

Bridging the Separation Between Church and State

In the African American Community we have heard political and faith-based leaders talk about “coming together” to settle the issues that are plaguing our communities. While there have been numerous efforts with varying degrees of success, a comprehensive approach to solve the problems facing many African Americans still remains elusive. The Black Elected Officials of the East Bay, an organization which I Chair, has been working with leaders in faith-based communities to develop a comprehensive outcome oriented initiative for our communities.

The strength of the current project is the honesty of the participants. The Black Elected Officials of the East Bay and the faith-based leaders started with an honest dialogue about what has prevented us from successfully coming together, resulting in a statement outlining core principals and a code of conduct. Yet more importantly everyone agrees that the process must be outcome oriented; we gave ourselves 365 days to make effective change in our communities. The areas we agreed to cover are: jobs, health care, mentoring, family counseling, financial planning, childcare, education (including K-12, community colleges, and adult education), and parent organizing in local school districts. All of these issues are fundamental to African Americans achieving the economic, social, and political equity which has been lacking since our nation’s inception.

The members of the working group are confident that our work will net future successes, perhaps a real full service supermarket in West Oakland. However, we don’t only dream, about our future successes we are well on the way to changing the face of the critical issue of child care in Alameda County. As with many issues there is a disparity between the quality of child care that is available and utilized by African Americans and parents who are of other ethnicities. Numerous factors play a role; income and culture are two of the dominant issues.

Child care providers are instrumental in preparing our youth to enter kindergarten. The level of education provided in the child care setting varies drastically. Unfortunately, many African American children do not receive the necessary education in their child care setting to prepare them for kindergarten, which is often the genesis for the achievement gap between African Americans and students of other ethnicities throughout the public education system.

A small committed working group led by Pastor Hames of Beebe Memorial Church, assisted by Pastor Carey, of True Vine Missionary Baptist Church and Pastor Mayberry, of First African AME, members of my staff, members of Bananas, Oakland Licensed Daycare Association, and the Childcare Planning Council are developing a network with the goal of improving the quality of the child care in the area. A forum is tentatively scheduled for October to inform and connect parents with the most appropriate child care providers for their children.

While it is important to note the Pastors and the members of the Black Elected Officials of the East Bay are not the first group to attempt to address the pivotal issues in our communities, this group continues to come back to the table for discussion and is continuing to make progress on the essential issues. Furthermore, as a result of the honest dialogue, differences of opinions and ideas are being dealt with openly and honestly, which means when a resolution is reached, all parties are more likely to stick to the deal.

Almost every segment of the African American community is tired of watching our representation diminish in areas such as business, politics and higher education; while the media promotes and our young people respect the athletes and rappers who are not aware of or contributing to the need for community development. Black America help is on the way! There is a committed group of African American elected officials and faith-based leaders who share your vision, but we need your help - if you are interested in helping us change our communities, please contact my office at 510-272-6618.

Our success is in the air and I can hear it saying that popular chant, I am proud because I am black, and I am black because I am proud.