

THE

# LEGISLATOR

ANNUAL LEGISLATIVE CONFERENCE EDITION

THE OFFICIAL MAGAZINE OF THE NATIONAL BLACK CAUCUS OF STATE LEGISLATORS

The Future is

# NOW!

MEETING CHALLENGES AND  
CREATING OPPORTUNITIES



**NBCSL**  
National Black  
Caucus of State  
Legislators

[www.nbcsl.org](http://www.nbcsl.org)

WINTER 2023



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Atiba Madyun  
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Newsletter Design:  
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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

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- 3** Letter from the President
- 5** Letter from the President Elect
- 6** Letter from Senator Raumesh Akbari
- 7** Letter from Chief Executive Officer
- 8** Letter from TBCSL Chairman Sam McKenzie
- 9** Letter from Nashville Mayor Freddie O'Connell
- 10** NBCSL Highlights: Legislators on the Move
- 13** NBCSL Presidents
- 14** Historic Firsts
- 16** Obesity: A Silently Growing Epidemic
- 20** The Future of Summer Nutrition is Here Today. But Only If We Act Now.
- 22** Quality Early Childhood Education Reduces Crime and Gun Violence in Communities
- 24** ENOUGH—It's Time to Fix the Six and End Campus Racism
- 28** Anything Banned Becomes a Policing Issue: Why the FDA Menthol Ban Is Not Good for Communities of Color
- 30** Hip-Hop and Cannabis: Profit, Paradox, and Policy
- 33** Parole Assumes that Change is Possible
- 36** Too Much Talking and Not Enough Action
- 38** Our Progress, Our Future Opportunity LIVES Here
- 40** Work Needed to Close the Digital Divide
- 42** Connecticut Baby Bonds: Fulfilling the Opportunity Promise
- 44** Banks Employ Fintech to Reach More Consumers with Better Products
- 48** Combating Cash Bail Misinformation
- 50** The All-Encompassing Actions of Legislative Procedures and its Jarring Results
- 52** An Opportunity for a More Equitable Clean Energy Transition
- 54** Let's Take Aim At LDL-C!

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**STAY IN TOUCH:**



@NBCSL77

NBCSLNews

444 North Capitol Street NW  
Suite 622  
Washington, DC 20001



## TO OUR READERS

Dear Reader,

This special conference edition of *The Legislator* has articles around education, small business, energy, cannabis, broadband, mass incarceration, gun violence, finance and banking.

We hope you will find them informative and share them with your colleagues and networks. There are articles from several legislators about the great work going on in their states.

Our magazine gives the public an opportunity to learn about the work our state legislators, corporate partners, and advocacy organizations are doing with a specific focus on advancing policies that create equitable opportunities for all Americans.

Sincerely,

NBCSL Editorial Team



## FROM THE PRESIDENT



Dear Readers and Conference Attendees,

I am delighted to welcome you to our 47th Annual Legislative Conference and greet you in this special conference edition of our magazine, *The Legislator*!

During this first year as president of NBCSL, we have experienced so much.

Across this country, we have seen, Black state legislators disrespected in their chambers—our very own Representatives Justin Jones and Justin Pearson—experienced a great disservice by their peers in the Tennessee State House for speaking out against gun violence. In Maryland, House Speaker Adrienne A. Jones was told by a colleague to “take a seat” on the House floor. These events mentioned are just a few, and we recognize that there is an attempt to silence voices of Black lawmakers in our state legislatures. We will not be silenced. It is our duty to not only assure that our voices as lawmakers are heard, but to make certain the voices of the American people are heard.

As a retired educator, the education of our students, especially students of color is something I hold near to my heart. I was disappointed but not surprised to learn that between the years 1987 and 2020, our 1890 land-grant institutions Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) had experienced an over \$12 billion disparity in funding. As state legislators, we must work to ensure that funding to our state schools, including land-grant institutions, are protected and receive adequate funding to operate as holistically as their PWI counterparts. Many of us are products of HBCUs and would not hold the positions we occupy without the values and lessons from our beloved institutions.

This year, we continue to move forward, yet recognize that our future is NOW. We are stepping out to meet the challenges that we are faced with and creating opportunities to excel in policymaking and partnership building.

NBCSL has had a successful year thus far. We have had the opportunity to partner with Lilly, Amazon, and EdChoice, which you will read about in this issue. Through Lilly, NBCSL was able to hold its first Health Forum focusing on obesity and mental health and their effects on the Black community. Amazon sponsored a leadership summit for our staffers and Black Caucus executive directors to make certain legislators have the best staff to support them in serving their constituents. We were able to travel to the Sunshine State to partake in an education policy summit powered by EdChoice to discuss the national secondary school education landscape and learn about education options available to Black students in different parts of the country.

We are on the move, and I am elated for you to read about it in this issue of *The Legislator*. I also look forward to you reading all the great initiatives our legislators have been working on, as well as the issues and industries our corporate partners work so hard on each day. It is my hope this issue will serve as a conversation starter and a means for legislators and stakeholders to come together to enact change through policy.

Thank you for your continued support of NBCSL.

Happy Reading!

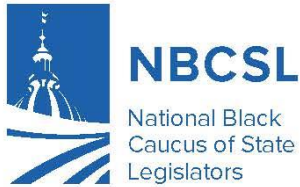
Sincerely,

Laura Hall (AL)  
President  
National Black Caucus of State Legislators









THE VOICE FOR THE STATES™

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**Lakimba DeSadier**  
*Interim Chief Executive Officer*

**Greetings!**

I am honored to welcome you to the great City of Nashville, Tennessee for the 47<sup>th</sup> Annual Legislative Conference which will convene November 27 through December 1, 2023 sponsored by the National Black Caucus of State Legislators! The theme of this year's conference is "The Future Is Now! Meeting Challenges and Creating Opportunities. Of special note this is the first return to Nashville since the Inaugural NBCSL Conference in 1977.

The conference agenda is designed to better equip our members to be effective in representing their constituents. It is my hope that all who attend will have their knowledge base increased by the information presented.

In addition, the activities of the youth conference will provide intentional leadership training for young people that will hopefully, result in them staying engaged in advocacy and possibly pursuing a career in public service. Thanks to the members of the NBCSL Corporate RoundTable for your support of this conference. We appreciate your efforts to help ensure that NBCSL members are informed of issues that are important to our Nation's businesses and workers. We look forward to continuing the mutually beneficial relationship fostered through our continued collaboration.

Finally, thank you to the Tennessee Host Committee members of the Tennessee Black Caucus of State Legislators, legislative staff and the entire conference planning team for pulling together an exciting and informative annual legislative conference

In service,

**Harold M. Love, Jr., Ph.D.**  
**President-Elect**





29th Senatorial District  
Shelby County

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## Tennessee State Senate

### COMMITTEES

EDUCATION  
COMMERCE & LABOR  
ETHICS  
JUVENILE JUSTICE

### RAUMESH A. AKBARI Senate Minority Leader

Welcome to the 47th Annual Legislative Conference of the National Black Caucus of State Legislators in beautiful Nashville, Tennessee. It is my absolute honor to serve as co-chair of our annual convening along with NBCSL President-Elect Rep. Harold M. Love, Jr. Over the next few days, we will connect with colleagues from across the country, learn about the latest developments in public policy, hear from a dynamic group of speakers, and hopefully have a lot of fun while doing it!

It is with great pride that the Tennessee Black Caucus of State Legislators serves as the host state, and we are thankful for the support of all of our partners. There are exciting events planned for the conference, with a refocus on the history and legacy of NBCSL and how it impacts our standing in the future. This year, we will celebrate the 10<sup>th</sup> Rep. Lois M. DeBerry Prayer Breakfast with a tribute to honor the life and legacy of Rep. DeBerry. As the host state where Rep. DeBerry served in the legislature for almost 50 years, this is a particularly special moment.

This is my tenth year as a member of the National Black Caucus of State Legislators, and I am proud and often in awe of the hardworking, dedicated, and thoughtful servant-based leadership of our members. From my first Annual Legislative Conference in Memphis in 2013, I have felt a part of the NBCSL family, an organization that has not only equipped me with the policy tools to succeed in the legislature, but the strength to know that there are legislators that look like me across this country working for change. As we approach the 50<sup>th</sup> year of NBCSL, let us do so with a commitment to our future and a reverence for our legacy.

Thank you for attending the 47<sup>th</sup> Annual Legislative Conference and I hope you leave Nashville with a renewed spirit, an inspired soul, and ready to tackle the challenges of the next legislative session.

In Love and Solidarity,

Raumesh Akbari  
Senate Minority Leader  
District 29, Shelby County  
Tennessee General Assembly

CAPITOL HILL OFFICE

425 Rep. John Lewis Way North, Suite 764, Nashville, TN 37243 (615) 741-1767; FAX (615) 253-0357

## FROM THE CEO



Dear Readers and Conference Attendees,

Welcome to our special conference edition of *The Legislator*, being released here during our 47th Annual Legislative Conference in Nashville, Tennessee where in 1977, the National Black Caucus of State Legislators (NBCSL) convened its first annual legislative conference.

Nashville is also the location where earlier this year, a mass shooting tragically claimed the lives of innocent students, teachers and school employees. In the aftermath of that shooting two African American members of the Tennessee House of Representatives, Justin Jones and Justin Pearson, were removed from that body for showing support for gun reform advocates in Tennessee. Once they were both eventually righteously reinstated, we heard loud and clear their voice of reason and continued support for meaningful reform. They are a reminder that a new generation of leaders around the country are carrying the legacy of our founding members who are recognized on a national level, recognizing their voices are louder together.

In 1972, one of NBCSL's founding members, Mrs. Lois DeBerry, a woman frustrated by her experience working as a counselor on a federally funded project, decided to run for elected office. She defeated four male candidates, earning the right to represent the 91st District, and connected with other leaders like herself at the Ponchartrain Hotel in Detroit, Michigan. Similar to Representative DeBerry, many of the members in attendance at the convention were the first African Americans to hold office, or leadership positions in their state.

Over the course of her legislative career, she became the first African American woman elected to be Speaker Pro Tempore of a state legislative House of Representatives. As a founding member of NBCSL, she went on to become the organization's first woman president. In conjunction with her state's legislative Black Caucus, she hosted the first NBCSL conference in Nashville, Tennessee.

This example of two generations of Tennessee lawmakers embodies the ideal that NBCSL members are a part of history every day in states across America. Members are still breaking barriers, opening the way for others by shaping public policy.

*The Legislator* magazine is a resource for our members and partners to share the policy work they are doing in their individual states. Decades ago, our members pushed for sanctions on South Africa at the height of the movement to end apartheid. Today, members are on the frontline protecting women's right to choose, healthcare, education, pushing for gun reform, pay equity, and opportunities for minority businesses.

To our members and partners: thank you for your steadfast commitment to making our nation a more perfect Union by ensuring that the lives of your constituents are at the forefront of your public policy efforts.

To our Corporate Round Table (CRT) and Labor Round Table (LRT) members: thank you for your support of NBCSL's efforts to address social justice and inequities. We hope you find in the pages of this magazine information about the worthwhile work our members and partners are doing around the country.

Best,

LaKimba DeSadier  
Interim Chief Executive Officer  
National Black Caucus of State Legislators





## Tennessee Black Caucus of State Legislators

Cordell Hull Building, Suite 512  
Nashville, Tennessee. 37243  
Office: (615) 741-0768

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District 15*

**Rep. Jesse Chism**

*Vice-Chairman, Memphis  
District 85*

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*Secretary, Memphis, District  
91*

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*Treasurer, Nashville, District 54*

**Rep. Yusuf Hakeem**

*Parliamentarian, Chattanooga  
District 28*

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*Nashville - District 19*

**Rep. Justin Jones**

*Nashville - District 52*

**Rep. Justin J. Pearson**

*Memphis - District 86*

Members of NBCSL and Distinguished Guests,

Greetings from the Tennessee Black Caucus of State Legislators (TBCSL)! The term “unprecedented” has, over the last two years, been constantly used when describing our current worldwide state of affairs and I cannot find a more suitable term!

What an exciting and challenging time as we prepare for our Annual Legislative Conference here in the Capitol City of Nashville. Our members have done an outstanding job preparing for this year’s meeting—our first meeting here since the Inaugural Conference in 1977. This City is vibrant, and while we have a full slate of activities on our agenda, we encourage you to explore our beautiful city! I thank each of you from the bottom of my heart for your service during these challenging times. I remain excited to serve as Chairman of the Tennessee Black Caucus of State Legislators.

Lastly, I want to thank the entire national team and the Corporate Round Table for all that you do to support us in our elected positions. If I can be of service, do not hesitate to contact me or any TBCSL member.

Humbly Submitted,

Sam McKenzie,  
Chairman of the TBCSL



## METROPOLITAN GOVERNMENT OF NASHVILLE AND DAVIDSON COUNTY



FREDDIE O'CONNELL  
MAYOR

**A Letter of Welcome to  
The 47<sup>th</sup> Legislative Conference of the National Black Caucus  
of State Legislators**

November 8, 2023

Dear Members of the National Black Caucus of State Legislators,

It is with great honor, as Nashville's mayor, to welcome you and all members of the National Black Caucus of State Legislators (NBCSL) to our great city as you convene your 47<sup>th</sup> Annual Legislative Conference.

With over 700 elected officials across the nation, the NBCSL proudly serves as a collaborative network, advocate, and catalyst for African Americans and other marginalized communities. Most importantly, NBCSL is a leading example of our nation's potential to lead by good governance from passionate, dedicated, change-makers as yourselves.

Metro Nashville remains committed to promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion throughout its governmental function, and we will continually aim to make sure all Nashvillians feel represented, respected, and appreciated.

On behalf of the City of Nashville, I warmly welcome each of you to our city and extend my most sincere wishes for a productive and successful conference.

All my best,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Freddie O'Connell".

Freddie O'Connell  
Mayor



# NBCSL HIGHLIGHTS: LEGISLATORS ON THE MOVE



**In true NBCSL fashion, our legislators have been on the move and working on behalf of their constituents and local communities. This year, NBCSL was privileged to partner with several corporate partners to bring pertinent information to our legislators to address in their state legislatures and share with their colleagues.**

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## Western Health Forum Sponsored by Lilly

NBCSL convened a policy symposium focused on the state of health among Black Americans. The event took place in Seattle, Washington and was supported by unrestricted funds from Eli Lilly to:

1. Introduce the Public Policy and Research Institute (PPRI) and fellow (Dr. Desmond Banks) to legislators as a resource for developing legislation that will benefit Black Americans, and
2. Equip legislators with information and potential policy solutions to prevent and treat obesity and mental health.

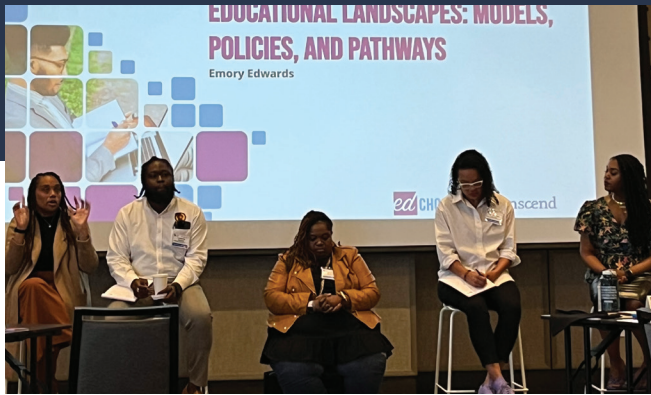
[Click here to view recap video](#)




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## President Hall in NY for US/Africa Summit

In September, President Laura Hall (AL) was invited to speak at the US-Africa Municipal and Sub-Sovereign Investors Forum in New York City. She shared how Black State Legislators in the US can contribute to the empowerment of legislators in Africa and how both can collaborate in building legislative and regulatory frameworks.



**Education Policy Summit  
Powered by EdChoice**

NBCSL hosted an Education Policy Summit—*Cultivating Young Black Minds* powered by EdChoice. This policy summit was held in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, where attendees participated in a candid discussion of the national secondary school education landscape. They discussed education options available to Black students in different parts of the country. The four-day program is designed to equip NBCSL members with information and tools to guide the assessment of current education models and evaluate new proposed models.



**NBCSL Leadership Summit  
Sponsored by Amazon**

NBCSL *Leadership Summit* sponsored by Amazon was an intense two and a half day training. Specifically targeting legislative staff, attendees heard from Caucus leaders, policy, and fundraising experts whose mission is to affect change through tactful strategizing, culture development and retention.



**Rep. Toni Rose Honored**

During the Congressional Black Caucus Foundation (CBCF) Annual Leadership Conference Week, NBCSL Financial Secretary, Representative Toni Rose (TX) was honored at *Voices of Resilience: Action to Support Children and Empower Community* for outstanding work in her community to end hunger for children in Texas.



**President Laura Hall (AL)** featured panelists on *The Courage to Teach: Fighting Back with Real Solutions for Kids and Communities Panel* at CBCF ALC 2023, sponsored by American Federation of Teachers.



**Senator Raumesh Akbari (TN)** participated in Amgen session on *Heart Health Equity*, alongside media personality, Angela Yee, at *CBCF ALC 2023*. The interactive session explored solutions to improve racial health equity and cardiovascular health.





### Senator Margie Bright Matthews and Senator Mia McLeod Recipients of the Profile in Courage Award

NBCSL members and South Carolina Senators Margie Bright Matthews and Mia McLeod, along with their colleagues Senators Sandy Senn, Penny Gustafson and Katrina Shealy, who formed a bipartisan coalition to filibuster a near-total abortion ban in their state, were recipients of the prestigious 2023 John F. Kennedy Profile in Courage Award®. The Profile in Courage Award highlights the exceptional contributions and the unwavering commitment of individuals, nationally and internationally, who risk their careers or lives by pursuing a larger vision of the national, state, or local interest. This award has only been granted 58 times in its history. Previous honorees include three United States Presidents—Barack Obama, George H.W. Bush, and Gerald Ford. Before this year, former South Carolina Governor David Beasley was the only South Carolinian ever to have received this distinction.



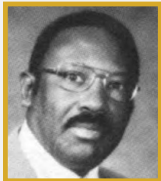
### NBCSL Participates in Joint Meeting with CBC, NOBEL Women, AAMA

NBCSL was invited by the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC) to participate in a joint meeting alongside, National Organization of Black Elected Legislative (N.O.B.E.L.) Women and African American Mayors Association (AAMA), to discuss Black political power, policy issues and strategize on ways to move our agenda forward at the federal and state levels—following up on last year's convening we were pleased to reestablish this important forum during such a critical time in our communities, states, and nation.

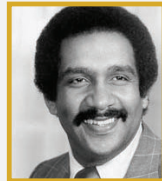


Pictured left to right: Ambassador Caroline Kennedy, Senator Margie Bright Matthews (D), Senator Katrina Shealy (R), Senator Mia McLeod (I), Senator Sandy Senn (R), and Senator Penny Gustafson (R).

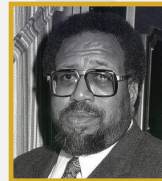
# NBCSL PRESIDENTS



**Representative  
Matthew McNeely (MI)**  
1977–1979



**Senator  
Clarence Mitchell III (MD)**  
1979–1986



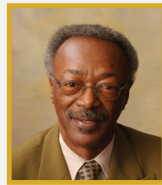
**Representative  
David P. Richardson (PA)**  
1986–1990



**Senator  
Regis Groff (CO)**  
1990–1994



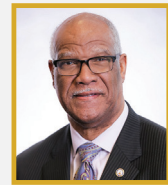
**Representative  
Lois DeBerry (TN)**  
1994–1998



**Representative  
James L. Thomas (AL)**  
1998–2002



**Representative  
Mary H. Coleman (MS)**  
2002–2006



**Representative  
Calvin Smyre (GA)**  
2006–2010



**Representative  
Barbara Ballard (KS)**  
2010–2012



**Representative  
Joe Armstrong (TN)**  
2012–2014



**Senator  
Catherine Pugh (MD)**  
2014–2016



**Representative  
Greg Porter (IN)**  
2016–2018



**Representative  
Gilda Cobb-Hunter (SC)**  
2018–2020



**Representative  
Billy Mitchell (GA)**  
2020–2022



**Representative  
Laura Hall (AL)**  
2023–Present



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# HISTORIC FIRSTS

## FROM NBCSL MEMBERS



**Cherie Buckner-Webb** is a Democratic politician from Boise, Idaho. In 2010, Buckner-Webb became the first elected African American and first African American woman in the Idaho State Legislature. After her historic win with 68.4% of the vote, she served one term in the Idaho House of Representatives, representing the north Boise-based District 19. In 2012, Buckner-Webb ran and won her district's Idaho Senate seat, succeeding the retiring Nicole LeFavour. In the Idaho Senate, Buckner-Webb was elected Democratic Caucus chair, and later served as Assistant Minority Leader.



**Neva Walker** became the first African American woman elected to the Minnesota State Legislature at 29 years old and served in the Minnesota House of Representatives, representing District 61B from 2001–2009. Walker is noted for running a grassroots election campaign that was inclusive of young people of color. Born into an activist family, she has decades of experience working with low-income youth and families of color on issues around economic and racial justice.



**Jackie Winters** (April 15, 1937–May 29, 2019) was elected to the Oregon House of Representatives in 1998 and became the first African American Republican ever to serve in the Oregon Legislative Assembly. She was re-elected to this office in 2000. She was elected to the Oregon State Senate in 2002, representing the 10<sup>th</sup> district. On November 15, 2017, Winters became the first Black legislative leader in the Oregon State Legislature when she was elected as Senate Minority Leader. Winters won re-election every year until her last election in 2018.



**Arnett Elysus Girardeau Sr.** (July 15, 1929–October 26, 2017) was the first African American, outside of Miami, to be elected to the legislature since Reconstruction. He served in the Florida House of Representatives, representing the 16<sup>th</sup> district from 1976 to 1982 and in the Florida Senate, representing the 7<sup>th</sup> district from 1982 to 1992. His great-uncle, Richard L. Brown, was a member of the Florida Legislature during Reconstruction.

# FIRST AFRICAN AMERICANS ELECTED TO THEIR RESPECTIVE STATE LEGISLATURES AND OR CHAMBERS



**Cecil Armillo Partee** (April 10, 1921–August 17, 1994) was an American attorney and politician. He was the first African American to serve as president of the Illinois Senate and the first to serve as Cook County State Attorney. He served in both the Illinois House of Representatives and the Illinois State Senate. He also served three terms as City Treasurer of Chicago.



**Minnie Buckingham Harper** was the first Black woman legislator in the United States. She was appointed by Governor Howard M. Gore to the West Virginia House of Delegates to fill the vacancy after the death of her husband, Ebenezer Howard Harper.



**Cora Mae Brown** (April 19, 1914–December 17, 1972) was the first African American woman elected rather than appointed to a state senate in the United States. She won her seat in the Michigan Senate in 1952. She served two consecutive terms—1953–1956—having represented the 2<sup>nd</sup> District during her first term and the 3<sup>rd</sup> District during her second term.

Throughout her time in the Senate, Brown worked on committees for welfare, public utilities and health. She was a strong advocate for civil rights and even introduced several bills that aided their expansion in Michigan. Brown was instrumental in passing a bill that increased punishments given to restaurants and hotels that were racially discriminatory from \$25 to \$100 and introduced legislation in 1956, ordering the removal of licenses of business that discriminated on the basis of race. Brown is noted as a women's rights activist and newspapers hailed her as the "champion of the underprivileged."



# OBESITY:

## A SILENT GROWING EPIDEMIC

By Representative  
Robin Shackleford (IN)



Obesity has become a major health concern across the United States—including Indiana—where around 70% of the population is medically classified as overweight or obese, [according to Global Data’s 2023 report](#).

However, the responsibility for this alarming statistic cannot be solely attributed to the people of Indiana. Many Hoosiers want to lead healthier lifestyles, but have limited public and private support. Biased attitudes toward obesity have contributed to the state’s inactivity in addressing the issue. [A study published in the American Journal of Public Health in 2009](#) highlighted the link between weight stigma and state legislative initiatives. Often, state legislation ignores the societal and environmental causes of obesity, treating it as an individual responsibility. This individualistic approach has prevented the expansion of public action, healthcare and government initiatives.

Upon closer inspection of any national report, it becomes evident that the state of Indiana lacks robust health initiatives. According to the [United Health Foundation’s Rankings Annual Report](#), Indiana ranks 45th overall in public health funding. On average, the state spends \$76 per person on public health, while the leading state, New Hampshire, spends \$119. Indiana also ranks poorly in terms of preventive clinical services and access to healthcare. The state has low rates of nutrition education, and [K-12 students nationwide receive less than 8 hours of required nutrition education each year](#). Although there is no federal law mandating nutrition education, Indiana has not filled the gap with its laws. Even though the state has a [comprehensive plan for nutrition and physical activity](#), it does not extend past 2020. Hoosiers are not being given the resources they need for a healthy lifestyle.

Compared to their white counterparts, minority communities, especially the Black community, have even fewer resources. In Indiana, the [Richard Fairbanks Foundation](#) found that Black adults have a 31% higher prevalence of obesity. Unfortunately, these communities usually have the worst access to healthcare, fresh produce, and fitness centers. They found that, in Marion County alone, Black residents are more likely than any other race to live in a food desert. A lack of access to healthy food has increased their risk



of obesity, which is mainly caused by a poor diet. In healthcare, implicit weight bias is an ongoing problem that is compounded by racial prejudice. People of color face disparities in access to healthcare, quality of care, and health outcomes. Due to both race and weight being stigmatized, Black Hoosiers who struggle with their weight may receive inadequate care.

The obesity epidemic in America has resulted in numerous negative consequences, both figuratively and literally. Obesity-related chronic illnesses have had a significant impact on the economy and workforce. In 2022, [Indiana alone suffered a loss of \\$9.3 billion due to reduced economic activity caused by obesity related issues](#). Obesity has also been linked to higher rates of heart disease, type-2 diabetes and other serious health complications. To make matters worse, weight stigma can increase the likelihood of unemployment. Studies have shown that men and women who suffer from obesity have a 7% and 20% less chance of employment, respectively. Until we effectively address this epidemic, the physical, mental and economic well-being of citizens will continue to suffer.

Over the past decade, there have been several national solutions proposed to address the growing epidemic of obesity. However, statehouses across the country have been blocking progress.

In 2023, I wrote House Bill 1097, which aimed to establish a healthy food incubator program to provide underserved communities with better access to healthy food options. Unfortunately, this bill was heard but not put to a vote in committee. Other proposed solutions include expanding nutrition education, increasing physical activity in schools and encouraging business investments in employee well-being. As stewards of the future, we must take care of our residents' physical and mental health. Therefore, during the 2024 legislative session, I urge my colleagues to invest in the health of our constituents by implementing some of these solutions. It's high time for Indiana to catch up with the rest of the nation, and for other states to follow suit.

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*Robin Shackleford has been the state representative for District 98 since 2012. During her time as a public servant, Rep. Shackleford has been an influential member of the Indiana Black Legislative Caucus, the Indiana POWER Caucus, the Public Health Committee, the Insurance Committee and the Courts and Criminal Code Committee.*

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# THE FUTURE OF SUMMER NUTRITION IS HERE TODAY. BUT ONLY IF WE **ACT NOW.**

By **Bernadette Downey**  
and **Rhonda Jackson**  
Share Our Strength



As kids head back to the classroom this year, they're also returning to the consistent nutrition they receive through school meals. For many children, that healthy, reliable meal isn't available during the summer, making it the hungriest time of year. When school is out, many families spend the summer struggling to make up for the consistent, nutritious school meals their students received. This is especially acute in communities of color, where systemic inequalities have disproportionately laid the foundation for higher rates of hunger and poverty.

But next summer could look a lot different, as long as state legislators act now.

For the first time ever, Summer EBT, a program that provides a modest, monthly benefit for families to buy groceries, will be available nationwide. This program is a paradigm shift in how we, as a nation, connect more kids to the nutrition they need.

It has the power to reach [more than 29 million kids](#) across the country, but only if states apply and lawmakers prioritize the program in their state's budget.

Here's how it works: Summer EBT provides families with \$40 a month per child over the summer. These federal funds work alongside traditional summer meals programs and help close a critical gap in family budgets during the summer.

Traditional summer meals programs were designed to reach kids with the nutrition they need over summer break, but they have historically only reached a fraction of those who need it. These programs largely rely on congregate meal sites that many families face barriers to accessing. For one, sites are only open

in certain areas and meals must be consumed on-site during a specific time. School buses aren't running and parents are working, which means kids don't have access to transportation. What's more, the operation of these services is often at the mercy of fickle summer weather that can shut down or limit access to meal sites.

Due to these barriers, [six out of seven kids](#) who were eligible for summer meals prior to the pandemic were missing out. Thus, Summer EBT fills an important gap. It complements these existing meal services while providing much-needed flexibility for families. And we know it works. [Summer EBT pilots](#) that began more than a decade ago decreased the most severe level of child food insecurity by a third. The country also just finished a massive three-year test run during the pandemic using a similar program called Pandemic EBT to help families afford groceries when their kids weren't in the classroom, which [reduced the number](#) of SNAP households where children experienced very low food security by 17% in its first year.

### **This matters!**

When kids have access to nutritious food year-round, they grow up smarter, stronger and healthier. This can have an outsized impact on communities of color and other under-resourced communities that are usually the most impacted by hunger. Today, Black children are [three times more likely to face hunger](#) than their white peers. Closing this gap is crucial for ensuring all children, no matter their zip code or circumstances, are well-nourished, prepared to realize their potential and able to achieve their dreams.

Summer EBT is a game-changer. But if states intend to participate, they must inform USDA by January 1, 2024, and they must contribute to half of all administrative costs.

Now is the time to act. State agencies are already making decisions about whether they can implement this program next year. Needless to say, early support for Summer EBT is critical. Your governors and executive agencies need your encouragement to move forward and your assurance that you will support the administrative costs in your next budget cycle.

Summer 2024 has the potential to be a transformative year for millions of kids across the country. But the days are limited to make this program a reality in your state. Work needs to happen immediately to ensure that state agencies are ready to join this program by January 1, 2024, and that they have the budget to help administer this program.

Summer is the hungriest time of year for many kids, but we're closer than ever to making sure that's no longer a reality and that no child goes hungry over their summer break.

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*Bernadette leads Share Our Strength's state and local government relations and advocacy efforts to advance its mission of ending childhood hunger and poverty in America.*

*Rhonda is the Director of No Kid Hungry Louisiana. She leads efforts to ensure all children in her state have access to the federal nutrition programs in their communities.*

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QUALITY EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION  
**REDUCES**  
 CRIME AND GUN VIOLENCE  
 IN COMMUNITIES

By Senator  
**Donna A. Frett-Gregory (VI)**



In the quest to address the pressing issue of crime and gun violence that plagues our society, Frederick Douglass's timeless wisdom echoes resoundingly: "It is easier to build strong children than to repair broken adults."

These profound words serve as a poignant reminder of the crucial role that quality early childhood education plays in shaping the future of our communities and, ultimately, in curbing the cycle of crime and gun violence that persists

in adulthood. There is an undeniable connection between quality early childhood education and the reduction of crime and gun violence among adults, and we are all charged with shedding light on the transformative power of investing in our youngest citizens.

According to a multigenerational research project known as the Perry Preschool Project, conducted by American psychologist David Weikart, high-quality early childhood education leads to improved social outcomes for generations to come. Children of families who participated in this social experiment were more likely to graduate high school, secure jobs, and commit fewer crimes than children in the same community who did not attend preschool. These positive outcomes continued into the next generation, with the children of Perry Preschool participants also having better social outcomes

than their peers. It is imperative that we pay attention to the profound impact of quality early childhood education on the cognitive and behavioral development of our youth. The first step in addressing this problem is to support families through legislation that continues to expand access to quality early childhood education for the most vulnerable members of society, our children, regardless of their socio-economic background or circumstance. Which is why enacting legislation that is generationally impactful should be the goal of all legislators.

The heartbreaking reality is that many children in the United States do not have access to quality early childhood education programs. This problem is especially true for children from low-income families, and families of color. According to the National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER), only 58% of four-year-olds in the United States are enrolled in a high-quality preschool program. The enrollment rate is even lower for children from low-income families and families of color. For example, only 44% of four-year-old Black children and 42% of four-year-old Hispanic children are enrolled in a high-quality preschool program. It has been proven that children with no access to quality preschool programs have higher rates of falling behind academically and of being incarcerated. With less than half of our children of color and more than

a quarter of all children not receiving access to these programs, when will we urge all lawmakers to enact legislation to address this crisis?

Having served as the Commissioner of Education in the Virgin Islands, prior to becoming a Senator, I have witnessed firsthand the damaging effects of not having access to quality early childhood education. It is because of my intimate knowledge that I am passionate about my work as a Senator in proposing legislation that is generationally impactful. To that end, I have successfully moved legislation to provide children access to Pre-Kindergarten, require teachers to be certified as early childhood education professionals, and ban the suspension of children in Pre-Kindergarten to the third grade. We must ensure the proper education of our children from all socio-economic backgrounds while raising the standards of how they are educated. The future leaders of our country need to be in our schools receiving a quality education so that they can lead us to a brighter and better future.

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*Senator Donna A. Frett-Gregory represents the 35<sup>th</sup> district in the Virgin Islands. She serves as Chair of the Committee on Budget, Appropriations, and Finance and Vice-Chair of the Committee on Education and Workforce Development.*





# ENOUGH

IT'S TIME TO FIX THE SIX AND  
**END CAMPUS  
RACISM**



By Senator  
Art Haywood (PA)



The Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education (PASSHE), established in 1983, brought several state-owned universities into one system to provide quality low-cost secondary education across numerous campuses. Countless students gained educational opportunity at these schools. At the same time, prior to the PASSHE formation, the U.S. Department of Education determined that these universities were one of nine racially segregated higher education systems in America. That legacy of racism persists and the journey towards correction and healing is still ongoing.

### The Call for Change

In 2020, a Philadelphia Inquirer article shed light on the racial harassment and unequal treatment experienced by Black students at PASSHE schools. These students courageously shared their stories, sparking outrage and concern across the state. When I read this article, I knew urgent action was needed. Immediately, my office confirmed that these experiences were not isolated incidents. We then mobilized a coalition of students, Black alumni and advocacy groups to begin the ENOUGH Advocacy Initiative. Our goal was clear—to apply pressure on PASSHE leaders to address six ENOUGH demands from students.

### Building Momentum

My office continued to engage with students and alumni, PASSHE leaders, and university presidents to push for immediate action. The PASSHE Board of Governors responded by incorporating many of the ENOUGH coalition's

## We have had ENOUGH.

### It's time to Fix the Six:

1. **End racial harassment and speech:** Establish clear policies and mechanisms to combat racial harassment and speech, fostering an inclusive environment.
2. **Nurture and retain students of color:** Implement strategies to support the recruitment, retention and academic success of students of color.
3. **Organize an incident reporting system:** Create an accessible and effective system for reporting incidents of discrimination and harassment.
4. **Unveil mandatory diversity training:** Institute mandatory diversity training for all members of the campus community to promote cultural understanding and inclusivity.
5. **Generate mental health resources:** Develop mental health resources and support systems tailored to the needs of students of color.
6. **Hire faculty and staff of color:** Actively recruit and retain a diverse faculty and staff, ensuring that the campus community reflects the diversity of its student body.



demands into their Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) strategic plans. These included provisions for faculty hiring, student retention, diversity training, codes of conduct and the establishment of bias response teams.

In the summer of 2021, my office secured \$9 million in funding for PASSHE's DEI efforts, further solidifying the commitment to change. We also initiated a harassment work group, focusing on creating an environment where students felt safe and respected.

### Collaboration for Change

To strengthen the ENOUGH initiative, I invited Chad D. Lassiter, Executive Director of the Pennsylvania Human Relations Commission (PHRC), to join a listening tour. The PHRC, with a storied history of fighting against discrimination spanning six decades, is Pennsylvania's largest civil rights organization. Their involvement added invaluable expertise and resources to our cause.

### The Listening Tour

From April 2022 to April 2023, Mr. Lassiter and I embarked on a comprehensive listening tour, engaging with students at nine PASSHE schools. The tour was not just about uncovering the extent of the problem but also about fostering dialogue and collaboration between all stakeholders. During this time, the coalition also met with PASSHE school leaders who acknowledged the pervasive legacy of discrimination and were equally committed to addressing campus racism.

### A United Front

One encouraging aspect of the journey to eliminate campus racism is the alignment among key PASSHE leaders, including Chancellor Daniel Greenstein and many university Presidents. The shared commitment to systemic changes reflects a positive step towards progress.

### The Path Forward

While our listening tour will conclude in the fall of 2023, the ENOUGH coalition advocates for immediate actions. With students, alumni, administration, faculty and staff engaged and aligned, the vision of ending racism on PASSHE campuses can be achieved.

PASSHE's journey towards addressing its legacy of racial discrimination is marked by significant progress and a collective commitment to change. The determination of students, alumni, legislators and institutional leaders gives hope that Pennsylvania's System of Higher Education will evolve into a more inclusive, equitable and welcoming educational environment for all.

While the work of the ENOUGH coalition focuses on Pennsylvania, the issue of campus racism is certainly not exclusive to the Commonwealth. As our nation continues to grow more diverse, it is crucial that we ensure higher education is a safe space for Black and brown students to learn and thrive.

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*Pennsylvania State Senator Art Haywood is an advocate for everyday people, who knows when everyday people are organized, they become powerful in demanding change. He is an attorney who works tirelessly to ensure Pennsylvania's communities have access to high-quality education, a living wage, fair housing and safe water to live a full life and is currently serving his third term representing parts of Montgomery and Philadelphia Counties.*

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# ANYTHING BANNED BECOMES A POLICING ISSUE: WHY THE FDA MENTHOL BAN IS NOT GOOD FOR COMMUNITIES OF COLOR

**By Elliot T. Boyce, Sr.**  
**New York State Police (EAP)**  
**(Ret.) National Coalition of**  
**Justice Practitioners**



Currently, three groups are debating the FDA's pending ban on menthol cigarettes; those who are uninformed, those who say the products should be banned for health reasons and those who don't understand that such a ban creates a law enforcement issue. It is imperative that the unintended consequences of bans and prohibitions be understood by policymakers contemplating passing legislation that will impact the interactions between Black and Hispanic Americans and police.

## For Those Who Are Uninformed

President Biden's FDA is poised to announce a nationwide ban on all menthol cigarettes, ending the legal sale and purchase of menthol flavored tobacco. Some advocates may say that menthol

products are more harmful than any other cigarette, but research shows that all tobacco products are equally harmful. Moreover, menthol cigarettes are not the preferred cigarette in America, non-menthol cigarettes are.

A study by the Journal of the National Cancer Institute found that "menthol cigarettes are no more, and perhaps less, harmful than nonmenthol cigarettes."

In addition, the Master Settlement Agreement (MSA) of 1998 prevents tobacco companies from directly or indirectly advertising to youth, restricting advertisement solely to "Point of Sale" at stores licensed to sell tobacco products. So why would the FDA aim to ban only menthol-flavored tobacco products, especially considering the majority of Black and Latino smokers prefer menthol? The reasoning behind the ban is misguided, non-scientific and rooted in the historical targeting of people of color.

## For Those Who Claim That the Prohibition Is Solely Motivated by Health

The best solution for a public health issue like tobacco smoking is education, treatment and counseling. The government knows this approach well, as it's led to tremendous declines in smoking

since the 1960s. According to [Statista](#), from 1965 to 2019, the prevalence of cigarette smoking in the U.S. has decreased from about 42% to 14%. Resources like quit-smoking websites, hotlines, medications and text message programs contributed to this decrease, as well as common tobacco control policies like warning labels, advertising bans and smoke-free environments.

### For Those Who Don't Understand That Prohibitions Are Police Matters

The federal government has not yet released their blueprint for enforcement of this proposed ban, however, under federal guidelines tobacco related incidents fall under the jurisdiction of the ATF (Alcohol Tobacco and Firearms), an agency that works independently and in conjunction with local law enforcement agencies to combat tobacco related offenses.

The FDA and ban advocates acknowledge that there will be an increase in trafficking of unregulated cigarettes nationwide. This will create a road map for organized criminal enterprises, like gangs and terrorist cells, to expand their operations within communities of color where individuals will be seeking their tobacco product of choice as a result of the ban. History has proven that prohibitions and bans do not solve the issue. Subsequently, this will force traditionally law-abiding citizens, particularly elderly individuals, who prefer menthol products to the streets to seek illegal, unregulated tobacco products, and, in turn, increasing their risk of becoming victims of street crimes.

Police officers I have spoken with say this will become one more tool for officers to “stop and frisk” or “racially profile” individuals in communities impacted by the ban. Understanding that policing in America is a business designed to keep people and communities safe, any illegal product becomes a catalyst to solving the larger issue of trafficking. This will ensure a proactive police approach to solving the trafficking concerns, which entails targeting individual possessors of contraband and illegal cigarettes for intel to pursue the larger organized criminals. This is a proven police

tactic that will, unfortunately, target individuals whose only crime is their choice of cigarette. This commonly used policing strategy completely disarms the ban advocates' stance that the ban will not impact individuals in possession of the banned menthol products.

The undefined direction of enforcement efforts potentially opens the door to a federal taskforce to handle the inevitable increase in criminal activities. This is reminiscent of the War on Drugs and has the potential for RICO (Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations Act) charges, which disproportionately impacted Black and Hispanic communities. “RICO” comes with enhanced jail sentences for any organized crime from the lowest levels of a street dealers to nationwide criminal organizations.

Information is power. It is imperative that the unintended consequences of the menthol ban are understood and taken into consideration by all parties involved in the decision-making process. It's important to note that health concerns are more effectively managed through education, treatment and counseling and that any ban creates a law enforcement matter.

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*Elliot T. Boyce, Sr. is a retired New York State Trooper who honorably served for 35 years in a wide range of assignments that included local, state and federal drug taskforce, recruitment, crisis negotiations, criminal investigations and the Employee Assistance Program. He is a former Executive Board Member of the National Black State Troopers Coalition, Inc. (NBSTC), National Association of Black Law Enforcement Officers, Inc. (NABLEO), Guardians Association of New York State Troopers, Inc. (GANYST) and served on the National Education & Training Committee for NOBLE, National Organization of Black Law Enforcement Executives.*

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# HIP-HOP AND CANNABIS: **PROFIT, PARADOX,** **AND POLICY**

**By Assembly Member  
Crystal D. Peoples-Stokes  
(NY), Majority Leader**



As we commemorate 50 years of hip-hop, I find myself both celebrating and reflecting on paradoxes, contemplating passing legislation that will impact the interactions between Black and Hispanic Americans and police.

Hip-hop is an empire built by Black artists who speak truth to power, yet it is rife with inequality. It's the nation's most popular music genre, but racial polarization feels worse than ever. Hip-hop contributes \$10–15 BILLION annually to the U.S. economy, but that wealth is nowhere to be seen on streets where the art is forged.

When we think about Black wealth, we instinctively visualize entertainers, many of whom came to prominence through hip-hop. But, for every Rihanna, Jay-Z, Dre, and Diddy there are hundreds of gifted musicians whose opportunity to earn and grow wealth is co-opted. Because, like many industries, the talent is Black, but ownership is predominantly White.

This dichotomy is not new. In fact, it's a familiar story. And its high time we learned the lesson that ownership is everything. To break the bonds of generational poverty we must create opportunities to build generational wealth at scale. Within our economic system, the best way to do this is with a nascent industry like cannabis.

Cannabis provides a remarkable opportunity to correct injustices created by bad public policy, namely the failed War on Drugs. Perhaps more importantly, this new market can begin with a level playing field so those who lost the most can succeed in the industry that stole their future.

This is exactly what New York State intended when its adult-use cannabis program was enacted.

**[The Marijuana Regulation and Taxation Act \(MRTA\)](#)** added the Cannabis Law to New York statutes and paved the way for a brand-new industry centered around equity, opportunity, and repairing the harm caused by past policies. The Cannabis Law ensures that people with non-violent low-level cannabis convictions would have their records expunged so they could go to college, get a job, qualify for housing, and care for their families. We also established the Community Grant Reinvestment Fund to help restore neighborhoods disproportionately devastated by state and federal drug laws.

We worked on the MRTA for over eight years and learned lessons from other states and mature markets. One such lesson is that provisional licenses—like New York’s Conditional Adult-use Retail Dispensary (CAURD) program—are essential because they provide entrepreneurs with limited access to capital a chance to succeed in the new market.

Programs like CAURD matter because only two percent of legal cannabis businesses are owned by Black entrepreneurs. Even states with progressive reputations, like California and Colorado, are failing social equity applicants, often because social equity applicants and justice-involved individuals cannot get to market fast enough.

We intentionally granted extraordinary regulatory powers to the newly established Cannabis Control Board and Office of Cannabis Management (OCM). We did this to support our goals of empowering those most harmed. A new industry, particularly one with such potential for historically marginalized people and communities, requires responsive management and regulation.

Despite, or perhaps because of, our clear intention for cannabis to be a vehicle for social equity and restorative justice, huge corporations and out-of-state operators are trying to hold the NY market hostage through lawsuits designed to keep social equity entrepreneurs from opening their doors.

New York represents one of the biggest cannabis markets in the world; there is enough room for established corporate entities and small businesses. It is unconscionable for corporate behemoths to ignore the will of democratically elected legislators by asking judges to move the goalposts because their lobbying efforts failed.

Too many people gave their lives to bring this market to light for cannabis to be another corporate giveaway. It is imperative that equity be the cornerstone of all cannabis programs. Medical operators and large corporations should support our efforts to fix historical injustices and allow folks who paid the price of arcane drug laws to finally reap some reward. The steps New York is taking to ensure cannabis is a catalyst for restorative justice should be the model for all cannabis programs going forward.

I hope that 50 years from now we are celebrating the realized vision of social justice entrenched in the MRTA. No matter how dope the goods, we do not need another industry built on the backs of the marginalized for the benefit of the super-rich.

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*Crystal Peoples-Stokes is the Majority Leader of the NYS Assembly. She has served Buffalo’s 141<sup>st</sup> Assembly District since 2003. She is an advocate with clear and principled service, and has always put people and policy before politics. Peoples-Stokes sponsored and successfully passed the “Marijuana Regulation and Taxation Act” (MRTA) in the NYS Assembly, legalizing cannabis and aiming to repair the disproportionate harm of drug policing in communities of color by ending marijuana prohibition.*

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# PAROLE ASSUMES THAT CHANGE IS POSSIBLE



By Ben Austen



After fifty years of mass incarceration, the United States can't afford to continue ping-ponging back and forth between criminal justice reforms and tough-on-crime retaliations. Locked

in that cycle, we ignore the extent to which our prison system is a historic and global aberration. The United States now imprisons a quarter of all the incarcerated people in the world! The number of women we lock up today alone is greater than the entire U.S. prison population in 1973.

**This is not normal.**



But we can change. And parole can be central to that correction—to a transformation of our practices around crime and punishment.

Parole, the practice of releasing someone from prison based on their good conduct and then afterward monitoring them for a time, was introduced in the United States 150 years ago as a reform. Parole was seen as a needed system of second chances. A prison term might be used to incapacitate the dangerous, but it was also supposed to prepare the incarcerated for their eventual reentry back to society. The theory was that a judge who set a release date at trial couldn't know when, in the future, an incarcerated individual would be rehabilitated. It made more sense for a parole board to continually evaluate that individual. Parole was viewed as so logical and just that every state and the federal government soon adopted it. All across the country, prisons were reclassified as "correctional" facilities. Philosophically, prisons were supposed to do more than warehouse and punish those convicted of serious crimes. A prison's true mission was to correct them.

How did this work out? By the 1970s, people in prison and their supporters on the outside were demanding that parole be abolished. The system lacked standards and oversight. Parole boards couldn't be trusted. Their decisions seemed arbitrary and racist. Conservatives at this time also attacked parole. They said parole—or any form of early release—was "soft on crime." Parole, as it existed, was doomed. Sixteen states and the federal government eventually eliminated parole for all future offenses. Most other states made many crimes ineligible for parole consideration, restricting the possibility of parole to only a small fraction of the prison population.

What replaced parole turned out to be far worse. Sentencing guidelines, which matched each crime to a fixed range of punishments, were the products of state politics. Elected officials from both parties found that there were enormous political downsides to appearing weak on crime. The mandatory minimum and maximum ranges of the guidelines grew like some out-of-control laboratory experiment. The end of parole

opened the floodgates to mass incarceration, mandatory minimums, truth-in-sentencing and "three-strikes" laws that defied any sense of proportionality. How did our prison population reach unprecedented heights over the last several decades? Simply put, more people were sent to prison for longer periods of time with fewer forms of early release.

Many states are now debating whether they need to reinstate parole and expand eligibility. They have people growing old in prison who statistically have little chance of reoffending. Parole is still a needed system of second chances, as it would give hundreds of thousands of people in prison (including those convicted of violent offenses) a shot at being returned to useful citizenship.

Parole reforms also have the potential to usher in a range of other necessary changes to the justice system. Any expansion of discretionary parole can't repeat the mistakes of the past. Parole boards must operate openly and fairly. A better carceral system focused on the possibility of reentry would begin to prepare people for release from their first days of incarceration. It would include effective educational and rehabilitative opportunities and would put in place ways to heal and protect those harmed by violent offenses. Such a system wouldn't work if those released under supervision were set up to fail.

States should pass laws to expand parole consideration to the vast majority of the people in U.S. prisons. Parole is an essential release valve. It's a pathway to change and to a safer and more just country.

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*Ben Austen is a writer from Chicago. He is the co-host of the podcast *Some of My Best Friends Are* and the author of *Correction: Parole, Prison, and the Possibility of Change*, *High-Risers: Cabrini-Green and the Fate of American Public Housing*. *High-Risers* was long-listed for the Andrew Carnegie Medal of Excellence in Nonfiction, shortlisted for the Goddard Riverside Stephan Russo Book Prize for Social Justice, and named one of the best books of 2018 by Booklist, Mother Jones and the public libraries of Chicago and St. Louis.*



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# TOO MUCH TALKING AND NOT ENOUGH ACTION

By Tanisha Woods, MSHRM



It pays to stay committed to your ambitions. If you are searching for examples of young people doing great things, recently, there have been some wonderful breakthroughs in sports. Take Sha'Carri Richardson, for instance. In 2021, national media outlets painted a negative picture of her as a person.

A successful track and field athlete, through the media's lens she was seen as a broken Black girl without direction. Scrutinized for her appearance and the way she talks, Sha'Carri was disqualified from competition for using marijuana.

Before now, Sha'Carri was not on my radar. You know how it goes—we continue with our lives until the next headline appears. The one that caught my attention was a video of her lined up

in the ninth lane. This outside lane on a track is the least desirable. With a champion's mindset, Sha'Carri broke her own 100-meter record, becoming the world champion.

As a Black woman, I am proud of her accomplishments. Not many of us get the chance to showcase our talents to the world nor do we get the vitriol and character assassination because of our mistakes. Sha'Carri worked through the hurt and focused on her goals. This is not everyone's pathway to success; however, it may sound like some of the folk we know in various areas of our lives. The point is, it pays to stay committed.

Recently, I have been in discussions about voting, volunteering and policy areas in general. The major issue is how much does it mean and is anyone listening. I used the example of commitment through the lens of a completely outside subject to give the approximation of closeness so that we can relate. Everything we do requires a reasonable amount of time for preparation and completeness.

In some areas of our lives, it seems that the strategy to get to the next step can change every so often. Someone trying to pay off a credit card might decide after a few months of paying the



minimum amount due on time that it isn't worth it and stops paying on time. In the end, they lose.

This is true for voting. As citizens we cannot vote in one or two elections and think the work is done. Voting in each election is necessary as is consistently making payments for a credit card, to make a difference.

Many people have spoken with admiration about Stacey Abrams. In my opinion, she is bigger than a Hip-Hop Star, and is the epitome of strong character and commitment to her passion-led ambitions. If a state with demographics similar to Georgia wants the success that Ms. Abrams achieved, it must be as committed to the work and effort that she and her team has put forward all these years. Her rise to leadership in the Georgia Legislative Assembly was a huge step in the right direction. She built relationships and created a template others can follow that can positively impact other communities.

It amazes me that some want to do the absolute minimum and receive the best overall outcome. That is not a formula toward success. I am not saying run like Sha'Carri but prepare like her.

I am not saying be an attorney or powerhouse legislator like Stacey Abrams but prepare like her. Be committed to your civic duties and passions so that we collectively reap positive results.

Across this nation, inside every legislature, reside motivated elected officials that do the work to institute policy that works. This message is for all of us to pick up our feet and move intentionally into our passions, while administering the best practices in our communities.

Say Less, Do More.

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*Tanisha Woods, MSHRM, a native of Oklahoma City, OK, is Chief of Operations in the office of Senator Dr. George E. Young, Sr., where she is an integral part of public relations, community service, legislative processes, research, writing and development. Woods serves as the chair of National Black Legislative Staff Leadership Council (NBLSLC), President, Georgia Brown Democratic Women, Connection and Social Action State Coordinator, Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc., and weekly OKC Herald Columnist.*





# OUR PROGRESS, OUR FUTURE: OPPORTUNITY LIVES HERE

By Senator  
Darius J. Brown (DE)



Perhaps best known as the home of President Joe Biden, Delaware is a small state, but we are unquestionably mighty—thanks to some key decisions that placed the First State at the forefront of the banking industry.

In the 1970's high unemployment and record debt placed Delaware on the edge of economic disaster. That changed thanks to leaders from both political parties putting aside their

differences to pass the [Financial Center Development Act](#). This set the stage for our State's economic resurgence and transformed us into a major hub for credit card giants and the financial services industry almost overnight. Decades later, Delaware remains on solid financial ground with six straight years of surpluses, low unemployment and growing interest from companies looking to make a new home here.

My focus since being elected to the Delaware Senate has been to make sure prosperity is shared by all who call Delaware home. We are leveraging economic justice to create the kind of targeted and intentional investments that can build generational wealth for families of color in the Three Rivers area that I represent.

More than just buzzwords, Opportunity LIVES Here defines the vision, mission and future

of this initiative to transform the old cycles of poverty, blight and crime into an economically, culturally and socially thriving community. Our work began with the enactment of historic restorative justice legislation that is providing second chances for thousands of neighbors. The creation of Delaware's first adult expungement program and the expansion of the Wilmington Downtown Development District will spur private investment to a larger geographic area through an innovative rebate program.

Our goal now is to harness the power of the banking industry that once saved the state of Delaware to help Black entrepreneurs turn their innovative startups into thriving businesses and engines of future economic prosperity. Earlier this year, for instance, I collaborated with my colleagues in the Delaware General Assembly to create the [Delaware Community Investment Venture Fund](#).

Seeded with up to \$2.5 million from regulatory fees paid by the banking industry, this state-managed fund will provide much needed capital and other financial services to Black-owned businesses creating jobs in some of our most historically marginalized communities.

This new tool is designed to overcome the higher rates of rejection and lower loan amounts experienced by Black-owned businesses. Specifically, they are working to create opportunities long denied by people of color in some of our most poverty-stricken neighborhoods.

This groundbreaking legislation passed unanimously by the Delaware General Assembly and will dovetail with two other economic development initiatives we have recently undertaken. Through my position on the Joint Capital Improvement Committee, we were able to attract the [Bronze Valley Venture Lab](#). This accelerator program provides entrepreneurial minded students from Delaware State University, one of the top three HBCU's in the nation, with advice, advocacy and access to venture capital in the heart of Delaware's minority-majority urban center.

With record-breaking investments in infrastructure, we seeded [our state's leading Community Development Financial Institution](#) with \$3 million to establish the [Northeast Wilmington Revitalization Fund](#). The fund provides flexible, low-interest loans to Black-owned childcare centers, residential developments, private business that collectively created 100 jobs in one of Delaware's most economically depressed communities.

None of these innovative and groundbreaking investments mean much if the real-estate and commercial investors we want to reach do not know these programs are available or how to access them. That's why I partnered with the Riverfront Development Corporation. They oversaw one of the greatest economic development success stories in Delaware history. The complete transformation of what was once a barren industrial wasteland into 100 acres of high-rises, restaurants, businesses and cultural amenities.

Together, we organized the [Opportunity LIVES Here Symposium](#) in November to bring together national leaders renowned for their achievements in lifting communities out of stagnation and into promising futures. While our work is far from complete, our progress is undeniable. There is no doubt in my mind that the strategic investments we are making in the Three Rivers area are just the beginning of our region's next great success story.

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*Described by Delaware's largest newspaper as "one of the State house's champions of criminal justice reform and racial equity," Senator Darius J. Brown serves as a member of the state budget-writing Joint Finance Committee and formerly on the Joint Capital Improvement Committee making over \$300M of investments in his senate district. He was recognized by Delaware Business Times in their inaugural 40 under 40 class. Senator Brown serves on the board of the Riverfront Development Corporation and Diamond State Port Corporation.*

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# WORK NEEDED TO CLOSE THE DIGITAL DIVIDE

By Honorable  
Walter T. Mosley



Access to a reliable, high speed internet connection is necessary to function in modern society, especially post-pandemic. That's why politicians on both sides of the aisle need to focus on bridging the digital divide and ensuring equal access to broadband. Regardless of race, geography, or socioeconomic status, the internet should be available to all. But that cannot happen if Congress does not authorize the FCC to open new bands of spectrum—the radio frequencies that serve as the bedrock of wireless access.

Too many are still on the wrong side of this digital divide. Black and Hispanic adults remain less likely than white adults to say they own a traditional computer or have high-speed internet at home, the Pew Research Center finds. Many are “smartphone-only” and rely on mobile devices for access to employment, education, and healthcare information.

Reflecting on this disparity, Brookings Institute scholar Nicol Turner Lee accurately explained that this disconnect creates a new underclass, “We’ve not only left these people behind in

digital connectivity, we’ve left these people behind in caring about them.”

To address these disparities and ensure equal opportunities for all, it is crucial we leverage all available resources in the United States. This includes allocating and utilizing new bands of licensed spectrum, which is essential for connecting devices online. Unfortunately, the FCC’s spectrum authority has expired, hampering the nation’s ability to provide businesses and consumers with more of these crucial digital “building blocks.”

During the pandemic, children’s classes went online, jobs switched to virtual, and local businesses pivoted to ecommerce, highlighting that internet access is the dividing line between the haves and have nots. Closing the digital divide is the defining issue of our time. Congress must come together and renew the FCC’s spectrum authority. With this action and a spectrum pipeline we can expedite the deployment of new technologies powered by 5G and enhance connectivity. Ultimately, this will enable more Americans to access the internet and take advantage of its benefits.

Connectivity is no longer a luxury in today’s post-pandemic world. And it should serve as a great equalizer. It is time Congress enables more individuals—no matter their race and where they live—to have the opportunity to harness the power of the internet.

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*Mr. Mosley is President and CEO of a full-service lobby and business strategic firm. Prior to this, Mr. Mosley served in the New York State Assembly from 2014–2022. Mr. Mosley is based out of Albany and New York City.*







# CONNECTICUT BABY BONDS: FULFILLING THE OPPORTUNITY PROMISE

By Senator  
Patricia Billie Miller (CT)



As someone who grew up in poverty, I know firsthand that opportunity isn't equitably distributed. It's among the reasons I chose to run for office, and it's the reason the Connecticut Legislative Black and Puerto Rican Caucus was fiercely committed to ensuring our state would enact the historic Connecticut Baby Bonds legislation. This first-in-the-nation initiative is designed to break generational poverty and narrow the wealth gap.

In 2019, the wealth of the median White family was eight times greater than the median Black family. In Connecticut, the wealth disparity is among the widest in the country. The reasons for this gap are deeply rooted in our nation's history of systemic oppression, but turning the tide on this inequity is both possible and necessary. Leaving the wealth gap unaddressed could cost the economy between \$1 and \$1.5 trillion per decade. Guided by the visionary framework established by Dr. Darrick Hamilton and Dr. William Darity, the Connecticut General Assembly in 2021 passed legislation establishing the Connecticut Baby Bond Trust. Through this law, every baby whose birth was covered by



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HUSKY, the state's Medicaid program, would have \$3,200 invested in a trust account managed by the Office of the State Treasurer.

Once those babies reach adulthood, between the ages of 18 and 30, the funds—projected to be worth between \$11,000 and \$24,000—will be available for use to put a down payment on a home, offset the cost of college, invest in or start a business, or save for retirement. The law includes a financial literacy component so that families deepen their fiscal knowledge, but more importantly, it gives them enhanced options and hope for the future. Simply put, people make different choices when the burden of fiscal constraints are ameliorated.

We know that poverty can have a ripple effect on families—the likelihood they will face inadequate education, health disparities and involvement with the justice system are increased compared to their wealthier peers. State Treasurer Erick Russell has engaged philanthropic leaders at the state and national level to support these families through outreach, services, and research, in the hopes of studying the effects of baby bonds over the long term and bolstering support for replication.

Although Connecticut passed the legislation two years ago with bipartisan support, the road to implementation proved challenging. The creativity of the Treasurer's Office to identify a cost-saving funding source, paired with the resolve of my colleagues in the Black & Puerto Rican Caucus to uphold the promise made

to families in need, was inspiring. Moreover, it bolstered my faith that the American Opportunity Accounts Act, federal legislation proposed by Senator Cory Booker and Representative Ayanna Pressley, could become a reality.

Wealth is intergenerational. So is poverty. As policymakers, we should do whatever it takes to broaden access to opportunity and close the racial wealth gap, not only for the families we serve but for the collective strength of our nation which will ultimately benefit the economy.

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*Senator Patricia Billie Miller, Deputy President Pro Tempore, representing the 27th Senate District. Senator Miller is the current chair or Connecticut Legislative Black and Puerto Rican Caucus and Banking Committee; vice chair of the Aging and Finance, Revenue and Bonding Committees; and a member of the Education, Commerce and Judiciary Committees. Throughout her tenure in the legislature, Senator Miller has been a strong advocate for education reforms that help address and improve Connecticut's education opportunity gap focusing mainly on literacy.*

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# BANKS EMPLOY FINTECH TO REACH MORE CONSUMERS WITH BETTER PRODUCTS



**By Andrew Duke**  
CEO to the Online Lenders Alliance (OLA)

Consumers benefit when they have more offerings in the credit marketplace. For instance, community banks using advanced financial technology called “fintech” can improve and automate the delivery and use of financial services to underserved customers. Banks leveraging the capabilities and infrastructure fintechs provide, can serve customers they otherwise wouldn’t reach (due to barriers

like geography or poor credit). These consumers then have more—and better—options to meet their financial needs.

Today, there is still a considerable population of Americans who do not use traditional bank or credit union services and products for their financial needs. According to the Federal Reserve, more than 60 million people are underbanked or unbanked altogether. Some of this is by choice and some of this is a byproduct of their inability to access those products. But if we want to expand bank offerings to more consumers, banks—especially community banks—need access to technology that allows them to meet customers where they are today.

Over the last decade, banks have employed innovative technology by working with

specialized fintech service providers, allowing the banks to extend credit to consumers they otherwise would not be able to reach. This has led to more banks expanding their services to more communities and reaching more customers than they ever could on their own.

We all want a strong financial system where banks, credit unions, and other providers compete for our business. Community banks are critical to that equation, but they often lack the resources to truly compete with big banks that have the capital to invest in technology to grow and get even bigger. These smaller banks lack the technical know-how to market, underwrite, originate, service, and collect loans over the internet, but they can overcome these challenges by working with fintech service providers.

Many fintech companies have spent years developing innovative technology and analytics for these very tasks, and their bank partners can utilize that technology and deploy their own capital more efficiently, which provides broader access to credit today for many consumers who need it.

Thus, when banks have found it impossible to sustainably offer short-term, small-dollar loans to customers—especially those with lesser credit—fintech companies have enabled them to do so. Ultimately, this ends up being a win for the bank, a win for the fintech service provider, and a win for the consumer who can now access safer and higher-quality credit options.

Unfortunately, bank partnerships are under fire. Some in the industry don't like the competition. Others want a system where free and open interstate banking is replaced with access restricted to those financial institutions that are based in the political boundaries of the consumer's home state. They seem all too willing to trade away consumers' options for more control over credit choices and offerings. And as a key part of their campaign against bank-fintech partnerships, they claim that these interstate offerings run afoul of the law. In fact, the opposite is true.

Bank-fintech relationships are subject to strict rules and oversight by regulators. Companies

providing financial technology services to banks comply with an array of federal statutes and regulations, along with various state and local laws. When partnering with a bank, the fintech service provider is subject to strict standards and oversight through the bank's regulators. In addition, the growing use of third-party fintech service providers has led to the establishment of a robust regime of third-party supervision by the Federal Reserve, OCC, and FDIC—which recently published detailed multi-agency guidance as to how banks should manage and supervise these relationships.

Some states have restricted access to these innovative bank offerings by imposing complex, multi-factor tests designed to restrict the out-of-state bank from being designated as the “true lender” of the loan. Other states have gone further and passed laws to pull themselves out of the open interstate banking system. When longstanding lending principles were curtailed in Connecticut, New York, and Vermont in 2015, a [study](#) found that it “reduced credit availability for higher-risk borrowers” in those states. Another [study](#) found that the same decision led to a “persistent rise in personal bankruptcies following the verdict and a decline in marketplace lending, particularly among low-income households” in New York and Connecticut.

Ultimately, banks acting without fintech providers can and will still offer loans—just not to the people who need them most. Fintech companies working as third-party vendors for banks play an important role in building a more inclusive financial system for consumers with more, better, and safer credit options and opportunities.

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*Andrew Duke serves as the CEO to the Online Lenders Alliance (OLA). Andrew comes to OLA with more than 22 years of experience in government with a decade in financial services policy—most recently leading the Consumer Education and External Affairs division at the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau (CFPB). Prior to the Bureau, Andrew served as Chief of Staff to three different members of Congress, including the Chairman of the House Financial Services Committee.*





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**By Senator  
Elgie Sims (IL)**



The Bail Reform Act of 2017 passed the Illinois General Assembly in bipartisan fashion. When former Republican Governor Bruce Rauner signed the Act into law, he said, “What this does is provide fairness to folks who really are just struggling to make ends meet, commit a minor offense, and should not be forced to languish in jail.”

After nine public hearings and 30 hours of public testimony, the Illinois General Assembly passed the Safety, Accountability, Fairness, and Equity—Today Act (the “SAFE-T Act”) and Governor JB Pritzker signed it into law on Feb. 22, 2021.

To address concerns raised by various stakeholders, including law enforcement and state attorneys, the law’s proponents continued working to find ways to improve the implementation process. Although there was bipartisan support in 2017, that wealth-based detention should end, in 2021 some of

the supporters became opponents to reform. They engaged in a blistering fearmongering campaign, spending millions of dollars spreading messages of fear, wrapped in falsehoods and lies.

Proponents on the other hand, engaged in good-faith efforts to ensure the state was in position to fully implement the Pretrial Fairness Act portion of the SAFE-T Act and create a criminal legal system that is fair and just for all. For two years, stakeholders, including law enforcement officials and state attorneys, helped identify policy recommendations that we turned into law to address implementation challenges our opponents conveniently ignored.

Instead of working with us to implement policy, opponents litigated before the courts and debated in the court of public opinion days before Illinois was to implement this nation-leading criminal justice reform. The difference between the realities of 2017 and 2021 are the politics opponents injected into these policy discussions while we waited for the courts to act. By attempting to maintain the status quo, opponents only served to preserve racial and economic injustices by continuing to invest in a two-tiered justice system in our communities.

As this was happening, I couldn’t help but think of the people who would continue facing injustices if the court overturned the Act. Instead of getting

# COMBATING CASH BAIL MISINFORMATION

ahead, their lives would be changed by a judge who could set a bail amount from a predetermined bail schedule that was based on their crime.

These were people trapped in a system that kept them in a destructive cycle, placed them and their family in an unenviable position. These families and individuals were willing to do all they could, at times with considerable financial harm, to find money to buy their loved one's freedom.

People like the single mother working two jobs.

Or the mother who could not work because of a sick child forced to choose between stealing a loaf of bread from a grocery store or not feeding her children.

How about the high school student caught with marijuana while hanging with the wrong crowd because he lacked healthy, productive options for friends.

And let's not forget, the man who has made some poor choices in life. While trying to get back on his feet, he is returned to custody because he couldn't afford to buy gas for his car and missed his probation hearing.

Meanwhile, a person who abused their partner, is accused of rape, or is the driver in a deadly hit and run accident aren't held in jail because they have the means to post bail.

Thankfully, following the Illinois Supreme Court's decision to uphold the constitutionality of the SAFE-T Act, individuals and their families with lesser means have a better opportunity to receive fairer, just treatment. Removing cash bail from the equation means people won't be punished based on how much money they have, but rather for the severity of the crime they commit. In Illinois, gone are the days of a money bail system perpetuating poverty and injustice, making it a crime to be poor.

Money bond is nothing more than a tax on the poor because violent offenders with access to money go free. Our state can take pride in being the first in the nation to reform its criminal legal system and now can focus on community safety, combating disparities, and removing wealth from decisions that should be about public safety.

As much as we have achieved, our work continues.

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*State Senator Elgie R. Sims, Jr. was elected to the Illinois State Senate in 2018 representing the 17<sup>th</sup> district. Prior to his tenure in the State Senate, he served in the Illinois House of Representative from 2012–2018. Senator Sims was the chief sponsor of the Illinois SAFE-T Act—a comprehensive approach to rid the state's criminal justice system of systemic racism.*





THE  
**ALL-ENCOMPASSING**  
ACTIONS OF LEGISLATIVE PROCEDURES  
**AND ITS JARRING RESULTS**

**By Senator  
George E. Young, Sr.,  
D. Min (OK)**



I am always amazed at the process upon which our legislative procedure is based. The idea of having legislation based on a thorough vetting by a committee of individuals who, by some account, have some affinity for the committees of which they are members is a great thing. My background as a member of the Department of Human Services Commission made me interested in Health and Human Service work. My work as an accountant/auditor and a degree in accounting ushered me to the Business and Commerce Committee. I have some ability to ask questions and help make the piece of proposed legislation stronger. We are elected to serve the best interest of the four million citizens of Oklahoma (and particularly) Senate District 48.

Yet that benefit, that possibility is short circuited when the chair of any committee has sole power to hear or not hear a piece of proposed legislation. This introduction brings me to the fact that the partisan politics of our political parties, chambers, and government does damage to the whole. Another illustration of this from a different viewpoint is the resistance of the Republican controlled state legislature of Alabama and Florida to just be fair in drawing voting districts.

I have two bills that I would welcome discussion by those elected to the Senate to challenge me as to their worthiness of them to become statute. Both my minimum wage and commission on race and equity legislation are a good start. The

current federal minimum wage is \$7.25 and has not been changed since July 24, 2009. Only seven states have minimum wages lower or no minimum and about thirteen that are the same as the federal minimum wage. Oklahoma's poverty level is 15.6%, which is the 10<sup>th</sup> highest. Keeping the federal minimum wage and being 10<sup>th</sup> in the highest rate of poverty ought to be enough reason to at least hear the bill. A raise would obviously impact the poverty rate in a positive way. The psychological and financial benefit would give us a boost. Our Governor brags about having a \$5–9 billion savings account, which has to irritate our most challenged citizens in just trying to make a good living.

My bill creating a Commission on Race and Equity is long overdue. There are several in existence across the nation. New York, D.C., California, Vermont, and many other states have established a state level office or commission to advance equity in all areas of life. There are numerous cities which have established this office. The Oklahoma City Council voted to establish a Human Rights Commission. I was a supporter and spoke on behalf of its establishment. The members would be chosen by the Governor, Senate, Pro Tempore, The Speaker, and the Oklahoma Legislative Black Caucus. They would mediate complaints alleging violations of the antidiscrimination laws, recommend studies, or surveys that promote antidiscrimination policies, coordinating with public and private agencies to promote racial acuity, work with law enforcements, etc. They would report directly to those who appointed them. With determination, I will be submitting these pieces of legislation again during this next session.

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*Reverend Doctor George E. Young, Sr. was elected to serve the 48<sup>th</sup> District in the Oklahoma State Senate in November 2018, where he previously served as the Chair of the Oklahoma Legislative Black Caucus. Prior to his tenure in the State Senate, served in the Oklahoma State House of Representatives. Dr. Young is the author of "[Christology: A Look at Practical Christianity](#)."*



# AN OPPORTUNITY FOR A MORE EQUITABLE CLEAN ENERGY TRANSITION

By **Angela M. Manso**  
Natural Resources Defense  
Council (NRDC)



Our country's clean energy transition to date has not been equitable, particularly for Black communities. The Greenhouse Gas Reduction Fund could allow for a **more inclusive energy transition** with more equitable outcomes and economic, health, and resilient opportunities.

Frontline communities, overwhelmingly low-income, Native, and communities of color, are the first to experience the worst consequences of climate change.<sup>1</sup> According to the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), Black people are 34% more likely to live in areas with the highest increases in childhood asthma diagnoses caused by climate-related changes in particulate matter exposure.<sup>2</sup>

However, these same communities have little to no access to green financing, which means they're not able to take advantage of the benefits of low- and zero-emission technologies like improved health and energy cost savings. These disparities show up in energy burdens, the percentage of household income used to pay for energy bills. The median energy burden for Black households is 43% higher than that for white (non-Hispanic) households according to the Department of Energy.<sup>3</sup> In 2020, Black renters

were also significantly more likely to be unable to pay an energy bill, forego crucial bills such as rent or groceries, or keep their homes at unsafe temperatures than white renters.<sup>4</sup>

A signature achievement of the Biden Administration on climate, the Inflation Reduction Act invests \$27 billion to establish the Greenhouse Gas Reduction Fund (GGRF). This is a first-of-its-kind program at EPA to rapidly deploy low- and zero-emission technologies and accelerate the transition to an equitable clean energy economy. It upholds President Biden's Justice40 Initiative to advance environmental justice and goes even further by dedicating almost 70% of program funds to make critical investments in communities underserved by traditional financial markets. This is a big deal.

Historically racist policies such as redlining have excluded Black Americans from [building wealth for generations](#). The Fair Housing Act of 1968 declared race-based redlining illegal, and Congress passed the Community Reinvestment Act (CRA) in 1977 to address discrimination in access to credit. Still, Black communities have continued to suffer from a lack of investment.<sup>5</sup> The CRA pushed lenders to reinvest in the communities in which they already operate and expand access to credit and banking services.<sup>6,7</sup> As a result, community development financial institutions (CDFIs) sprung up to fill gaps in access to financing for economically disadvantaged communities and promote community development.<sup>8</sup>

The GGRF builds on the successful model and track record of green banks, CDFIs, credit unions,

and other green and community-based lenders. It dedicates a sizable portion of funding to expand the capacity of community lenders to provide financing for clean energy projects in frontline communities.

The program has three objectives: to reduce emissions of greenhouse gases (GHG) and other pollutants, deliver benefits of GHG- and air pollution-reducing projects to communities across the United States and its territories, and mobilize financing and private capital to stimulate additional investment in these projects.

### The potential benefits are tremendous:

- Leveraging \$20 billion into \$250 billion over a decade by spurring public and private co-investment.
- Reducing 850 metric megatons or more of pollution, accounting for one-sixth of the reductions needed over 10 years to avoid the most damaging impacts of climate change.
- Creating one million direct jobs over a decade, with 380,000 located in low-income and disadvantaged communities.
- Realizing at least \$100 billion in savings, with nearly one-third of that concentrated in low-income and disadvantaged communities, reducing energy burdens.
- Avoiding thousands of early deaths by reducing air pollution, especially in low-income and communities of color that bear the greatest pollution burden.<sup>9</sup>

Black-led organizations and communities must be involved in implementing this program to

make sure low income and disadvantaged communities realize these benefits. EPA needs to award the funding to organizations with internal structures, decision-making bodies, and investment criteria that reflect representation and accountability to the communities this program prioritizes. Also, future awardees must ensure that investments will provide economic and non-economic benefits for impacted communities without causing harms such as displacement, worsening pollution burdens, or exacerbating disparities. The GGRF Equity and Governance Best Practices Alliance, a group of organizations with deep experience in environmental, economic, and racial justice, developed an [operational guide](#) for applicants to execute these strategies.

GGRF is a program with the potential to ensure that consumers, homeowners, and businesses across the country can participate in and benefit from the transition to a low-cost, low-carbon economy. NRDC will defend this program and its funding to ensure that the full amount of funding remains dedicated towards this purpose.

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*Angela M. Manso is the National Outreach Director for the Natural Resources Defense Council and is based in Washington, D.C..*

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# LET'S TAKE AIM AT LDL-C!

## Sponsored Article By Amgen

Cardiovascular disease (CVD) is arguably one of the most underappreciated public health crises and raising awareness of the impact of CVD on the Black community should be a top priority for policymakers.

Black Americans suffer consequences resulting from CVD at a higher rate than other racial and ethnic groups. Several factors contribute to these disparities and outcomes, including higher rates of hypertension and obesity, lower awareness of personal risk factors, genetics, geographic location, community factors and inequitable access to care.<sup>1,2,3,4,5</sup>

Aiming for, and maintaining, an optimal low-density lipoprotein (LDL), or “bad” cholesterol, is one of the best ways for people with cardiovascular disease (CVD) to reduce their risk

of cardiovascular events. However, structural and systemic factors perpetuate disparities in access to screenings, care and treatment of CVD.<sup>6</sup>

Despite having a higher prevalence of CVD, Black Americans are less likely to receive timely screenings for high LDL-C, a big risk factor for heart attacks and strokes.<sup>7,8</sup> Additionally, Black Americans who experience heart attacks are less likely to be prescribed appropriate treatment.<sup>9</sup>

Across the country, many patients encounter obstacles when seeking care for CVD, and these challenges can escalate when accounting for disparities in access. Understanding of, and adherence to, treatment guidelines can vary among clinicians, creating a need for awareness around the importance of guideline directed lipid management. Earlier this year, Amgen hosted the first-ever annual LDL-C Action Summit to address the state of CVD care in the U.S. The meeting brought together representatives from the American College of Cardiology (ACC), American Heart Association (AHA), Cardio Health Alliance, Family Heart Foundation and the National Lipid Association (NLA), among others, to discuss strategies and opportunities for improving lipid management among the highest risk of people living with CVD.<sup>10</sup>

Initiatives such as the LDL-C Action Summit bring us one step closer to addressing the harsh realities of cardiovascular disease, but there is much more to be done collectively to meet Amgen's ambition of halving the number of cardiovascular events by 2030.

To help raise awareness about the connection between high bad cholesterol and CVD, Amgen joined the Congressional Black Caucus Foundation (CBCF) to convene a conversation about how policymakers can help improve cardiovascular health. NBCSL Vice President, State Senator Raumes Akbari (TN) spoke during the event and encouraged local governments, including state departments of health, to make cardiovascular health a priority and ensure people have access to annual screenings.

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*Amgen encourages NBCSL to adopt Senator Akbari's sponsored legislation that will establish September as National Cholesterol Education Month. Now is the time to educate and advocate for actions that can improve access to screenings, care, and the management of cardiovascular disease among Black Americans.*

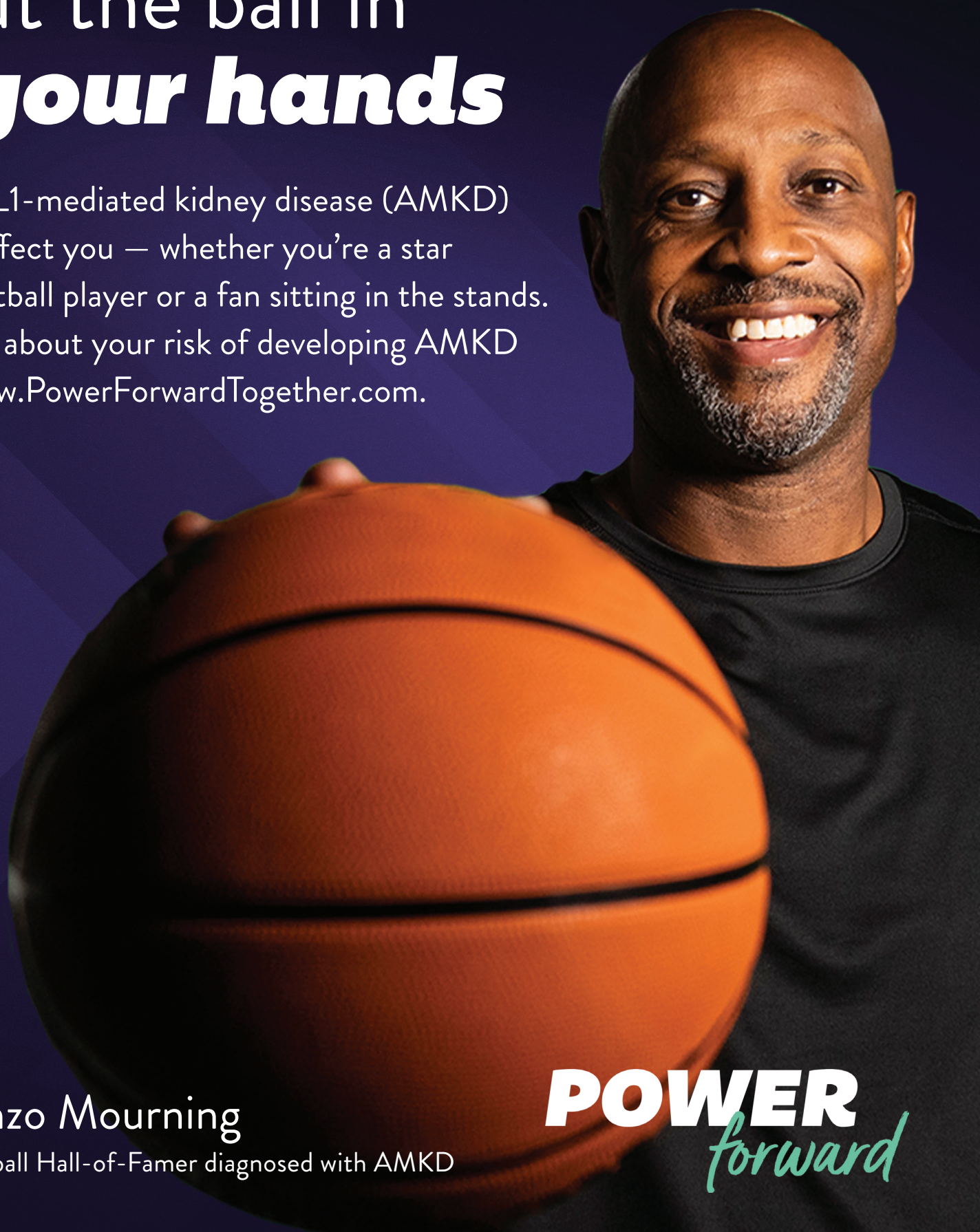
*For more information, as well as to receive information about a free LDL-C screening test, visit [WhatIsMyLDL.com](https://www.lipidlink.com). <https://www.lipidlink.com>*

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Alonzo Mourning

Basketball Hall-of-Famer diagnosed with AMKD

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Alonzo Mourning is a paid spokesperson for Vertex Pharmaceuticals.

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