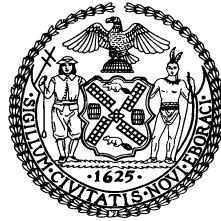


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THE COUNCIL

BRIEFING PAPER OF THE HUMAN SERVICES DIVISION
ROBERT NEWMAN, LEGISLATIVE DIRECTOR

COMMITTEE ON HIGHER EDUCATION
CHARLES BARRON, CHAIR

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OVERSIGHT: The Status of CUNY's Implementation of the Black Male Initiative

On Thursday, April 27, 2006, at 1:00 p.m., the Committee on Higher Education, chaired by Council Member Charles Barron, will conduct an oversight hearing regarding the Status of the City University of New York ("CUNY's") Implementation of the Black Male Initiative. The hearing will focus on CUNY's implementation of university-wide programs and services to achieve the goals of the Black Male Initiative. The Committee has invited members of CUNY's Administration, representatives from CUNY schools, and other interested parties to testify.

Background: The Benefits of Higher Education

Access to higher education is crucial to upward mobility in the United States. A high school diploma is no longer sufficient for most people to secure a reasonably well-paying job. Two years of post-secondary education has become the baseline for future success.¹ Generally, the higher the level of educational attainment, the more a person will earn over their lifetime. Further, an educated workforce is central to the development and sustainability of communities with the largest predictor of economic well-being in cities being its percentage of college graduates.² State and city governments appropriate millions of dollars per year for public colleges and universities and the federal government provides grants, loans and work assistance, as well as tax credits and deductions, to help students finance secondary education.³

Higher education benefits all sectors our communities. The individual benefits of a college education are obvious and include the ability to earn higher earnings. For members of all demographic groups, average earnings increase measurably with higher levels of education.⁴ Over their working lives, typical college graduates earn about 73 percent more than typical high school graduates, and those with advanced degrees earn two to three times as much as high school graduates.⁵

In addition to the individual benefits received from attaining a post-secondary education,

¹ Center for an Urban Future Report: "Ready or Not," released April 2006.

² Stephen Ohlemacher, "College grads drive up home prices by running to big cities in search of jobs," amNewYork, April 18, 2006.

³ CUNY's modified budget for fiscal 2006 was well over \$620 million. *See*, New York City Council, Fiscal 2007 Preliminary Budget Hearings: Committee on Higher Education, on file with Higher Education Committee.

⁴ Sandy Baum and Kathleen Payea, Education Pays 2004 Trends in Higher Education Series: The Benefits of Higher Education for Individuals and Society. College Board, Revised Edition, 2005.

⁵ *Id.*

it has been reported that college graduates contribute more than others to the public treasury and to social well-being.⁶ The societal benefits of higher levels of education correspond to lower levels of unemployment and poverty, higher contributions to tax revenue, and decreased dependence on social safety-net programs, generating decreased demand on public budgets.⁷ College graduates are also said to have lower smoking rates, more positive perceptions of personal health, and lower incarceration rates than individuals who have not graduated from college.⁸ Higher levels of education also correlate with higher levels of civic participation, including volunteer work, voting, and blood donation.⁹

Despite the benefits of higher education, enrolling and graduating from college has proven to be difficult for many students. Overall, approximately 66 percent of graduates in the U.S. enroll in post-secondary education or training directly after high school, but only 25 percent earn a degree.¹⁰ In New York State, while 57 of every 100 ninth graders graduate high school on time, only 41 of them enter college immediately after graduating.¹¹ Of these, just 31 remain enrolled for a sophomore year and 19 finish college within six years.¹² Obtaining a college degree is particularly difficult for individuals from underprivileged backgrounds. Nationally, only 7 percent of lower-income students get a B.A. by the age of 26, compared to 60 percent of upper-income students.¹³

⁶ Sandy Baum and Kathleen Payea, *Education Pays 2004 Trends in Higher Education Series: The Benefits of Higher Education for Individuals and Society*. College Board, Revised Edition, 2005.

⁷ *Id.*

⁸ *Id.*

⁹ *Id.*

¹⁰ Center for an Urban Future Report: “Ready or Not,” released April 2006.

¹¹ *Id.*

¹² *Id.*

¹³ *Id.*

Black Men and Higher Education

In the African-American community and for Black men in particular, attaining a post-secondary education and its corresponding benefits has proven to be challenging. According to the 2000 census, there are over 34 million Blacks in the United States, 8.1 million of whom are living below the poverty line.¹⁴ Of the total Black population, 16.4 million are males.¹⁵ As of March 2004, nationwide, 17.6 percent of Black Americans 25 years and over had attained bachelor's degrees,¹⁶ representing 16.6 percent of the national numbers as compared to 18.5 percent of their Black female and 32.9 percent of their White male counterparts 25 years and over who had attained bachelor's degrees.¹⁷

Locally, it appears that the educational level of Black males in New York City reflects the national statistics, with Black males lagging behind other groups in attaining post-secondary education. There are an estimated 2.1 million Blacks residing in New York City, 11 percent of whom are males.¹⁸ Of this population, 9.8 percent of Black males 25 and older had a bachelor's degree compared to 10.5 percent of their Black female and 21.1 percent of their White male counterparts.¹⁹ As previously noted, higher education is viewed by many as one of the gateways to employment and higher earnings. A recent New York Times article reports that nationwide a large cohort of poorly educated Black men are becoming ever more disconnected from the

¹⁴ U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2000 Demographic Profile Highlights: Selected Population Group: Black or African American alone, available at <http://factfinder.census.gov>. As previously noted, generally, poverty rates are linked to lower levels of education and employment, See, Rogelio Saenz, "Beyond New Orleans: The Social and Economic Isolation of Urban African Americans," Population Reference Bureau, 2006, available at <http://www.prb.org>

¹⁵ See, supra, note 13.

¹⁶ U.S. Census Bureau, available at <http://www.census.gov/population/socdemo/race/black/ppl-186/tab7.pdf>.

¹⁷ U.S. Census Bureau, available at <http://www.census.gov/population/socdemo/race/black/ppl-186/tab7a.pdf>.

¹⁸ U.S. Census Bureau, 2004 American Community Survey, available at <http://www.factfinder.census.gov>.

¹⁹ U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2000 Summary File 3 (SF3), available at <http://www.factfinder.census.gov>.

mainstream society and by 2004, 50 percent of Black men in their twenties who lacked a college education were jobless.²⁰ According to the New York State Department of Labor, the unemployment rate²¹ in 2005 for Black males in the City was 10.7 percent compared to 7.2 percent of their Black female and 4.4 percent of their White male counterparts.²²

CUNY's Impact on New York City and the Black Male Initiative

The lack of Black male enrollment, retention and graduation from colleges and universities is an issue faced by institutions of higher education nationwide, including CUNY, which is the largest urban university in the nation.²³ CUNY serves more than 450,000 degree-credit students and adult, continuing and professional education students.²⁴ The number of graduates discharged by CUNY into the labor market is quite significant- at least one-third of college educated New Yorkers are CUNY graduates.²⁵

In the 2004-2005 school year, 31 percent of CUNY's 188,000 undergraduates were Black and of those Black students, women out-numbered men 2 to 1.²⁶ It has been reported that only 27 percent of Black men who start at a CUNY four-year institution and 15 percent who start at a community college have earned a bachelor's degree six years after enrolling.²⁷ In response to

²⁰ Erik Eckholm, "Plight Deepens for Black Men, Studies Warn," New York Times, March 20, 2006.

²¹ In labor force (population 16 years and over), *See* New York State Department of Labor 2005, on file with the New York City Council, Higher Education.

²² *Id.*

²³ CUNY has 11 senior colleges, six community colleges, the CUNY Honors College, the Graduate School and University Center, the Graduate School of Journalism, the Law School and the Sophie Davis School of Biomedical Education. *See*, "About CUNY," available at <http://portal.cuny.edu>.

²⁴ *Id.*

²⁵ "About CUNY," available at <http://portal.cuny.edu>.

²⁶ Scott Jaschik, "The Missing Black Men," Inside Higher Ed, December 5, 2005.

²⁷ *Id.*

these figures and the national statistics, in May of 2004, CUNY's board of trustees approved as part of its 2004-2008 Master Plan, the "Chancellors Initiative on the Black Male in Education," to address the "disproportionately low-percentages and numbers of Black men within higher education."²⁸ The CUNY Master Plan authorized the Chancellor to "oversee the development and implementation of a new University-wide program aimed at implementing some of the most effective practices in this area."²⁹

In the fall of 2004, a taskforce was established by the Chancellor pursuant to the Black Male Initiative to examine the issue of low Black male enrollment and retention, and to develop recommendations to improve the recruitment and retention of Black males at CUNY. The taskforce was organized into five working groups: pre-kindergarten to grade twelve, higher education, employment, social relations and criminal justice.³⁰ Each working group assessed how its topic played a possible role in creating a barrier to black men entering and graduating from institutions of higher education, with particular attention to possible barriers on CUNY campuses. The working groups reported findings and recommendations, which were included in a final report issued by CUNY.³¹ The taskforce recommended that the following methods be used to increase Black male recruitment and retention on CUNY campuses:³²

- Establish strong university leadership
- Improve access to higher education
- Increase admission and graduation rates at CUNY colleges
- Educate a new generation of K-12 teachers

²⁸ City University of New York, "Master Plan 2004-2008," *available at* http://www1.cuny.edu/portal_ur/content/2004/chancellor/masterfinal.pdf.

²⁹ *Id.*

³⁰ CUNY: "Final Report of The City University of New York Task Force on the Black Male Initiative," September 12, 2005, *available at* http://www1.cuny.edu/portal_ur/chancellor/BMI_Task_Force_Report.pdf.

³¹ *Id.*

³² *Id.*

- Use the university's resources to improve employment prospects of Black males
- Develop ways to contribute to the reduction of the incarceration rate for Black males
- Establish an Institute for the Achievement of Educational and Social Equity for Black Males
- Involve experts in the implementation of these recommendations
- Establish benchmarks

Thereafter, CUNY requested funding assistance from the New York City Council to implement the taskforce recommendations. In May 2005, the Council appropriated 2 million dollars to CUNY to launch University-wide projects. After receiving the New York City Council allocation, CUNY requested and reviewed proposals focusing on increasing enrollment of Black males and measuring their success (i.e. retention, and graduation).³³ CUNY then funded 15 programs on 12 different campuses, including eight senior colleges, two community colleges and a CUNY Prep program.³⁴ Each borough within the City received funding for CUNY schools within its community. For the most part, Black Male Initiative activities on each CUNY campus include methods to increase the school's enrollment, retention and graduation of Black men by reaching out to Black males in high school and providing mentoring and academic counseling assistance, career development workshops and/or building on pre-existing programs.³⁵

Other universities and states also offer programs that address the lack of black males in higher education. For example, the University of Memphis, North Illinois University, Cleveland State University, Texas Southern University and Ohio State University have mentoring programs focused on providing personal, academic and social support for Black males attending their

³³ CUNY Summary of Black Male Initiative Program Activities on file with the New York City Council, Higher Education Committee.

³⁴ *Id.*

³⁵ *Id.*

institutions.³⁶ The state University System of Georgia (USG) has an African-American Males Initiative comparable to CUNY's Black Male Initiative, which includes rural institutions and some historically black colleges and institutions.³⁷ Since USG launched its African-American Male Initiative, the enrollment of Black males in the university system has increased 13 percent, from 17,068 students in the fall of 2002 to 19,291 students in the fall of 2005.³⁸

CUNY's effort to address and increase the number of Black males in post-secondary institutions has caused some advocates to question the necessity of Black Male Initiative programs. In particular, advocates have expressed concern that excluding women and students who are not black is discriminatory.³⁹ Other advocates have argued that the Black Male Initiative cannot succeed without addressing the inadequacy of pre K-12 education in the City.⁴⁰ A recent report from the Center for Urban Future supports this point by highlighting that too many students who graduate from the City's public high schools are unprepared to succeed in college.⁴¹

At today's hearing, the Committee will seek to learn more about the university-wide programs and services that CUNY has implemented to achieve the goals of the Black Male Initiative, and explore ways to improve the programs and make them even more accessible to

³⁶ CUNY: "Final Report of The City University of New York Task Force on the Black Male Initiative," September 12, 2005, available at http://www1.cuny.edu/portal_ur/chancellor/BMI_Task_Force_Report.pdf.

³⁷ Scott Jaschik, "The Missing Black Men," *Inside Higher Ed*, December 5, 2005.

³⁸ University System of Georgia News Release: "USG funds Partnerships to Enhance Black Male Participation in Preparation for Higher Education," November 10, 2005 available at <http://www.usg.edu/news/2005/111005-2.phtml>

³⁹ Karen W. Arenson, "CUNY Program to Help Black Men is Called Discriminatory," *New York Times*, April 19, 2006.

⁴⁰ Bernard Gassaway, "Invisible Black Boys become Invisible Black Men Unless...", on file with the New York City Council, Higher Education Committee.

⁴¹ Center for Urban Future Report: "Ready or Not," released April 2006.

students throughout the City.