAURA FLANDERS: Must have been a bit nerve-wracking being up there on the stage. How was that for you and what was the story you wanted to share with everyone?

ANQUOINDRIA MOORE: Now prior to MMT, I ended up losing my job due to Covid, everything went virtual, so it was tough being home and having two under two in between that time. I did not have a steady job at the time. I did start working at Boost Mobile, but it was really iffy and definitely not enough. So when the cohort came about, it gave me an opportunity to get myself back afloat.

LAURA FLANDERS: How did you hear about it?

ANQUOINDRIA MOORE: I heard about it from the apartment complex. There was a woman named Natasha that let me know about the program.

LAURA FLANDERS: Well, we're going to hear more about how the program works, but I suspect we may hear one of your kids. So who do you have there around you Anquindria, do you want to introduce us?

ANQUOINDRIA MOORE: This is Jasir that you all hear in the background.

LAURA FLANDERS: And how old is Jasir?

ANQUOINDRIA MOORE: Jasir is 11 months.

LAURA FLANDERS: And it looks like somebody might be helping you with Jasir.

ANQUOINDRIA MOORE: Yes.

LAURA FLANDERS: It takes a village. All right, coming back to you, Aisha. Am I right? Tell us how the program works, no strings attached. Work requirements?

DR. AISHA NYANDORO: Springboard works directly with families that live in federally subsidized affordable housing. And we really do provide programs and services aimed at helping those families achieve their goals in life, school and work. We provide wraparound services, the Magnolia Mother's Trust cash is one of those wraparound services, it's the most significant wraparound service, but we do understand that cash is not a balm that solves all the inequities within this country. It is one magnificent balm and one magnificent aid, but it is just one piece where we really go to, when we really talk about the long arc of poverty and the long arc of the systems that have been involved in allowing us to have a country in which poverty gets to persist at the rates that it gets to persist at. So Magnolia Mother's Trust, \$1000 a month, 12 months, no strings attached. We are in essence doubling the income for some of the women that we work with, because on average our moms make about \$12,000 annually. That's at no fault of their own, and it's because we are centered in Mississippi with our federal minimum wage, it's still \$7.25 cents an hour, \$7.25 cents an hour. So you can work full-time as many of our moms do, and you still aren't making a living wage. And so by coming in and providing that buffer, we are allowing our moms some breathing room, it's allowing them their space to get back on their feet, not only to address their immediate needs, but also think about the needs of their kids and their families and their dreams and center themselves and into the conversation. But in addition to providing the money for our moms, we are an organization that really does focus on two generations. We provide a \$1000 in a 529 account for all of the moms kids who are within the trust because we do believe in making sure that we are investing not only in our moms right now, but also allowing them to invest in their kids future.

LAURA FLANDERS: Anquindria, you've called it a holistic program. Can you describe what you mean by that? Is it not just about the cash clearly?

ANQUOINDRIA MOORE: It is not only about the cash. I had the opportunity to meet some very wonderful people. I was also able to socialize with different women who were also in the same shoes as me or similar. I was able to meet their children and do some tutoring with them. The women there are not, they're not getting involved and then leaving you stranded. We have the opportunity to continue to keep in touch so that they

can possibly help out in other areas. When we have our meetings, if my children had to come, they helped out. It was absolutely wonderful.

LAURA FLANDERS: So Dorian, you're listening to all this and I know you're familiar with this story, you and I have talked for many years, the federal government and the states have long histories dealing with the question of poverty. And many programs have been tried, all of which it seems to me are very different from what we are hearing. There may be cash money involved in some of the programs, I'm thinking food stamps, TANF, welfare, you name it. But there's usually a large role for the state in surveillance, and concerns about dependency, work requirements. As somebody who studied those programs, what verdict do you think we can draw about them?

DORIAN WARREN: Well, I think Aisha actually said it very, very clearly, agency and trust, and I would add a third concept of freedom. Either we trust people and particularly mothers and especially in this case, Black mothers, to make the right choices with the resources that they have and that they're receiving from this program or for a government program, or we don't. We either want to provide agency to people and believe in the freedom of people to control their own bodies, as well as determine their life outcomes and the fate of their kids, or we don't. And so what this program, what Magnolia Mother's Trust, the first and longest running guaranteed income pilot in the history of this country, what it has taught us is a different model. It's actually a new economic model and it's a new model of providing support for all of us, and it's particularly for ordinary people who are struggling to make ends meet. So we have a lot of lessons to learn. I would add Laura, Aisha and Springboard Opportunities and Magnolia Mother's Trust, they've been collecting data on every cohort of the Black women in this program. And now there are, by the way, are over a 100 guaranteed income pilots around the country in just the last several years. So we have lots of, lots of data about how to do this, how to give people cash, no strings attached, unlike SNAP, unlike some other government programs. And the data shows us a few things, people are more likely to be working and seeking work. People are less likely to be living in poverty and struggling. We know that if we trust women in particular and give them the agency, that they will actually do always the right thing for their kids, and actually it's a win-win for everybody. What we're up against is basically ideologues and some zombie ideas who are ignoring the evidence and the stories about the participants in these kind of programs.

LAURA FLANDERS: Just to put a pin on the alternatives though, I mean, have those programs that I mentioned earlier succeeded?

DORIAN WARREN: They have succeeded in reducing the rates of poverty and the lack of wellbeing for the recipients of those programs. They have not succeeded in making sure that we are collectively caring for each other without stigma. That is the failure of those programs, especially when you have a work requirement attached, whether it's Medicaid or SNAP, which is one of the proposals basically right now in front of Congress by the way.

LAURA FLANDERS: Aisha, how do you think about this question of deservedness with relation to all of this? Because that's a huge issue, who deserves this kind of help?

DR. AISHA NYANDORO: Yeah. When I think about deservedness, it really is about equity and it really is about value. It really is about who do we believe is allowed to have access to their dreams and their freedom, and who do we sit, who do we position as having value within this country? So it really is about equity and it really, to me, that really is about values. I know that in this country, because of how we talk about deservedness and those pieces, we really do believe that only a few are deserving because we are connecting that to work, and we are connecting that to other aspects.

LAURA FLANDERS: We often connect it to race and gender.

DR. AISHA NYANDORO: That right there.

LAURA FLANDERS: Just saying.

DR. AISHA NYANDORO: That right there as well. And so it really is, it's a narrative shift. We're asking people to shift their mindset and really shift the narrative that we are indoctrinated with in this country around who is deserving of a good life and making sure that we understand and we all are entitled to a good life that should not just be predetermined by a subset of us based on your gender and your race. And currently that's what it is.

LAURA FLANDERS: You mean all those white guys on Wall Street, the banks being helped out right now, didn't deserve all of that help? Anquindria, coming to you for a second, you shared some of your dreams, your aspirations, and you talked about something called a sensory school that you would love to create. I don't know what that is, I'd love to know more. Can you share with us what that might be?

ANQUOINDRIA MOORE: So for the sensory school, it would be like a little school or building that has all these different opportunities for the children. It might be a sensory mat, it might be water and sand, and these things the children can use to help kind of

relax while they learn, or they might be able to take a brain break that we call it in school if they get frustrated or anything. And it can be a number of different things, there can be texture tiles and things of that nature.

LAURA FLANDERS: Because you've worked as a teacher and you've also got a lot of skills around teaching the deaf and the hearing impaired. Is that right?

LAURA FLANDERS: Yes. Do you think you might know how to get that school into being, with the experience that you've had with this year, might you have some of the connections to make that possible?

ANQUOINDRIA MOORE: I definitely think I have the people that can help me get some things together and put me in front of the right people. I hope so.

LAURA FLANDERS: I mean, this just speaks Aisha to the sort of wraparoundness of the program as you describe it, and Dorian, I would love you to come back in on this too, but there are bound to be people out there saying, well, how do you pick the moms? You know, how do you decide? And then of course, where does the money come from?

DR. AISHA NYANDORO: Yeah, so a couple of pieces. So I just want to really hone in on what she was saying about training. And I think that is the beauty of guaranteed income, and those are the pieces we don't talk about enough. Whenever I am asked about this and when Dorian is asked about guaranteed income, people always really want to hone in on the tangibles. How much did they save? How much did they spend? Where did the money go? And it's capitalism. Yes, you know, those pieces, somebody cares about that, I don't, I care about what people are dreaming about and whether or not because of those seeds that have been planted, whether or not they can be watered and manifested. So I think that's the beauty of guaranteed income, and a part that gets me really excited. As far as the details and mechanics of our program, we pride ourselves on being really transparent with our moms, and so it is a process that's opt in by lottery. We believe that moms have agency, so they should have an ability to opt in for the Magnolia Mother's Trust and the lottery process. We open that lottery process up every summer. It is all philanthropic dollars. So we have been doing this work successfully since 2018 because of philanthropy. We have no federal or state resources, I am in Mississippi, let me be very clear, nobody is lining up to give a Black woman in Mississippi money to give other Black women. I am just very clear about what that looks like. But we have had success as it relates to philanthropic partners in getting this work done because individuals are able to see, when we invest in individuals, when we invest in community, that's just not a win for that person, it's just not a win for that

community, it is a collective win for all of us. And so that's the beauty of this work and how we have been able to partner along and how we have been able to go from a seed here in Mississippi to a movement that has had nationwide proliferation.

LAURA FLANDERS: Dorian, tell us a bit about that national picture, can you describe how many of these programs there are? And is this a right, left kind of a thing? What's the nature of the support for these guaranteed minimum income programs?

DORIAN WARREN: Well, the nature of the support, there was a poll taken in fall of 2022, about six in 10 Americans support the idea of no strings attached guaranteed income, including by the way, 40% of self-identified Republicans. So there is actually overwhelming majority support for this idea, we just don't have the political will. Laura, I'm going to bring in another word, so Aisha talked about dreams and dreaming, I'm going to bring in democracy because that is the other intangible that is the promise of these kind of programs. And that is, like think about this, when people have a little more breathing room, when they don't have to count every penny to pay bills or hustling for gigs and jobs, or make impossible choices around should they go into debt to pay the bills, whether a childcare or the utility bill, they actually have more time to get involved in our democracy, in their communities, in school board elections and town hall meetings, hey, and mother's groups to talk about the issues they face. That is important for the promise of multiracial democracy in this country. So I do think we need the dreaming, we need the democracy. And the last thing I'd say on this point is this is in some ways the dream realized, the Magnolia Mother's trust, this is the dream realized from the National Welfare Rights Organization 50 years ago of low-income Black mothers in the South, organizing around this very idea of guaranteed income. This is the dream realized of what they were fighting for several decades ago.

LAURA FLANDERS: It's such an important point that you make and go back all those decades to the 1960s, and you find Richard Nixon was at one point proposing exactly this. The politics of this are complicated. There was a piece in the New York Times not so long ago about Republicans, conservative think tankers who are saying, "Hmm, with abortion banned or strictly limited in more than half the states, there's going to be a whole lot more babies putting demands on the system, a whole lot more moms in trouble. Hmm, we maybe need to reconfigure or rejigger our attitudes towards family policy." Dorian, coming to you, do you work with any of those people? And is there any chance of that kind of shift in politics that you talked about?

DORIAN WARREN: I think there's a chance of a shift, but there have to be guardrails, Laura, because I think many of supporters on the right who are in favor of this idea also

want to see women in the home and not in the workplace and not having full freedom and control over their bodies. So I do think that is the limit for the alliance.

LAURA FLANDERS: So, we'll give you the \$1000 and lock the door.

DORIAN WARREN: Oh, there are people that do believe that and want that, and they're dreaming of that vision.

LAURA FLANDERS: In an ideal world, moms would be at the table designing the programs.

DR. AISHA NYANDORO: Absolutely. Everything about the trust was designed with moms in these communities in 2017, the amount of money, the length of time, the other supports that we provide, none of that came from me or my team. It really was us sitting down for almost a year being in conversation with women and saying, if we were to figure out how to go about providing financial support for your family, what would that look like?

LAURA FLANDERS: Anquindria is just one of many moms, she had the guts to step up and put herself in this pipeline, in this cohort. But I heard a lot of people speaking at your storytelling, this is scary stuff to come out and ask.

DR. AISHA NYANDORO: Yeah, you know, I think it's scary stuff because I think it's the way the system is designed. The system is set up in a way in which individuals are penalized for asking for help. And if the system is set up in a way in which people are constantly having to prove that they are financially incapable or whatever the words may be, in order to need that help. With Springboard and with the Magnolia Mother's trust, it's not about any of those people in any of those instances. It really is about relationships and it really is about trust and it really is about being in relationship with individuals and trusting that they know better than anyone else, what they need for themselves and their families to be successful.

LF; Aisha, I want to ask you about your dreams, I mean, it's hard to fundraise independently philanthropic dollars for a program like this, but we've talked about the challenges at the federal level. What's your future? Were you hopeful that, for example, when the Expanded Child Tax Credit came into being, that that would persuade people of the benefits of all this?

DR. AISHA NYANDORO: Oh, we all were. I would be naive if I, I think we were all heartbroken, the first six months of 2022. I know I went into a deep depression when we



weren't able to get a win with that. But it's, so when I think about the long arc of this work, and my long-term goal, it still is federal policy. Even when we started this work in 2018, it has always been about how do we provide a blueprint on what is possible? And that is what we did in 2018, that's what we will continue to do. But it really is the federal play, how do we go about providing better cash-based policies? How do we go about reforming some of the policies that we have in place, whether or not that's the Child Tax Credit, whether or not that's TANF, how do we better support families with the cash that they need to live out their dreams?

LAURA FLANDERS: All right, Dorian, so you've got Anquindria has told her story, Magnolia's developed the program. You are the advocate, you've gotta get it over the hill somehow, and when I say hill, I mean Capitol Hill. What happens next? How do we move this?

DORIAN WARREN: Organizing, organizing, organizing, social security was a dream before it became reality, Medicare and Medicaid were dreams before they became reality, the Affordable Care Act was a dream before it became reality. So I'm very, very optimistic, Laura, that with organizing and good strategy, we can shift political will, and as Aisha said, shift mindsets as well to get this over the finish line, we have to, for the future of this country, for the future of ordinary people and for the future of our children in this country, we have to win, and I do believe that we will win.

LAURA FLANDERS: Anything else you'd really encourage Aisha and the folks at Magnolia Mother's Trust to continue or to add to what they're doing now?

ANQUOINDRIA MOORE: I would definitely say continue to put the word out there and invite moms in for that because it's a wonderful opportunity. Again, not just for the money, but being able to mingle, they also offer different opportunities that children could be involved in. And a lot of us need that, even if we don't realize it at the moment.

LAURA FLANDERS: I close these episodes by asking people the following question, which you've all spoken to, but I would love to just get your answers, I ask, what you believe the story will be that the future tells of this moment? You've alluded to it, Dorian.

DORIAN WARREN: When you follow Black women, we all benefit.

LAURA FLANDERS: Anquindria.

ANQUOINDRIA MOORE: I second that. It is going to be beautiful.

LAURA FLANDERS: Aisha

DR. AISHA NYANDORO: Oh, that was so good, I'm like, I'm stuck now. I think the future of this moment really is, what does it look like when we give individuals radical permission to dream and trusting them where they are and meet them in the center of their dreams and not just at the center of their needs.

LAURA FLANDERS: Aisha, Anquindria, Dorian, fantastic to have you on the program. Good luck with the program. I wish I could join you next year in Jackson, Mississippi. May it be so. All right, thank you so much. It's been wonderful to have you with us.

For the precious six months that it was in operation, the Federal Tax Credit Program known as the Expanded Child Tax Credit worked, it slashed child poverty by almost half and kept millions of poor families out of financial ruin, even in the middle of a pandemic, it worked. So why was it allowed to elapse? Well, for one reason, Republicans in Congress voted en masse against it, for another, they were joined by one killer Democrat, Senator Joe Manchin of West Virginia. For a third, the recipients themselves didn't rise up in defense of it as so many anticipated they would. But there are reasons for that, for one, our media barely covered the success of the program until it was dead. For another, we in this country set our sights low when it comes to needed help for our people. Just look at the French around their pensions or the British around national health. They're proud of their programs and they rise up to defend them. How can you get proud of something you've barely even heard about? Let's be clear, if Republicans had been responsible for such a successful tax cut, they'd be crowing about it. So how about it Joe Biden? Talk it up. Talk about the expanded Child Tax Credit. Let's renew it, but let's rename it, and rename it something sexy. Money for Moms, Funds for Kids, you name it, but rename it. And let's keep watching these programs that do exist around the country that we have every right to get excited about. We'll keep reporting on stories like this and others in the weeks to come on the Laura Flanders show. You can get the full uncut conversations by a subscription to our podcast. Till the next time, stay kind, stay curious. For the Laura Flanders Show, I'm Laura.

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