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CONGRESSIONAL BLACK CAUCUS



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January 19, 2017

President-elect Donald J. Trump
Presidential Transition Headquarters
1800 F Street, NW, Room G117
Washington, DC 20270

Dear Mr. President-elect,

During your campaign, you pledged to address a number of issues being faced by African-Americans. Unfortunately, your "New Deal for Black America" represents the same old "Trickle Down" economics assumptions that didn't work for our communities in the 1980's or in the 2000's when these failed experiments were tried before. Furthermore, your insistence on reducing the African-American experience solely to the conditions faced by many in our inner cities is ultimately unproductive. 39 percent of African-Americans live in suburbs compared to 36 percent who live in inner cities. The remaining 25 percent live in small metropolitan areas and rural communities. For more than 45 years, the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC) has worked to improve conditions for African-Americans from all walks of life. Collectively, our Members represent 78 million Americans, 17 million of whom are African-American. Our districts are rural as well as urban. Some of our Members represent majority-minority districts while others do not. If you are serious about addressing issues in the African-American community, you would be wise to tap into the decades of expertise held by Members of our Caucus.

*"1. **Great Education through School Choice.** We will allow every disadvantaged child in America to attend the public, private, charter, magnet, religious or home school of their choice. School choice is the great civil rights issue of our time, and Donald Trump will be the nation's biggest cheerleader for school choice in all 50 states. We will also ensure funding for Historic Black Colleges and Universities, more affordable 2 and 4-year college, and support for trade and vocational education."*

Conversations around education reform and "school choice" often ignore the conditions outside the classroom that contribute to a student's performance. It is not enough to adjust a curriculum if we do not also address student hunger and account for parents having to work 2 or 3 jobs simply to make ends meet. Rather than address these interconnected barriers to academic achievement, your plan



would strip away \$20 billion in funding from public schools in order to create the largest private school voucher program in American history. The CBC supports access to good schools in all forms. However, simply shifting students from public to private schools does not ensure a quality education. A study into academic achievement of students in the Louisiana Scholarship Program, the largest existing voucher program, found a significant negative impact of voucher participation for math, reading, science, and social studies scores. Voucher programs in Milwaukee, Cleveland and Washington, D.C., have not resulted in any significant score difference between voucher and non-voucher students. Rather than diverting resources away from already under-resourced schools in pursuit of failed policies, the CBC would urge you to support methods that have been proven effective. Furthermore, HBCUs play an indispensable role in training African-American professionals that work, live, and serve in communities across the nation. These institutions are indispensable to our communities, and it is not enough to simply promise to “ensure funding”. You must back up that promise by providing HBCUs the support and resources necessary to carry out their critical mission. If you want to make real progress towards improving educational outcomes for African-Americans, you should embrace the policies laid out by Ranking Member Bobby Scott in the [Opening Doors for Youth Act of 2016](#) and Rep. Marcia Fudge in the [Core Opportunity Resources for Equity and Excellence Act of 2015](#).

“2. Safe Communities. *We will make our communities safe again. Every poor African-American child must be able to walk down the street in peace. Safety is a civil right. We will invest in training and funding both local and federal law enforcement operations to remove the gang members, drug dealers, and criminal cartels from our neighborhoods. The reduction of crime is not merely a goal – but a necessity.*”

Under President Obama, the Department of Justice (DOJ) began 23 investigations into law enforcement agencies accused of violating civil rights and entered 12 consent decrees to bring much-needed reforms to policing in Chicago, Baltimore, Cleveland and other cities. Unfortunately, your actions, which include nominating Sen. Jeff Sessions as Attorney General, raise great concerns about the prospects of continuing the progress made under the outgoing Administration. In a 2008 paper published by the Alabama Police Institute, Sen. Sessions called consent decrees a “dangerous exercise of raw power” and an “end run around the democratic process.” It’s troubling that a public official of Sen. Sessions’ stature would display such brazen hostility towards one of the most effective methods of bringing about meaningful reform in troubled police departments. If you believe that an individual who holds these views should serve as our nation’s top law enforcement official it is difficult to believe you are truly committed to promoting the types of community policing models supported by the CBC and its Members. In order to achieve meaningful reform on public safety and policing, you could adopt the proposals set forth in Representative Jackson Lee’s [Gun Violence Reduction Resources Act](#) and Rep. Jeffries’ [Excessive Use of Force Prevention Act](#).

“3. Equal Justice Under the Law. *We will apply the law fairly, equally and without prejudice. There will be only one set of rules – not a two-tiered system of justice. Equal justice also means the same rules for Wall Street.*”

The Members of the CBC believe that actions speak louder than words, and your record thus far casts doubt on your commitment to seeking true equality in the legal system. In 1989, you spent \$85,000 on newspaper advertisements calling for the execution of five African-American and Latino boys accused of raping a white woman in Central Park. The five boys, who were convicted based almost exclusively on their confessions that were coerced by detectives, were later exonerated on the basis of DNA evidence. In spite of this, as recently as October, you reiterated your belief that these five innocent men should be



behind bars. Instead of spreading misinformation and exploiting harmful stereotypes, the CBC urges your Administration to continue investigating potential civil rights violations related to officer-involved shootings and to vigorously fight against voter suppression schemes. In addition, the CBC encourages you to join in our continued efforts to reform the criminal justice system and address mass incarceration. You can begin to make our justice system more fair and equitable by supporting Ranking Member Conyers' [End Racial Profiling Act](#) and Rep. Richmond's [Student Disciplinary Fairness Act](#).

"4. Tax Reforms to Create Jobs and Lift up People and Communities. *We will lower the business tax from 35 percent to 15 percent and bring thousands of new companies to our shores. We will also have a massive middle class tax cut, tax-free childcare savings accounts, and childcare tax deductions and credits. We will also have tax holidays for inner-city investment, and new tax incentives to get foreign companies to relocate in blighted American neighborhoods. We will empower cities and states to seek a federal disaster designation for blighted communities in order to initiate the rebuilding of vital infrastructure, the demolition of abandoned properties, and the increased presence of law enforcement."*

The CBC supports a national strategy to eliminate poverty and extend equitable access to economic opportunity to all Americans. Programs like the New Markets Tax Credit and Empowerment Zones that leverage private capital and reward companies for investing in distressed communities are a step in the right direction. However, tax incentives alone will not restore struggling communities. If you want to create jobs and lift up communities, you should target investment to those communities that need it most. You should support programs that support small and medium-sized businesses and address the access to capital crisis in the African-American entrepreneur community. African-American communities do not lack talent and expertise. What is lacking is a sustained commitment from the public sector to assist in addressing long-standing problems. The CBC has proposed an anti-poverty plan that could improve economic outcomes in our communities if properly resourced across the federal budget. The ["10-20-30" plan](#) provides at least 10% of funds in designated accounts be spent in communities with a poverty rate of at least 20% over the last 30 years. You would be wise in joining Speaker Paul Ryan in support of this proven strategy.

"5. Financial Reforms to Expand Credit to Support New Job Creation. *We will have financial reforms to make it easier for young African-Americans to get credit to pursue their dreams in business and create jobs in their communities. Dodd-Frank has been a disaster, making it harder for small businesses to get the credit they need. The policies of the Clintons brought us the financial recession – through lifting Glass-Steagall, pushing subprime lending, and blocking reforms to Fannie and Freddie. It's time for a 21st century Glass Steagall and, as part of that, a priority on helping African-American businesses get the credit they need. We will also encourage small-business creation by allowing social welfare workers to convert poverty assistance into repayable but forgive-able micro-loans."*

In 2015, due to generational effects of past injustices combined with the repercussions of the recent financial crisis, the racial wealth gap reached historic levels. Currently, white households maintain 13 times the wealth of African-American households. African-American household wealth declined by 53 percent from 2005-2009 compared to a 16 percent decline for White households in that same time-span. This happened in large part because African-American families were targeted more frequently for subprime mortgages. Your proposals to roll back protections against this type of predatory lending show a lack of awareness of the impact these policies have had on our communities. The CBC will work with Ranking Member Waters to protect Dodd-Frank's important reforms. Better houses, stronger businesses and more prosperous neighborhoods depend on access to capital. Rather than roll back regulations and risk the financial security of African-American families, you should consider bolstering programs like the



Small Business Administration's Microloan Program that provide capital and assistance to minority-owned businesses. If your administration is serious about providing regulatory relief for smaller financial institutions and increasing investments in Community Development Financial Institutions, we can engage in a conversation. Lastly, the CBC will not support efforts to replace direct financial assistance with repayable, but forgive-able, micro-loans. Welfare reform has drastically reduced the number of people receiving direct financial assistance, and those that remain face multiple barriers including mental health, substance abuse, and educational barriers. These are root causes of poverty that should be addressed. The micro-loans proposal is just another step towards eliminating the public safety net and one we will oppose.

"6. Trade That Works for American Workers. *We will stop the massive, chronic trade deficits that have emptied out our jobs. We won't let our jobs be stolen from us anymore. We will stop the offshoring of companies to low-wage countries and raise wages at home – meaning rent and bills become instantly more affordable. We will tell executives that if they move their factories to Mexico or other countries, we will put a 35% tax on their product before they ship it back into the United States."*

We should take a scalpel to existing trade agreements, making adjustments that will help improve job creation here at home while avoiding the potential harm done by a sledgehammer approach to delicate international economic arrangements.

"7. Protection from Illegal Immigration. *We will restore the civil rights of African-Americans, Hispanic-Americans, and all Americans, by ending illegal immigration. No group has been more economically-harmed by decades of illegal immigration than low-income African-American workers. Hillary's pledge to enact "open borders," – made in secret to a foreign bank – would destroy the African-American middle class. We will reform visa rules to give American workers preference for jobs, and we will suspend reckless refugee admissions from terror-prone regions that cost taxpayers hundreds of billions of dollars. We will use a portion of the money saved by enforcing our laws, and suspending refugees, to re-invested in our inner cities."*

The CBC will not buy in to the divisive rhetoric that blames immigration for the social and economic problems in African-American communities. Our members support comprehensive immigration reform that includes a path to citizenship and do not support deportation of law-abiding immigrants and their families. Rather than building walls, as you promised to do throughout your campaign, the U.S. must continue to attract talented people from all over the world, including the tens of thousands of Black immigrants who come to our country from African and Caribbean nations. In order to truly help low-income workers, you should work with our Members on the House Committee on Education & the Workforce to raise the minimum wage, strengthen worker protections, and increase access to skills training.

"8. New Infrastructure Investment. *We will leverage public-private partnerships, and private investments through tax incentives, to spur \$1 trillion in infrastructure investment over 10 years, of which the inner cities will be a major beneficiary. We will cancel all wasteful climate change spending from Obama-Clinton, including all global warming payments to the United Nations. This will save \$100 billion over 8 years. We will use these to help rebuild the vital infrastructure, including water systems, in America's inner cities."*

The components of your infrastructure plan that have been conveyed to the public amount to over \$100 billion in tax breaks to private investors. While this plan would allow private companies to enjoy even greater profits, as currently envisioned, it likely would not address many of America's most pressing infrastructure needs like repairing existing roads or replacing water infrastructure in communities like



Flint. The CBC urges your Administration to leverage historically low interest rates to invest real dollars into rebuilding our infrastructure in rural and urban communities. You should also prioritize the hiring of local labor to execute major projects. If you are serious about making significant federal investments in our nation's infrastructure, Members of the Caucus are available for this discussion.

"9. Protect the African-American Church. *We will protect religious liberty, promote strong families, and support the African-American church."*

The CBC is comprised of Members of various faiths and takes religious liberty very seriously. Our Members do not believe there is an ongoing attack on religious liberty by the federal government. However, this does not take away from the stark reality that African-American churches have been the target of over 100 hate-filled attacks since the 1950s. These attacks have been brought down upon our communities by racists who have murdered parishioners and burned down Houses of worship. Since Election Day, over 1,000 incidents of bias-related harassment and intimidation have been reported all over the country. We urge the DOJ under your Administration to be unrelenting in rooting out racist extremism.

"10. America First Foreign Policy. *We will stop trying to build Democracies overseas, wasting trillions, but focus on defeating terrorists and putting America First."*

While the CBC shares your desire to protect our communities against acts of terror, our Members would caution you not to limit this effort to any particular ideology. A recent survey found that state and local law enforcement personnel are almost twice as concerned about right-wing and anti-government terrorism as they are about the threat from ISIS, al-Qaeda or like-minded terrorist organizations. If you are interested in addressing radicalism in all its forms, you should work with Ranking Member Thompson and our Members on the House Committee on Homeland Security to develop effective strategies to defend Americans at home and abroad. Furthermore, the CBC supports an inclusive global dialogue that seeks to solve our shared problems through diplomacy. We urge you to work with our Members on the House Committee on Foreign Affairs like Reps. Meeks and Bass to continue the work being done by the United States to improve outcomes and empower individuals around the world, including on the African continent and in the Caribbean.

African-Americans have made tremendous gains in the past 50 years. However, there is much more work to be done to address a number of issues still affecting our communities. Strong leadership will be required to improve access to economic opportunity and affordable housing, close the achievement gap in education, and ensure the rights of all citizens are protected. It is my sincere hope that you will accept this invitation to engage in an earnest effort to work together on these issues.

Sincerely,

Cedric L. Richmond
Chair, Congressional Black Caucus

