



National
Urban League



NAACP



***Towards a New Civil Rights Movement for
Economic Empowerment and Justice***

21st CENTURY AGENDA FOR JOBS AND FREEDOM

**African American Leaders Convening
National Policy Priorities**

Released August 23, 2013

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BACKGROUND

On December 3, 2012 and January 25, 2013, Marc H. Morial, President & CEO of the National Urban League; Rev. Al Sharpton, founder and President of the National Action Network; Benjamin Jealous, President & CEO of the NAACP; and Melanie Campbell, President and CEO of the National Coalition on Black Civic Participation convened nearly 60 of America's leading civil rights, social justice, business and community leaders in Washington, D.C.

These meetings of African American Leaders Convening (AALC) were historic and unprecedented and were the first steps in developing a public policy agenda targeting the primary challenges facing African Americans, urban communities and all low-income and working-class Americans.

The ensuing discussions and debates resulted in the identification of five urgent domestic goals for the nation:

- 1) *Achieve Economic Parity for African-Americans***
- 2) *Promote Equity in Educational Opportunity***
- 3) *Protect and Defend Voting Rights***
- 4) *Promote a Healthier Nation by Eliminating Healthcare Disparities***
- 5) *Achieve Comprehensive Criminal Justice System Reform***

The AALC has since worked to further expand these goals to include guiding core principles and corresponding legislative policy priorities and other recommendations.

As such, the policy recommendations contained herein will serve as a working document, or action plan – to be revised, amended and updated accordingly – aimed at achieving these five goals

and moving our communities toward economic empowerment, equality and prosperity.

Moving forward, additional issues of import that have not initially been reflected in these recommendations may be included. However, the current goal of this document is to develop a priority, rather than comprehensive, agenda to ensure maximum impact in the aforementioned five areas.

INTRODUCTION

United We Stand

We African-American civil rights and social justice leaders come together on the heels of both progression and regression of equal opportunity in America in the 21st Century.

As we commemorate 50 years since the height of the Civil Rights Movement and the iconic March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom, we have witnessed two historic elections in recent years. In both, African Americans played a crucial and decisive role in securing a first and second term for the Obama Administration. This role also extended to the outcomes of numerous U.S. Senate, U.S. House, gubernatorial, state legislative, mayoral and other races across the nation.

However, in recent months, we have also witnessed an amalgamation of efforts aimed at turning back the hands of progress towards parity in voting rights, civil rights, workers' rights and criminal justice – namely the United States Supreme Court's evisceration of the Voting Rights Act amid heightened voter suppression measures, its hesitation to confront affirmative action and its stripping of critical protections granted under Title VII of the Civil Rights Act, as well as unequal justice perpetuated by unfair laws such as Stand Your Ground.

These events have helped to spark the flame of the 21st Century Civil Rights Movement. However, they are not isolated. These events join a growing list of old and new challenges, and the current plight of the African-American community underscores the urgency of our demand.

The African-American community was disproportionately battered by the Great Recession and has benefited the least from the fragile economic recovery. The black unemployment rate remains in the double digits; income inequality and the ever-widening wealth gap threaten to relegate the black community to perpetual underclass status; and those who wish to curtail investment in education and career preparation further dim the prospects for upward mobility for our young people.

Commitment, Collaboration, Continuation

Until we meaningfully confront these challenges, we jeopardize our ability and potential as a nation to fully live up to our ideals of equality and democracy.

Today and hereforth, we come together as a growing coalition representing the changing face of America to urge our elected leaders at the national, state and local levels to give our unique challenges utmost consideration as they grapple with the daunting fiscal and social challenges facing our country.

While the civil rights and legislative successes that followed the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom in the 1960s laid the foundation for decades of progress to follow (via the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965), economic parity and achievement for African Americans remains elusive. The National Urban League's 2013 State of Black America Report 50-year Retrospective showed that while blacks have achieved double-digit gains in educational attainment, employment, and wealth within the Black community since 1963, this is in contrast to single-digit gains against whites. Additionally, in the past 50 years, the Black-White income gap only closed by seven points (now at 60%), and the unemployment rate gap only closed by six points (now at 52%). Significant economic disparities still exist, and cast doubt on what has been considered meaningful change in the equality gap in America.

We cannot wave the flag of victory when so much work remains to be done to ensure that subsequent generations move beyond the aspiration for life, liberty, justice and economic opportunity for all, to the achievement of these for all.

We come together at this historic juncture to articulate our vision for the priorities around **Economics, Education, Voting Rights, Health and Criminal Justice Reform & Safe Communities** that can – and must – drive economic recovery and rebirth not just for 42 million African-Americans, but also for urban communities and all low-income and working-class Americans.

We unwaveringly commit our efforts to the discourse and actions that will lead to the realization of this vision and measures that support our policy priorities.

On this 23rd day of August 2013, we, the undersigned organizations, are bound by a common goal. By crafting this domestic policy agenda, we begin another significant phase in our nation's history to bring African Americans and others closer to opportunity and economic parity – fulfilling the promise of 50 years of progress and of our ongoing quest to help America become a more perfect union.

We invite others who share our mission and our purpose to join with us.

It will take all of us – working together – to finish.

THE AALC

Marc H. Morial President/CEO, National Urban League
Rev. Al Sharpton Founder/President, National Action Network
Melanie L. Campbell President/CEO, National Coalition on Black Civic Participation (NCBCP); Convener, Black Women's Roundtable
Benjamin Jealous President/CEO, NAACP
Rep. Marcia L. Fudge U.S. Rep. (OH), Chair of the Congressional Black Caucus
Marian Wright Edelman President, Children's Defense Fund
Wade Henderson President, Leadership Conference of Civil and Human Rights and Counsel to the Leadership Conference Education Fund
Barbara Arnwine, Esq. Exec. Dir., The Lawyers Committee for Civil Rights Under Law
Hillary Shelton SVP, Advocacy and Public Policy, NAACP
Rep. Emanuel Cleaver II U.S. Representative (MO)
Burrell Ellis CEO, Dekalb County, Georgia
Rev. W. Franklyn Richardson Chairman, Conference of Black Churches
Dr. Barbara Williams-Skinner President, Skinner Leadership Institute and Co-Chair, National African-American Clergy Network
Pastor Jamal Harrison Bryant Empowerment Temple AME Church
Lezli Baskerville, Esquire President/CEO, National Association for Equal Opportunity in Higher Education
Dr. Avis Jones-DeWeever Exec. Director, National Council of Negro Women
Dr. E. Faye Williams, Esq. Chair, National Congress of Black Women
Minyon Moore Partner, The Dewey Square Group
Rev. Lennox Yearwood President/CEO, Hip Hop Caucus
Brandi Richard President, National Urban League Young Professionals
Jessica Brown National Black Youth Vote! Coordinator, NCBCP
Becky Pringle Secretary-Treasurer, National Education Association
Elizabeth Powell Secretary-Treasurer, American Postal Workers Union
Clayola Brown National President, A. Phillip Randolph Institute
Arlene Holt-Baker Executive Vice President, AFL-CIO
Terry Melvin President, Coalition of Black Trade Unionists
Cloves Campbell, Jr. Chairman, National Newspaper Publishers Association
William G. Tompkins Jr. President, National Newspaper Publishers Association
Robert S. Johns Executive Director, National Dental Association
Jerald L. Tillman Founder, National African-American Insurance Association
Rudy Loney Chair, National African-American Insurance Association
Julie Cunningham President/CEO, Conference of Minority Transportation Officials
Dr. Ron Daniels Founder, State of the Black World 21st Century
Ron Busby, Sr. President, U.S. Black Chamber, Inc.
Lawrence Parks President, Potomac Coalition, Federal Home Loan Bank
Harry E. Johnson President/CEO, The Memorial Foundation, Inc.
Curley Dossman Chairman, 100 Black Men, Inc.
Laura Murphy Director, Washington Legislative Office, ACLU
Lamell McMorris Founder/CEO, Perennial Law Group, LLP
Dr. Elsie Scott Director, Ronald Walters Leadership/Public Policy Ctr., Howard Univ.
Dr. Bernard Anderson Chair, National Urban League Council of Economic Advisors
Dr. Michael Eric Dyson Professor of Sociology, Georgetown University
Ralph Everett President/CEO, Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies
Dr. Stephen J. Thurston President, National Baptist Convention of America, Incorporated, International
Angela T. Rye, Esq. Founder and Director, Impact
Warren Ballentine Attorney, activist and radio host

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

ECONOMICS

1) *Achieve Economic Parity for African-Americans*

Eliminate Racial Inequality in American Economic Life

If America is to continue to compete on a sustained basis in an increasingly global economy, our nation must commit itself to eliminating racial inequality in American economic life. Doing so would not only lift the burden of economic stress on millions of American families, but also contribute to national economic growth and prosperity.

Further, the elimination of racial disparities will be enhanced if policies are focused on people and areas of greatest need. African Americans and the communities in which they are concentrated suffer from the highest unemployment and are among the highest rates of poverty in the nation. The black unemployment rate has hovered at twice the rate of unemployment among white workers in good times and bad; black household income remains less than two-thirds the income of white households; and the widest disparity, wealth, reveals that median black household net worth is 5% that of median white household net worth.

As such, we embrace the following three core principles to guide our economic policy priorities:

- *Achieve stable and balanced economic growth towards full employment*
- *Prepare and protect for full participation in all domains of economic life, including employment, housing and community development, business development and wealth-building*

- *Target economic and social policies toward people and communities in greatest need based on relative unemployment, income and poverty for the purpose of closing long-standing and persistent economic disparities, as well as toward Minority Business Enterprise development as a tool to stimulate full economic participation of communities of color*

*(*Corresponding policy priorities and other recommendations can be found on pp. 14-22.)*

EDUCATION

2) Promote Equity in Educational Opportunity

Ensure Equal & Equitable Educational Opportunity for All Students to Prepare Them for College, Work & Life

Education – and specifically, educational opportunity – remains a critical civil rights issue in the 21st century agenda. A quality educational experience provides the on-ramp to success, while an inferior one diminishes our ability to compete as a community and as a country.

With a goal to close the achievement gap for minority and underprivileged students, we must improve access to quality education across the nation.

Ensuring equal and equitable educational opportunity for all students, including low-income and students of color, will require our collective efforts to be focused on improving preparation, access, and achievement at all levels of education – from pre-school to college and beyond -- that will prepare our students to participate in a 21st century global economy.

As such, we embrace the following three core principles to guide our education priorities:

- *Provide all students access to high-quality early childhood education*
- *Establish and properly fund a K-12 Education system that will fully prepare all students for college, work and life*
- *Improve access to, support in and completion of higher education, including specific support for HBCUs*

*(*Corresponding policy priorities and other recommendations can be found on pp. 23-26.)*

VOTING RIGHTS

3) *Protect and Defend Voting Rights*

Protect the Right to Vote

The right to vote is one of the most fundamental to our democracy. Our goal as a nation must be first and foremost to ensure that every eligible voter can exercise the right to vote and have that vote counted.

The Voting Rights Act was necessary in 1965 and remains so today. While it remains intact – despite the U.S. Supreme Court’s ruling against Section 4 – immediate action is required by Congress to create a new formula to determine which states and counties should be covered under Section 5, the preclearance provision. Voter suppression tactics have no place in our country – no matter the state, city, or town – and we pledge to continue to vigorously oppose any efforts to that end.

The right to vote is not a tool to be manipulated for political gain, but one that should expand and enhance our democratic process – as each constitutional voting amendment has achieved since the 15th amendment. The need for federal and state reform to fully protect voters from deceptive tactics is ongoing and is underscored by the suppression measures seen during the 2012 election cycle and thus far through 2013.

As such, we embrace the following three core principles to guide our voting rights priorities:

- *Restore the Voting Rights Act*
- *Modernize our nation’s voting system*
- *Protect voters from deceptive and discriminatory practices, suppression and intimidation*

*(*Corresponding policy priorities and other recommendations can be found on pp. 27-28.)*

HEALTH

4) *Promote a Healthier Nation by Eliminating Healthcare Disparities*

Provide Every American with Access to Quality and Affordable Health Solutions

“Of all the forms of inequality, injustice in health care is the most shocking and inhumane.” – Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

Health disparities cost everyone. They inflict disproportionate levels of illness, disability, and death on racial and ethnic minorities. In addition to excess morbidity and mortality, health disparities impose a significant economic burden on society.

In 2009, health disparities cost the U.S. economy \$82.2 billion in direct health care spending and lost productivity. African Americans bore the majority of that cost at \$54.9 billion, followed by Hispanics (\$22 billion). More than 90 percent of these medical care and lost productivity costs were in urban areas. Private insurance plans paid 38.4 percent of the healthcare costs of health disparities, but the second highest cost is incurred by individuals and families through out-of-pocket payments of 27.7 percent -- more than Medicare and Medicaid combined. A healthier nation means providing every American with access to quality and affordable health care solutions.

As such, we embrace the following three core principles to guide our health priorities:

- *Eliminate health disparities*
- *Develop a diverse and culturally competent healthcare workforce*
- *Prevent hunger and increase access to healthy foods*

*(*Corresponding policy priorities and other recommendations can be found on pp. 29-32.)*

CRIMINAL JUSTICE AND SAFE COMMUNITIES

5) *Achieve Comprehensive Criminal Justice System Reform*

Secure Safe Communities

Our criminal justice system should keep communities safe and treat people fairly, regardless of the color of their skin. However, racial disparities still exist at every point in the system, from the time a person is stopped by the police to the time a person is incarcerated. Law enforcement practices, such as racial profiling, can have devastating effects on communities of color and contribute to racial disparities in the system.

With 5% of the world's population, the U.S. has 25% of the world's prison population – making us the world's largest jailer. Since 1970, our prison population has risen 700%, and our federal prison population has increased by almost 800%. As a nation, we currently have the highest rate of imprisonment in our history.

Our nation must set the goal of eliminating the cradle to prison pipeline and bring an end to the prison industrial complex that has disproportionately affected our community. In addition, as African Americans are disproportionate victims of crime, and often from within our own communities, we must further work to create peaceful communities and help our young people focus on nonviolent ways to resolve conflict, as well as provide them with ample after-school and employment opportunities.

As such, we embrace the following three core principles to guide our criminal justice reform and safe communities priorities:

- *Bring an end to racial profiling*
- *Oppose mandatory minimum sentences*
- *Ensure safe communities*

*(*Corresponding policy priorities and other recommendations can be found on pp. 33-36.)*

LEGISLATIVE POLICY PRIORITIES & RECOMMENDATIONS: ECONOMY

Policies for stimulating economic growth and creating jobs

- 1. National Public-Private Jobs Initiative:** Develop sector specific policies that promote growth and expand access to quality employment opportunities for blacks, as employees and business owners, via a dynamic national public-private jobs initiative to create jobs and train urban residents in the following sectors with significant growth potential:

Health Care: Use realized Medicare savings resulting from the Obama Healthcare Plan to expand efforts to recruit, train, and hire urban residents as healthcare practitioners. Develop a program similar to the Civilian Conservation Corps aimed at retraining qualified workers while addressing a critical national need regarding the shortage of trained medical personnel. Since blacks are overwhelmingly concentrated in lower paid support jobs in this sector, in order to reduce the racial wage disparity, it is especially important that these jobs be unionized. Federal policy with Medicaid and Medicare provides along with Obama care providers should encourage just wages and benefits for this sector and allow for unionization of workers in the support cluster of health care jobs.

Infrastructure: Finance an Urban Infrastructure Bank by considering the usage of existing GSEs to guarantee activities at the state and local level. The initiative should be targeted to infrastructure financing in distressed communities, defined as those with local unemployment and poverty rates above the state average. A percentage of all infrastructure monies should be directed to job training and job placement for disadvantaged workers living in the communities where infrastructure investments are being made – for example, by building apprenticeship programs and a local hiring point system into public-private partnership agreements.

Expand public initiatives in rail projects, urban water systems maintenance and expansion, parks, public buildings, and school buildings in distressed urban communities through shared financing obligations such as the highly popular, recently expired Build America Bond program.

Restructure the HBCU construction loan program from the current guarantee program (requires participating schools to mutually self-insure the program and also limits the amount of loans) to one that allows HBCUs more freedom to benefit from the low cost loan environment created by the Fed's quantitative easing policy. Construction by HBCUs will take place in Black communities, under the direction of Black college presidents, and will expand the capacity of America's largest producers of black STEM graduates. We recommend at least \$10 billion in loan guarantees for these investments.

Technology and Broadband: Support competitive grants fueling the private creation of Urban Business Incubators, Technology Campuses from dormant industrial sites, and other measures intended to foster targeted and localized small business growth.

Manufacturing: Develop and enforce a "Buy American" initiative promoting the purchase of American-manufactured goods by federal agencies, semi-public transportation authorities, local and state governments. Incentives could include favorable government-subsidized financing terms for the purchase of domestically-manufactured equipment and vehicles with continued terms of renewal.

Clean Energy: Encourage investment in clean energy businesses, particularly those that promote alternative energy and energy conservation. Vehicles for encouraging such investments should include: (1) Targeted tax inducements for clean energy investment in urban areas and programs encouraging urban building retrofits for improved energy efficiency and (2) Multi-government initiatives to increase the efficiency of regulatory approvals and thus eliminating major impediments to the growth of a vibrant, sustainable clean energy manufacturing and service industry

in the U.S. All inducements and reforms must be tightly targeted to benefit urban, underserved communities and be designed with a long-term focus in order to have a material impact on relevant business models.

- 2. Urban Homesteading Program:** Create an Urban Homesteading Program as a comprehensive, coordinated approach to create new homeowners by redirecting foreclosed bank-owned properties to middle-class and working class families at low purchase prices and low interest rates. Support the approach with the expansion of housing counselors nationwide through the investment of \$500 million in housing counseling agencies that help delinquent borrowers work with loan servicers to secure more affordable mortgages. A report by the Urban Institute states that borrowers facing foreclosure are 60% more likely to hold onto their homes if they receive counseling and loan modifications with average monthly payments a mere \$454 lower than those who did not see counselors.
- 3. Eliminate Proposed QRM Rule:** Eliminate the proposed Qualified Residential Mortgage (QRM) rule, which seeks to increase the down payment for home purchases, up to 30 percent. QRM would lock out the middle-class from the housing market and relegate it to long term renter-status. If enacted, QRM would exclude hundreds of thousands of creditworthy homebuyers from the dream of homeownership.
- 4. Prudent FHA Reform:** Ensure that efforts to reform the Federal Housing Administration (FHA) which extends loans to low-to-moderate income individuals, are thoughtful and prudent. FHA kept the housing market afloat during the height of the financial crisis, serving as the principal source of home loans for minorities. Future changes must take into account the low-to-moderate income individuals the program was designed to serve.
- 5. Responsible GSE Reforms:** Reforms to Government Sponsored Enterprises (GSEs), i.e., Fannie Mac and Freddie Mae (Fannie and Freddie), must not alter the prominent role that GSEs play in the housing finance industry. Reforms must

protect Fannie's and Freddie's government status, maintain their role in providing mortgage backed securities, provide compulsory homeownership counseling and protect homeowners from deceptive and abusive practices.

- 6. Stimulate innovation in Urban Communities through an Urban Innovation Bank:** Ensure that the funding evaluation criteria utilize location, job creation and diversity of the team for project funding. Complementary methods for facilitating innovation and investment in urban communities should be employed as well, such as including a carried interest preference for urban community investment and changing Basel III liquidity requirements so as to encourage large banks to lend for longer term financing.
- 7. Expand Small Business Lending:** By (1) Reducing the SBA Community Express loan interest rate to 1%, targeted for businesses located in areas where local unemployment exceeds the state average; (2) Establishing an additional New Markets Tax Credits Program, targeted to loan products for small businesses who wish to borrow less than \$250,000 for start-up and expansion; (3) Being consistent with President Obama's proposed FY2014 SBA budget proposal, waiving loan fees for 7a loans under \$150,000; and (4) Establishing a mezzanine-financing vehicle that provides debt and equity financing for growing minority-owned companies that commit to job growth or to companies located in distressed areas that commit to hiring residents of distressed areas.
- 8. Pass the Harkin-Miller Fair Minimum Wage Act:** Since the majority of jobs created since the recession have been in low-wage occupations, raising the minimum wage is important to slowing the trend toward growing wage inequality. The current federal minimum wage is \$7.25. However, if minimum wage had kept up with inflation since 1968, it would be \$10.59 today. The White House has proposed raising minimum wage to \$9 per hour by 2015 and indexing it to inflation thereafter. However, The Harkin-Miller Fair Minimum Wage Act of 2013 is more generous – proposing a minimum wage increase to \$10.10 per hour by 2015 and also indexing it to inflation thereafter. We support the higher increase proposed

in the Harkin-Miller Fair Minimum Wage Act, which would result in 30 million people receiving a raise, nearly half of whom would be people of color.

- 9. Increase the Federal Procurement Goals for Small- and Minority-Owned Businesses and the Requirement of a Subcontracting Plan:** Establish a non-federal monitoring system which would ensure that each agency is working toward these goals. We recommend that monitoring should be performed by an independent non-profit or for-profit firm that has experience in the oversight of public procurement programs for small and minority business owners. This will provide an impartial overview of the program activities and can provide recommendations on how to make the program more effective if necessary.
- 10. Unbundle Contracts to Allow More Small-and-Minority-Owned Businesses to Have the Opportunity to Bid on Federal Contracts:** This begins with defining the contract amounts at which unbundling will take place and defining what a small business concern is to clarify size standards. To this end, we would recommend language stating that the small business size standards shall be those that have been set by the U.S. Small Business Administration and should be published on its website for public viewing.
- 11. Simplify the Registration Process for Becoming Eligible for Government Contracts:** By: (1) Setting up the Central Contractor Registration (CCR) system so that if a business is entered in this registry at www.CCR.gov, its information would automatically be updated in other systems and (2) Clarifying which certifications, registration numbers and NAICS codes are necessary.
- 12. Invest in Expanded Entrepreneurship Training Provided by Community-Based Organizations that Provide Direct Business Management Services:** Analysis of Kauffman Firm Survey data showed that black-owned firms were more likely to receive assistance sponsored by the SBA or a non-profit

association for small businesses (16.4% and 15.5%, respectively)¹.

13. No Cuts to Social Security Benefits: A safe secure retirement and the protection of the income of American families from losses due to disability or death begin with insuring there are no cuts in the benefit structure of Social Security.

14. Promote Efforts to Increase Americans' Retirement Income: More than 40 percent of Americans' wealth was wiped out as a result of the financial crisis. More than 50 percent of Americans, ages 30 and over, are not financially prepared for retirement. Individuals, ages 55 – 64, have a median retirement account of only \$120,000, totaling only \$575.00 per month. There is a \$6.6 trillion gap between the amount of retirement income Americans have saved and the amount that they need to save to retire comfortably. We must educate individuals and families of the importance of saving for retirement and urge the federal government to create additional tax incentives for employers to automatically enroll their employees and increase the amount they deposit into their retirement plans.

15. Expand Individual Savings Accounts Program: Expand HHS program for Individual Savings Accounts to persons/families that participate in and complete post-secondary education, federally-funded training and self-sufficiency programs, with the ISA accounts to be utilized specifically for home ownership.

16. Simplify the Tax Code to Make It More Equitable for Low-to-Moderate-Income Individuals: Tax reform efforts must raise revenues and preserve and enhance the tax incentives that allow low-to-moderate income individuals and families the opportunity to build assets and move up in social class. The mortgage interest deduction, charitable interest deduction and earned income tax credits, must remain in place to fulfill this

¹ *State of Urban Business 2011: Metro Areas that Lead the Way*, National Urban League, December 2011.

goal. We support a lower corporate tax rate that creates greater access to high paying jobs.

- 17. Fix the Safety-Net, End Disparities:** We support a higher federal standard for state-based safety-net programs. Evidence is clear – disparities in state based safety-net programs create huge differences in social mobility across America. Because the state based safety-net programs are least generous in states with high shares of African Americans, the result is that African Americans receive the least help when we become ill and lose income because of a job related accident or because the economy is not producing jobs.

Policies on Workforce development and Equal Opportunity

- 18. Urban Jobs Act:** Enact the Urban Jobs Act (S. 655/H.R. 1340) as incorporated in the Workforce Investment Act of 2013 (S.1356) passed by the Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions on July 31, 2013. The Urban Jobs Act would provide federal funding to nonprofit organizations, allowing them to carry out programming to prepare youth for employment, particularly those who have dropped out of high school or have been subject to the criminal justice process.
- 19. Equal Employment for All Act:** Eliminate the misuse of credit background checks by passing the Equal Employment for All Act.
- 20. Protect Right to Organize:** Federal Labor laws must protect the right of employees to organize and bargain collectively for fair wages and benefits.
- 21. Summer Youth Jobs Program Restoration:** Restore the Summer Youth Jobs Program as a stand-alone program employing five million teens through a new investment of \$5-7 billion. This is critical to the future of the American workforce because lack of early labor market experience has significant effects on future earnings and productivity. Under the Workforce Investment Act (WIA), the summer jobs program

lost its status as a stand-alone program with its own dedicated funding and instead became one of 10 programs that states could elect to fund using the WIA funds designated for youth services. In addition, WIA required year-round participation in order for disadvantaged youth to be eligible to participate during the summer. This requirement increased the cost considerably and severely limited the number of participants.

22. Implement Strategic and Effective Workforce

Development Policies Targeting Americans Most in Need:

The long overdue reauthorization of the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) has led to the reduction of investment in our nation's workforce, especially those programs that train unskilled and low-skilled adults and youth who have little attachment to the labor force, and older workers whose jobs will have been lost to the recent recession.

Strategic and effective workforce development requires:

- Public/private investments and partnerships in our workforce development system targeted to low income communities;
- Direct federal funding to nonprofit national or regional intermediary organizations that have multistate community-based affiliate networks with demonstrated expertise and effectiveness in workforce development;
- Intensive services in basic education, pre-employment and skills training for high growth and emerging industry jobs of the 21st century;
- Equal access to pre-apprenticeship programs that facilitate better access to unions and higher paying jobs;
- Mandatory inclusion of community-based organizations on all State and Local Workforce Investment Boards or any other local governing mechanism that may be established by WIA;
- A reauthorized WIA must include conflict of interest provisions to prevent Workforce Investment Boards from functioning as direct service providers in competition with local community based providers.
- Wrap-around services to address other barriers to employment beyond the lack of skills.

23. Develop New Job Training Models Coupled with Job Placement: Job training programs must provide two services – 1) a full suite of skills that match the needs of employers, and 2) assisting successfully trained jobseekers with job placement. Partnerships between business, vocational education providers and community intermediaries are essential to addressing all the individual characteristics contributing to successful employment.

24. Apprenticeship Model Reform: Reform the old apprenticeship model to fit today's needs by including tax incentives for employers offering apprenticeships and utilizing community intermediaries to connect hard-to-reach workers with available opportunities.

25. Curtail Labor Market Discrimination: Make stronger efforts to eliminate labor market discrimination, including the restoration of affirmative action in both the private and public workplace and vigilant enforcement of Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Preparation for work is meaningless if qualified workers are denied jobs due to race and gender discrimination.

LEGISLATIVE POLICY PRIORITIES & RECOMMENDATIONS: EDUCATION

Policies to Obtain Equitable Resources and College and Career Ready Standards

- 26. Maintain and expand resources provided through Title I in ESEA:** Publicly report data in a transparent and easy-to-understand manner that is easily accessible to all stakeholders, including families, students and teachers.
- 27. Align with Common Core State Standards:** By requiring all high school standards, curriculum and instruction to be aligned with common core state standards, all students can be adequately prepared for college, work and life. States that have adopted such standards should provide the teacher training, technological infrastructure and student supports necessary to meet the promise of these standards.
- 28. Create Focused Legislation:** On the expansion of safe school environments and reporting data on school discipline and school climate.
- 29. Reauthorize Elementary and Secondary Education Act:** With key priorities including parental involvement and Title VI Compliance.
- 30. Promote Diversity and Integration Requirements:** Towards the elimination of racial disparities in school disciplinary policies.
- 31. Ensure Access to Early Childhood Education for Each Child:** Children from low and middle-income families should have access to high-quality early learning opportunities. Universal Pre-K should be made available in all states.
- 32. Invest in Strategies that Support Parents in Creating Language-Rich Environments:** Expand and replicate quality programs and provide professional development for child care workers.

33. Align data systems across early childhood, K-12 and workforce.

34. Federal Funding for Head Start and Early Head Start:

Funding must not only be maintained but increased during all budget negotiations and efforts must be made to improve the quality of Head Start and Early Head Start to meet the needs of 21st century children.

We also support the following:

35. Inclusion of the ESEA Fiscal Fairness Act in any ESEA bill (Rep. Chaka Fattah).

36. Positive Behavior for Safe and Effective Schools Act (Rep. Danny Davis).

37. Successful, Safe and Healthy Students Act (Sen. Tom Harkin).

38. Upholding of Principles Adopted by White House Blueprint on Early Education.

Invest in Innovation and Scale-Up Effective Programs

39. Provision of Academic Supports. Must provide academic supports for all students to overcome barriers to learning and teaching, integrate innovation and research-based methods to re-engage students especially for those students at risk for dropping out of school.

40. Pass the Project Ready STEM Act (Rep. Marcia Fudge):

Also focus on policies that expand access to programs that fully prepare students for jobs of the future, including exposure to STEM fields and careers.

41. White House Initiative on Educational Excellence for

African Americans: Must identify existing support programs and seek to replicate and bring to scale.

Strategic Investments and Support for HBCUs

- 42. Reform Higher Education Funding:** By adopting federal and states policies of investing more public dollars, including institutional aid, campus-based student financial aid, and research dollars in those institutions educating disproportionate percentages of the growing student populations: lower-income, first generation, underrepresented minority students and families.
- 43. Reform Student Aid:** To encourage the wealthiest colleges and universities with the lowest percentages of low income students to enroll, retain and graduate more diverse, low-income students by more clearly defining those institutions at which a low-income student may use a Pell grant, and not excluding the wealthiest institutions in America, which often have lower levels of student diversity.
- 44. Promise Zones:** Incentivizing governors and state legislatures around the nation to act to establish promise zones around HBCU and MSI campuses and the campuses of other colleges and universities that educate disproportionate percentages of low income, traditionally underrepresented students. The difference in the pre-and-post zone tax base would be awarded to the institutions in the zone for need-based student financial aid and other purposes.
- 45. Loan Interest Rate Caps:** Capping student and parent loan interest rates on subsidized Stafford student loans, Parent Plus loans and other government loans to a reasonable percentage above the rate at which the government borrows the funds in the bond market. This will help students who desire to attend college to not be deterred by high interest rates and prohibitive student debt. This proposal will assist 7.4 million student borrowers and parent borrowers.
- 46. Modernize and Enhance the Workforce Investment Act:** By equipping HBCUs and MSIs to continue and enhance their

role in training and placing chronically unemployed and hard to employ persons in gainful employment.

47. Enhance the Entrepreneurial Ecosystem of the African-American Community: Through HBCU and PBI regional centers of entrepreneurship and technology transfer.

48. Higher Education Act Reauthorization (Pell Shortfall and Financial Aid Reform) – Support programs that reduce the financial burden created by a college education.

49. Affirmative Action: With challenges in court and lack of full enforcement through the agencies, we propose the following:
(1) More thorough enforcement of Executive Order 11246 and
(2) Public education campaign starting with the White House in support of affirmative action policies.

We also support the following:

50. Reform and Technical Adjustments to the HBCU Capitol Financing Program.

LEGISLATIVE POLICY PRIORITIES & RECOMMENDATIONS: VOTING RIGHTS

- 51. Restore and Fix the Voting Rights Act:** By enacting legislation to effectively prevent and deter discriminatory voting changes from taking force, including creating a new Section 4.
- 52. Prevent Voter Suppression:** By (1) Challenging unnecessarily restrictive voter identifications, registration and proof of citizenship laws; (2) Continuing to challenge the disenfranchisement of eligible voters and overuse of provisional ballots; and Dispelling voter fraud assumptions in the African American community by combating all forms of deceptive practices.
- 53. Secure Full Voting Representation:** In Congress and full democracy for the residents of the District of Columbia.

We also support the following:

- 54. Restoration of voting rights to individuals with past criminal convictions.**

Policies to Modernize Our Nation's Voting System and Protect against Deceptive and Intimidation Practices

- 55. Modernize Voter Registration through Universal and Permanent Voter Registration of All Eligible Americans:** By congressional adoption of uniform ballot designs and efforts to ensure voter registration at VA facilities, as well as improve electronic voting and support the expansion of early voting.
- 56. Military/Overseas Voter Policies:** Adopt policies that ease the burdens on military/oversees voters.
- 57. Improve the Election Administration Process:** By challenging inadequate and unequal administration of elections.

58. Support Election Protection Efforts: By preventing improper purging of minority voters and ensuring minority communities are afforded the opportunity to engage in the redistricting process.

We also support the following:

59. Passage of the “Deceptive Practices and Voter Intimidation Prevention Act.”

LEGISLATIVE POLICY PRIORITIES & RECOMMENDATIONS: HEALTH

Policies to Ensure Access to Coverage

- 60. Support the Implementation of the Affordable Care Act (ACA):** The Affordable Care Act promotes opportunity for millions of uninsured persons obtain health insurance, and ultimately, will result in making health care itself more affordable. This, in turn, alleviates the severe financial burdens that fall on the uninsured, which have a disproportionate negative impact on communities of color, low-income persons, and other disadvantaged populations. In order for the new law to adequately address health disparities, federal and state funds must be directed toward the full implementation of the law.
- 61. Protect ACA Implementation Funds and Medicare:** As the ACA is implemented and Congress seeks to address budget shortfalls, it is important to ensure that any proposed changes do not limit federal funding for the full implementation of the ACA. Additionally, budget negotiations must not impose burdensome costs on seniors with limited resources or weaken Medicare's ability to effectively negotiate prices and control costs.
- 62. Clear and Accessible Enrollment:** Ensure implementation of strong health insurance exchanges, both in the states and federally. The HHS Center for Consumer Information and Insurance Oversight (CCIO) should issue guidance to facilitate successful adoption among underserved and vulnerable populations, such as meaningful access and plain language standards, processes for eligibility determination appeals, and navigator and other consumer assistance training standards. New enrollment systems for state-based exchanges are comprehensive, culturally and linguistically appropriate and easily accessible.
- 63. Increasing Minority Health Professionals:** An important component of addressing health disparities is to also ensure quality care provided by a diverse healthcare workforce. We

recommend strengthening and expanding critical health workforce programs aimed at increasing the pipeline of underserved and diverse populations in the health professions -- including the Health Careers Opportunities Program (HCOP), Area Health Education Centers (AHEC) and other Title VII and Title VIII Workforce programs.

64. Advocate for All States to Expand Medicaid: As part of the Affordable Care Act, Congress expanded Medicaid to cover 15.1 million more adults. The White House estimates that up to 6.8 million African Americans will receive health coverage through the Medicaid expansion and new Affordable Insurance Exchanges. In late June 2013, the Supreme Court ruled that Congress cannot compel states to expand coverage and many governors have indicated that they will not accept federal funds to cover more individuals through this Medicaid expansion. States that choose not to expand Medicaid will affect the coverage of millions of Americans. Currently, 10 state governors have publicly declared that they will not participate in the Medicaid expansion or have made statements that imply they will not participate. If all 10 of these states below do not participate in the Medicaid expansion, the health coverage of almost 5 million Americans will be at risk.

65. Incentivize Medicaid Expansion for All States: Medicaid is a major source of health care for African Americans. It is estimated that the 3.8 million African Americans who would otherwise be uninsured will gain coverage by 2016 through the expansion of Medicaid eligibility and the creation of Affordable Insurance Exchanges under the Affordable Care Act. As states seek to implement the expansion of Medicaid and other states resist expanding the program to 133% of the federal poverty level, it is important for the federal government to create incentives for expansion, guarantee the federal match or FMAP and continue to provide confidence to states about the Medicaid provider reimbursement rate as set out in the law. In turn for this confidence from the federal government, the states must guarantee that the expansion will cover single, childless adults, which is particularly important considering the high rates of unemployed African American males (17.8% for 2011).

66. Enrollment Campaigns Targeting Minorities: States seeking to develop enrollment plans or those states that have applied and receive funding from the HHS Exchange Establishment Grants to do enrollment work must develop strong outreach campaigns that include community-based organizations with credibility among targeted and vulnerable populations that are less likely to enroll. States must pursue meaningful engagement and community representation by stakeholder organizations that serve & represent low-income and minority populations in the development of state-based health exchanges and accountable care organizations.

67. Promoting Community-Based Prevention Efforts: The Affordable Care Act will impact the number of individuals in need that can be served by community-based organizations. Community-based organizations are instrumental in helping to expand access to prevention and wellness services, coordinate access to appropriate health care services and connect individuals to medical homes and insurance coverage. The health care reform law emphasizes local-level efforts and offers several new and federal grant programs. It is imperative that these new funds are targeted to the most vulnerable populations and those local community-based organizations with demonstrated experience working in underserved communities. There is a need for prevention policies that increase research for diseases adversely impacting communities of color and to support wellness policies that increase access to physical fitness and mental health services.

68. CBOs as Patient Navigators: Community-based organizations must benefit from the full funding of the ACA Patient Navigator provision - Section 3510 which reauthorizes Section 340a of the PHSA, the Patient Navigator and Chronic Disease Prevention grants, reauthorized through 2015. As states establish health care exchanges, states must contract with existing CBOs currently serving the African American community to serve as navigators. To assist with prevention efforts, Congress must appropriate funds for the Community Health Worker provision, Section 5313, 10501(c).

69. Priority for CTG Grants with Racial and Ethnic

Interventions: ACA Community Transformation Grants (Section 4201) supports evidence-based community-based activities to promote health and prevent chronic diseases. This discretionary program has received funding through the Prevention and Public Health Fund, appropriated at \$145 million in FY2011. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services must issue clarifying guidance for the program's eligibility requirements that establishes a rating system that provides for balanced and equitable criteria for evaluating applications for CTG funding and that provides for racial and ethnic specific interventions at the community level.

70. Reducing Costs through Integration of Services:

Strategically integrate health care interventions with existing community-based interventions provided by local CBOs that connect local residents to services such as TANF, SNAP, job training and other programs.

71. Reduce Food Insecurity: Food insecurity and the inability to access healthy food options affect health outcomes. African Americans are disproportionately affected by poverty and food insecurity and are more likely to be overweight or obese, as compared to other populations. We support the expansion of SNAP for families not making a living wage and other programs that help families access food. We also support the development of policy solutions and community interventions that create healthy environments for communities of color, including grants to grow food in places that are deemed food deserts on tracts of land not slated for development.

72. Create Meaningful Legislation Aimed at Solving the

Climate Crisis: More and more people are feeling the impacts of global warming, from UV damage to poor air quality, and its subsequent health effects.

**LEGISLATIVE POLICY PRIORITIES &
RECOMMENDATIONS:
CRIMINAL JUSTICE REFORM & SAFE
COMMUNITES**

- 73. Prison Reform and End Mass Incarceration:** Identify policies directed toward reducing the federal and state prison populations, local jail populations, and overall correctional populations.
- 74. Death Penalty:** Reject legislation that has a disproportionate impact on communities of color, including bills that subject more people to the death penalty.
- 75. Ex-Offender Programs:** Address the need for development of programs to educate and employ ex-offenders (e.g. tax incentives to employers or opportunities for trade jobs).
- 76. Oppose Any Bill that Would Create or Increase the Use of Mandatory Minimum Sentences:** This type of legislation would undermine efforts to reduce over incarceration at the federal level. Sentences for federal crimes are often harsh and lengthy, due to the various mandatory sentences.
- 77. Support Legislation that Would Eliminate and Lower Mandatory Minimum Sentences and Increase Judicial Discretion:** Bipartisan federal legislation such as the Smarter Sentencing Act of 2013 and the Justice Safety Valve Act of 2013, if passed would allow judges to use more discretion to determine sentences for low level non-violent drug offenses among other things.
- 78. Address Gun Violence on a Comprehensive Level with the Elimination of the School to Prison Pipeline:** Which leads to more children of color in the justice system and potential victims and or perpetrators of gun violence.
- 79. Pass the End Racial Profiling Act:** Racial profiling continues to be a significant issue for millions of Americans who are

subject to profiling based on their race, ethnicity, religion, or national origin. Ensure greater federal oversight of federal and local police in order to end racial profiling.

80. The Department of Justice Should Issue Strengthened Guidance to Law Enforcement on Racial Profiling and Excessive Force: The Department of Justice needs to review its 2003 Guidance Regarding the Use of Race by Federal Law Enforcement Agencies and update it with language that will allow any loopholes that would permit law enforcement to engage in racial profiling.

81. Reform the Juvenile Justice System through Reauthorization of the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act (JJDP): Create systematic reform of the juvenile justice system and hold it more accountable, particularly for youth of color who receive harsher treatment and tougher sentences.

We also support the following:

82. Provisions for increased rehabilitation and education of youth in order to have safer and better communities.

83. Provisions for community-based alternatives to incarceration.

Policies and Programs to Secure Safe Communities and Schools

84. School Guidance and Counseling Programs: Guidance and counseling programs should be integrated into the entire education system, pre-K through higher education. Such programs should be provided through a maximum counselor/student ratio of 1:250 by appropriately certified and/or licensed school counselors who have been trained to support students in realizing their full potential in all areas of growth and achievement. School counselors should spend at least 80 percent of their time providing guidance and counseling services to students.

85. Safe and Orderly School Climates and Communities: A safe and effective school climate is necessary for promoting educational excellence in public schools. All education employees, parents/guardians, students, school governing boards, and community members and agencies must work cooperatively to establish and maintain safe and orderly school communities.

86. Controlled Access: All school buildings should have controlled access during the school day. Schools and school districts should implement policies and procedures that monitor visitor access, such as check-in and wearing of identification badges.

87. School Emergency Plans: Schools, school districts, and school transportation systems must have written plans that delineate procedures that include, but are not limited to, emergencies, lockdowns, violence, evacuations, and weather-related conditions. Plans must include rapid reaction criteria and procedures coordinated with on-campus, community, and other appropriate first responders. School personnel and parents/guardians in partnership must develop emergency plans for each school site with the community. For these plans to be effective they must be practiced and updated on a regular and consistent basis. Plans must include stress management/counseling strategies as follow-up care for students and staff when appropriate.

88. Gun-Free Schools and the Regulation of Deadly Weapons: All students and education employees must be allowed to learn and work in an environment free of unauthorized guns and other deadly weapons. Severe penalties should be enacted and strenuously enforced for criminal actions involving guns and other deadly weapons, especially in school settings, and for those who profit from the illegal sale, importation, and distribution of these weapons. Individuals who bring guns or deadly weapons to school should be excluded from school and school grounds until undergoing mandatory prescribed intervention.

- 89. Strict Prescriptive Regulations:** Are necessary for the manufacture, importation, distribution, sale and resale of handguns and ammunition magazines.
- 90. Ban Automatic and Military-Style Semiautomatic Assault Weapons:** The possession by the private sector of automatic weapons and military-style semiautomatic assault weapons should be illegal, except for historical and collection purposes, which must be strictly regulated. A mandatory background check and a mandatory waiting period should occur prior to the sale of all firearms.
- 91. Responsible Gun Ownership:** Gun owners should participate in educational programs that stress responsible ownership, including safe use and storage of guns.
- 92. Care of Persons with Mental Health Disorders:** It is society's responsibility to provide quality care for persons suffering from diagnosed mental health disorders. Such persons should have access, as needed, to primary hospital care, outpatient services, necessary medication, social services, and housing in the least restrictive environment. Financial assistance for such care should be based upon the ability of the individual to pay.