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## **Statement: “Why we can’t wait”**

**Alderman Ashanti Hamilton selected as co-chair of Black Male Achievement Advisory Council**

**April 3, 2014**

Under action taken this week by the Milwaukee Common Council, I will now assume the co-chairmanship of the Milwaukee Black Male Achievement Advisory Council. This dedicated group of local people is committed to addressing the disparities faced by black men and boys in the Milwaukee community, and the negative outcomes that result.

I am humbled by and grateful for the trust my colleagues on the Common Council have placed in me, and taken aback by the magnitude of the task at hand. Nonetheless, this is a mission with which I have considerable experience, and to which I am ready and eager to pledge my effort. I will be taking the reins of the initiative from my friend and colleague Alderman Joe Davis, Sr., under whose leadership the BMAAC first got off the ground.

Launched with the support of a National League of Cities technical assistance grant, the BMAAC is charged by the NLC with identifying local challenges and opportunities in the plight of black men and boys in Milwaukee, exploring policies and strategies that have the potential to make an impact and developing mechanisms to evaluate and sustain progress over time.

The NLC has communicated with President Obama's My Brother's Keeper Initiative and is partnering with Cities United, an initiative led by mayors which frames the challenges Milwaukee and other large cities face under the theme of “Why we can’t wait.” This week, I stared into the eyes of a grieving mother. The hope that she once held for her son’s future was extinguished within steps of her front door in an act of senseless, preventable violence. This was the second time in the last week that I have had to witness such pain in our community.

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These grieving families are feeling the very real pain of the senseless, deadly violence, but I fear that the prevalence of this violence has caused the community to become numb to murder. Worse yet, we have come to just expect that some black males will meet a violent end during the warmer months of the year. This horrifying apathy is one of many examples of “Why we can’t wait.”

The first step in reducing violent deaths among black men and boys is reaffirming that their lives do have value, and that such senseless deaths are a tragic waste of human potential. Then we must find a way to intervene in a meaningful, genuine way that requires of them responsibility, structure, compassion and understanding.

And finally, most importantly, every person in our community must be afforded the opportunity to advance economically in our society. Without providing access to quality education that leads to financial stability and the chance to contribute positively to society, any effort to improve the lives of black men and boys is simply window dressing and will have no lasting impact.

In my new leadership role on the Black Male Achievement Advisory Council, I hope to build on the progress of smaller, pilot programs that have met with success. I will introduce and advocate for solutions that I feel reflect the size of the problems, which are immense. After all, the whole purpose of pilot programs is to identify best practices in order to expand the scale at which they operate and increase the benefit to the community.

Next week, I and other city officials will have the opportunity to continue valuable discussions that began at a recent conference in New Orleans. The upcoming meetings in Oakland will not only provide us the opportunity to learn from cities that have dealt with problems similar to ours, but will offer us a chance to share with them our success stories. Together, as city leaders, we will continue the vital work to find ways to build upon that success.

We must continue forward now, with this work, because we cannot wait any longer.