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President Hines: New Employment Numbers “Extremely Disheartening”

Today’s top-of-the-page headline in the *Journal Sentinel* notes the sad reality of African American male employment in Milwaukee, as a new study by UW-Milwaukee researchers shows that the already very poor employment situation for African American males in Milwaukee is actually getting worse.

It is extremely disheartening to see that African American male employment in Milwaukee is among the lowest in the nation. In 1970, when our city was near its peak in industrial manufacturing and the like, the study shows Milwaukee having very similar rates of employment for white and African American men. Today, however, our city has a massive employment gap, with white men enjoying an employment rate of 77% while the rate for African American men is barely hitting 45%, according to the study.

In my opinion the black male employment issue is Milwaukee’s most pressing economic and social crisis, and its negative trend is affecting our children, families, our community, and our ENTIRE city.

The study points to certain factors that are having a negative impact on our black male employment rate, including our “inconvenient and inefficient transportation links” with neighboring communities and the suburbs, where more jobs are available if only men could get to them. Huge rates of incarceration of Milwaukee’s black male working age population are also a major factor, and must be reviewed.

So what can city government do to address the problem?

The Common Council-created African American Male Unemployment Task Force has for months been meeting and discussing possible solutions and programming to address the black male employment rate crisis. The Council has approved implementing recommendations to address the findings of a disparity study, which I believe will open up and provide more city work and procurement contracts for African American males and firms that employ them.

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In addition, I believe we must expand existing markets and grow new ones such as the city-led activities at Century City, in the Menomonee Valley, and Reed Street Yards (Water Technology Research and Business Accelerator Building). I sponsored legislation to secure funding in the amount of \$20 million for the city's Me2 Milwaukee Energy Efficiency program, which offers affordable loans for home energy upgrades, incentives for energy assessments and improvements creating employment opportunities for local/city contractors.

I believe the city must continue to push for more apprenticeship and training programs that lead to a path with a secured job at the end. We need to continue partnering with businesses and organizations that are committed to hiring Milwaukee residents, and who are committed to the future success of our city.

We need to continue to push for change in our schools and our educational system so that we are generating young people who are ready to enter our workforce. Job growth and job creation must be at the very top of our strategy for bolstering Milwaukee's economic health and wellbeing. Deficiencies in our transportation system must be addressed so that willing individuals can have access to jobs no matter where in our area those jobs are located.

It is my goal to bring city leaders and the creators of the UWM report together to further discuss ways that we might reverse this discouraging trend in African American male employment in Milwaukee.