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Milwaukee Black Male Achievement Advisory Council and partners applaud President Obama's commitment to improve life outcomes for young men of color; Launches city-wide Black Male Achievement collective impact initiative

MILWAUKEE, WI (February 27, 2014) – Like many cities throughout the United States, Milwaukee is in dire need for innovative, non-traditional approaches to improving minority male outcomes both inside and outside of school. That need may be greater today than at any other point in history.

Just a few moments ago, President Barack Obama unveiled his new “My Brother’s Keeper” initiative, taking action to partner with foundations, businesses, and community and faith leaders around the country to ensure that every young man has an opportunity to reach his full potential. The new White House initiative adds federal support to a national movement of leading foundations, civic organizations, and corporations working toward a better future for men of color.

Excitingly, Milwaukee is at the forefront of this endeavor. Last year, the City was selected to receive critical support and assistance from the National League of Cities and the Open Society Foundations’ *City Leadership to Promote Black Male Achievement* initiative. Each of the 11 U.S. cities selected is developing a systemic approach to reducing disparities between Black males and their peers.

Supported by a growing collaborative of local stakeholders, the **Milwaukee Black Male Achievement (BMA) Initiative** will address a multitude of challenges that place young Black boys and men of color across our city at a significant educational, economic and social disadvantage, especially compared to others around the state and country.

This initiative will form strong local partnerships in identifying and supporting proven interventions, using existing data more effectively. In addition, the initiative will develop its own comprehensive strategies focused on education, access to employment, violence prevention, reentry, men’s health and wellness, strengthening families, and better engaging boys, men, and fathers. The Milwaukee Black Male Achievement Initiative is determined to have a lasting impact on Black boys and men of color through meaningful policy and systems-level change that will affect the future progress of Milwaukee and the region.

To date, a number of collaborative groups have engaged with and joined the BMA cause. A community-driven **Advisory Council on Black Male Achievement** has been established to advocate and inform policy and decision-making on the issues and barriers impeding the potential and success of Black and other men of color within the City, County, and State.

“The formation of the BMA Advisory Council is an important first step, but we have much more work to do when it comes to addressing the multiple challenges that place Black men and boys in Milwaukee at a significant disadvantage compared to others,” said Mayor Tom Barrett and Alderman Joe Davis, Sr., Co-Chairs of the City-convened Advisory Council in a joint-statement on the group’s webpage.

“These problems will not go away by themselves, and it is up to this generation to right the ship. We applaud President Obama’s commitment to direct the federal government to look for ways to specifically help young Black boys and men. And we will follow his lead.”

The University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee (UWM), a partner of the City's BMA initiative, is hopeful for the same. In anticipation of the announcement, UWM's Associate Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs, Jim Hill, expressed his excitement for the President of the United States' recognition that the plight of Black boys and men go beyond the reach and capacity of local communities and states. Rather, it is a national crisis that America must address if it is going to maximize opportunity for all of its citizens. The President's announcement today affirms that the Milwaukee BMA Initiative's public/private strategy is aligned with the White House as it continues to leverage the needed support, partnerships, and resources to gain traction in the City of Milwaukee and beyond.

Milwaukee stands out among other cities. The data makes it clear that wide racial disparities exist in education, employment and the criminal justice system, putting Black males in a far worse position than in any other community.

Milwaukee is well-positioned to mobilize key community stakeholders including government, business, faith-based, academic and community-based organizations around a common BMA agenda and can align efforts using common measures of success.

"The convening of the BMA Advisory Council and initiative and the launching of President Obama's White House Initiative clearly demonstrate that Milwaukee, like the nation, is willing, ready, and capable of collectively improving health, life, and educational outcomes for Black boys and men everywhere," said Jeffery Roman, Chair of the City of Milwaukee Equal Rights Commission and champion facilitator of the local initiative.

Roman has been working over the last two years to engage a wide cross-sector partnership strategy, and has enlisted the support and commitment of a broad range of community, faith-based and municipal partners, businesses, workforce development agencies and community foundations from around the area, who have already pledged to work closely together through the BMA Initiative. In the coming year, these entities will work to mobilize the organizational, political, and financial resources needed to build a better future for Black boys and men in Milwaukee.

Six focus areas and sustainability needs have surfaced to engage the community, align resources, steer cross-sector linkage and support, and implement strategic interventions and action throughout 2014:

- **Family and Social Development**
 - *Strengthening Black families and increasing involvement of Black men and fathers in the lives of children*
- **Education K-16**
 - *Improving access to quality education and learning opportunities before, during and after school, and supporting Black boys and men, pre-K through post-secondary education*
- **Employment and Workforce Development**
 - *Improving access to quality job training and employment opportunities, and creating pathways to entrepreneurship for Black men and boys*
- **Health and Wellness**
 - *Improving the social, emotional, mental, and physical well-being of Black boys and men, and eliminating the culture of violence*
- **Incarceration and Criminal Justice**
 - *Addressing disproportionate criminal justice contact and confinement of Black boys and men; and strengthening reentry support and resources*
- **Faith-based and Community Engagement**
 - *Strengthening faith-based and cross-sector engagement and linking available resources and assets to support Black boys and men*

The Milwaukee Black Male Achievement Advisory Council encourages community input and involvement and is created in perpetuity by City Ordinance to be informed and driven by the community. Become a partner, get involved and stay connected at: www.milwaukee.gov/bma