Date: Tuesday, June 16, 2008

Plenary Session: Fatherhood and Health Marriage: An Interactive Panel Discussion with Today’s African American Elected Officials

Workshop/Plenary Number: Plenary 2A
Number of Attendees:

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<tr>
<th>Moderator</th>
<th>Presenters</th>
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<tr>
<td>Carlis Williams, Regional Administrator, ACF Region IV, Atlanta, GA</td>
<td>Vanessa Williams, Executive Director, National Conference of Black Mayors</td>
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<td>Mayor A. C. Wharton, Shelby County, Tennessee</td>
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<td>Mayor Wayne Smith, Irvington Township, New Jersey</td>
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Summary/Main Ideas:
This session explored the importance of mayoral involvement in programs and messaging regarding healthy marriages and responsible fatherhood. Opening discussion focused on the role that mayors play in promoting healthy families. Ms. Vanessa Williams spoke about the power that mayors have as leaders in their communities and the influence that they can have by lobbying together to legislative bodies. Mayor Smith spoke to the “bully pulpit” that mayors should use to send the message of strong families. He spoke about the importance of bringing fathers into families and re-engaging the formerly incarcerated, formerly homeless and formerly addicted. Mayor Smith addressed the importance of the Black middle class in mentoring, encouraging, and embracing young people without fathers in their communities.

Mayor A. C. Wharton gave a presentation on the PAIRS program from his community in Shelby County, TN. The program is focused on 3 R’s: Rehabilitate, Renew, Reconnect. It is funded by a Responsible Fatherhood grant through ACF and operates in a correctional facility. The program’s premise is that many men behind bars are fathers and that these fathers will eventually be released from prison back to their families and communities. The program teaches inmate-fathers about emotional literacy and other key parenting and relationship skills. After involvement in the program, the inmates are allowed to have visitation with their children and a
warm, friendly room at the prison – rather than behind glass. There is also a work component that allows men to have supervised offsite work and send the money back to their families.

Mayor Smith presented his community’s work with fathers. In working with formerly incarcerated fathers, they use the Exodus model. He also spoke about interactions with John Jay College, C.U.N.Y. and the New Jersey Department of Justice in developing a new curriculum for incarcerated men. Mayor Smith went on to stress the importance of small businesses in Black communities. He said that small businesses are the most likely to hire formerly incarcerated individuals and create economic opportunities for the formerly incarcerated.

In a time for questions, audience members asked more about working with formerly incarcerated fathers. The panelists once again stressed the importance of work and jobs. As well, there was dialogue about the Second Chance Act and its importance in reintegrating men into communities and families.

Note Taker’s Name: Daniel Hekman
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