

## GOVERNMENT

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“ I’m reaching out to some of America’s leading foundations and corporations on a new initiative to help more young men of color facing especially tough odds stay on track and reach their full potential. ”

Barack Obama, President of the United States, State of the Union, 2014

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**O**n February 27, 2014, President Obama declared his commitment to young men of color through the announcement of a major public-private partnership called My Brother’s Keeper (see sidebar on p. 29). The initiative engages the private sector and philanthropic community and places a strong emphasis on identifying and scaling strategies and approaches that work. While much attention has been focused on this initiative, there has also been growing engagement by state and, especially, local governments in recent years.

One notable effort to engage mayors and municipalities is Cities United, an initiative focused on reducing the violent deaths of black men and boys. A partnership among Casey Family Programs, Open Society Foundations, Mayor Michael Nutter of Philadelphia, and Mayor Mitch Landrieu of New Orleans, Cities United is led by the National League of Cities and currently engages 58 mayors across the country. According to Mayor Nutter, “Cities United helps mayors and city leaders focus on prevention rather than prosecution, intervention rather than incarceration, and provides data and tools to topple systemic barriers to opportunity facing African-American men and boys.”<sup>6</sup>

Through a separate but related initiative, the National League of Cities leads Cities for Black Male Achievement, a technical assistance

initiative supporting 11 cities promoting black male achievement in their communities. These cities have committed to raising the visibility of issues faced by black males, developing cross-sector partnerships, effectively utilizing data, and implementing comprehensive strategies and policies that include authentic engagement by young black men themselves. With assistance from the Institute for Black Male Achievement, the National League of Cities supports these communities through regular webinars, individual and peer group check-ins, and site visits.

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Leon Andrews, senior fellow, National League of Cities

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Leon Andrews, senior fellow with the National League of Cities, who oversees both efforts, believes, “City-level government is probably

the most effective arm in engaging in meaningful ways. Mayors can play a unique role in driving a strategy in a city that can lead in a significant positive direction.” In Philadelphia, for example, Mayor Nutter re-established the Mayor’s Commission on African-American Males and in February 2014 approved a series of concrete policy recommendations presented by the Commission.

The Young Men’s Initiative in New York City is often cited as an exemplar of how cities can take action. The initiative is one of the nation’s most comprehensive efforts to tackle the broad disparities slowing the advancement of black and Latino young men. This innovative

public-private partnership includes \$60 million in private investments from Open Society Foundations and Bloomberg Philanthropies and is also funded by an ongoing city tax levy that has been baselined into perpetuity. The initiative targets education, employment, health, and justice, with a focus on mentoring and a special emphasis on fatherhood. The City closely measures and evaluates the success of all program investments and policy and practice changes to ensure successes are learned from and taken to scale, while programs and policies facing challenges are revamped or discontinued.

Another local initiative with a specific focus on young black men is Oakland Unified School

## MY BROTHER’S KEEPER

In February 2014, President Obama launched My Brother’s Keeper, a national effort dedicated to creating opportunities for boys and young men of color. The White House initiative engages local and state governments, foundations, businesses, nonprofits, and faith communities, among others. Rather than creating a new government program, this initiative intends to build on existing successes, assessing critical indicators of life outcomes, examining the impact of federal policies, and promoting effective strategies and practices.

Foundations are significant partners in this effort. Annie E. Casey Foundation, Atlantic Philanthropies, Bloomberg Philanthropies, California Endowment, Ford Foundation, Kapor Center for Social Impact, Knight Foundation, Nathan Cummings Foundation, Open Society Foundations, Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, and W.K. Kellogg Foundation have thus far committed to leveraging at least \$200 million over the next five years. Prominent members of the business community were also present at the launch of the initiative, including executives from American Express, McDonald’s, and Sam’s Club.

The initiative intends to address areas with the highest potential for impact at key moments in young men’s lives, including: early child development and school readiness, parenting and parent engagement, third grade literacy, educational opportunity and school discipline reform, interactions with the criminal justice system, ladders to jobs and economic opportunity, and healthy families and communities.

Addressing the need for this effort, President Obama stated in his announcement, “Fifty years after Dr. King talked about his dream for America’s children, the stubborn fact is that the life chances [for] the average black or brown child in this country lags behind by almost every measure and is worse for boys and young men.... And the worst part is we’ve become numb to these statistics.... We just assume this is an inevitable part of American life, instead of the outrage that it is.... But these statistics should break our hearts, and they should compel us to act.”

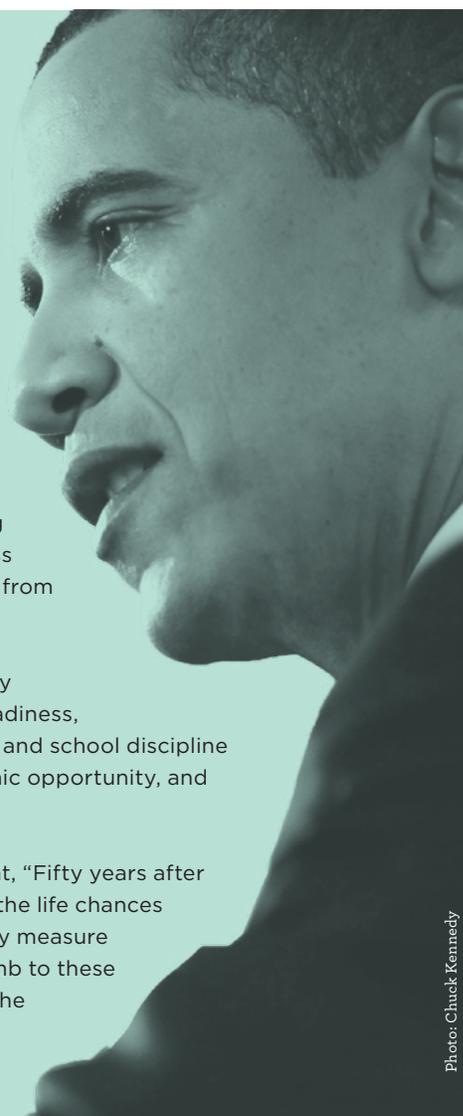


Photo: Chuck Kennedy



Cities United mayors gathered to watch President Obama's announcement of the My Brother's Keeper initiative.

District's Office of African American Male Achievement, created in Fall 2010. Led by Chris Chatmon, the Office strives to ensure that the district's black male students are college and career ready. In addition to developing new programs, Chatmon seeks a transformation of the ecosystem of the school district and the broader community to one that he describes as a "conspiracy of care" for black males.

At the state level, California's Alliance for Boys and Men of Color has had enormous success in building support for policy changes and was identified by interviewees as a model for future work. A coalition of community organizations, foundations, youth leaders, and systems leaders, the Alliance has worked in partnership with the Assembly Select Committee on the Status of Boys and Men of Color in California to enact laws that improve the health and opportunities of young men of color. A series of 2013 policy victories included the Campus Safety bill (AB 549), encouraging school districts to integrate alternatives to law enforcement into school safety decision-making processes,

and "Ban the Box" (AB 218), forbidding state and local agencies from asking job applicants to disclose criminal convictions on the initial employment application.

Elsewhere, there are exciting developments taking place on the policy front, both locally and nationally. Attorney General Eric Holder has called for criminal justice reforms, shifting the country's tough-on-crime policies and reducing mandatory minimum guidelines. In addition, the Departments of Justice and Education have issued new guidance to schools to avoid and redress racial discrimination in disciplinary policies. Similarly, local school districts, cities, and states are implementing changes that dismantle the school-to-prison pipeline by ending "zero tolerance" practices and implementing alternatives like restorative justice.

These efforts are a promising start, but many interviewees stated that greater engagement by the public sector is still needed.

# BLACK MALE ACHIEVEMENT ACTIVITIES IN GOVERNMENT

## CALIFORNIA

Assembly Select Committee on the Status of Boys and Men of Color

## OAKLAND

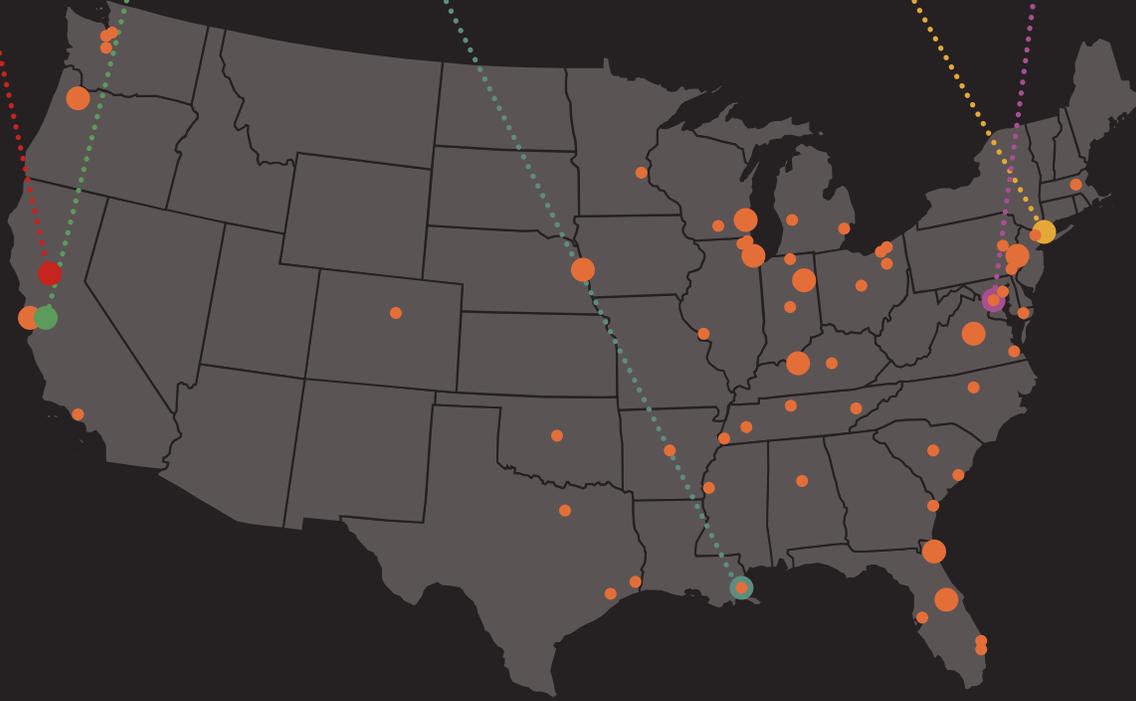
Office of African American Male Achievement, Oakland Unified School District

## NEW YORK CITY

Young Men's Initiative

## FEDERAL

- My Brother's Keeper
- White House Initiative on Educational Excellence for African Americans
- White House Initiative on Historically Black Colleges and Universities
- Congressional Black Caucus
- Congressional Caucus on Black Men and Boys



## NEW ORLEANS

NOLA for LIFE

## CITIES UNITED

- Akron, OH
- Allentown, PA
- Auburn, WA
- Baltimore, MD
- Beaumont, TX
- Birmingham, AL
- Brooklyn Park, MN
- Charleston, SC
- Charlottesville, VA\*
- Chester, PA
- Chicago, IL\*
- Cleveland, OH
- Columbia, SC
- Columbus, OH
- Dallas, TX

- Denver, CO
- Durham, NC
- Evanston, IL
- Fort Wayne, IN\*
- Grand Rapids, MI
- Greenville, MS
- Hampton, VA
- Houston, TX
- Indianapolis, IN
- Jackson, TN
- Jacksonville, FL\*
- Knoxville, TN
- Las Vegas, NV
- Los Angeles, CA
- Lexington, KY
- Little Rock, AR

- Louisville, KY\*
- Madison, WI
- Memphis, TN
- Milwaukee, WI\*
- Nashville, TN
- New Orleans, LA
- Newton, MA
- North Chicago, IL
- Oakland, CA\*
- Oklahoma City, OK
- Omaha, NE\*
- Orlando, FL\*
- Paterson, NJ
- Philadelphia, PA\*
- Portland, OR\*
- Riviera Beach, FL

- Salisbury, MD
- Savannah, GA
- Seattle, WA
- Shaker Heights, OH
- South Bend, IN
- Southfield, MI
- Tacoma, WA
- Tampa, FL
- University City, MO
- Washington, DC
- West Palm Beach, FL

\* Also affiliated with the Cities for Black Male Achievement technical assistance initiative