



'Making a Difference' Forum Honors Martin Luther King, Jr.

Community Breakfast Put Focus on Challenges Facing Black and Latino Men

BOSTON, Jan. 11 /PRNewswire-USNewswire/ -- Today, over 200 Boston-area leaders from schools, businesses, foundations, government, and community-based organizations gathered to explore solutions to the education and workforce challenges facing men of color. The occasion was Jobs for the Future's "Making a Difference in Our Community" breakfast, held annually in commemoration of Martin Luther King's birthday.

"We are all here today," said JFF CEO Marlene B. Seltzer on opening the breakfast forum, "because we have a grave concern that we are losing a generation of young men of color -- to a life of poverty, dead-end jobs, and hopelessness -- a life that will prevent them from participating in the economic and social benefits of our society."

The forum, attended by representatives of a wide variety organizations committed to "opportunity for all," featured a variety of speakers, including Suzanne Bump, the director of workforce development for Massachusetts, and Dana Mohler-Faria, the Governor's Special Adviser for Education, both of whom brought greetings from the administration of Governor Deval Patrick.

Dr. Rosa Smith, president of the Schott Foundation for Education, was the first keynote speaker. The Schott Foundation strives to develop and strengthen a broad-based and representative movement to achieve equality in public education. Its Public Education and Black Male Students: A State Report Card shows that 60 percent of U.S. black male students do not graduate from high school.

"Here in America, here in Massachusetts, the truth is that our adult decisions indicate clearly that we do not yet love all the children," Dr. Smith said. "And especially we do not love poor children. We do not love our black and brown children. And mostly we do not love our black and brown boys."

Claudio Martinez, executive director of the Hyde Square Task Force, described the work of his organization to develop the skills of youth and their families so that they are empowered to enhance their own lives and build a stronger urban community. "Poverty has structural causes that require collective answers," Martinez explained. "Neither the corporate sector nor the government nor the nonprofit sector can solve these problems alone. All three sectors, however, can and must do a better job."

Keith Motley, vice president of business affairs at UMASS Boston, described why he and several colleagues cofounded Concerned Black Men of Massachusetts and its Paul Robeson Institute for Positive Self-Development. CBMM formed in 1989, he noted, when "10 men from all walks of life came together from diverse professional backgrounds mainly because we were just tired" of hearing depressing statistics and negative stereotypes. "We wanted to promote and honor a positive role for black males in society," he said, adding that it's important that "young men understand there's nothing they can't achieve."

Roundtable discussions engaged all participants in exploring what it would mean to commit to a community-wide approach to making a difference in

the lives of black and Latino males. They brainstormed how their organizations might change to better address the obstacles to success that these young men

face in today's economy and society. And they looked at changes in public policies that would help their organizations do this essential work.

"There is real power in this room," Marlene Seltzer noted. "Our challenge, and that of our new leaders like Governor Deval Patrick and Boston's incoming superintendent of schools Manuel Rivera, will be to mobilize the complex set of resources and supports and learning opportunities needed to move this work forward here and throughout the nation -- to create the kind of education and career pathways that reflect and meet the complex needs of every individual."

Jobs for the Future is a Boston-based nonprofit that seeks to accelerate the educational and economic advancement of youth and adults struggling in today's economy. JFF partners with leaders in education, business, government, and communities around the nation to: strengthen opportunities for youth to succeed in postsecondary learning and high-skill careers; increase opportunities for low-income individuals to move into family-supporting careers; and meet the growing economic demand for knowledgeable and skilled workers.

For more information on "Opportunity for All," visit <http://www.jff.org>.

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