

PRESS RELEASE

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For more information:
Speaker's Office
410-841-3916

SPEAKER JONES ANNOUNCES RACIAL AND ECONOMIC JUSTICE AGENDA

Annapolis, MD – Today, House Speaker Adrienne A. Jones announced the nation's first comprehensive legislative package dedicated to closing race-based economic and health gaps for minority communities.

“Our country had a moment of reckoning this summer when thousands of protesters, in every state, demanded that we address the racial inequality that continues to exist. As the first Black speaker in Maryland history, I cannot waste this moment,” said **Speaker Jones**. “Justice and equity reaches further than police reform. We have to create better access and more pathways to economic opportunities. We must get it right.”

The 2021 Racial and Economic Justice Agenda package was developed this fall with over three dozen local, state and national leaders on ideas to address systemic racism across sectors. The agenda makes 30 policy recommendations, including nine pieces of legislation, in five key areas: housing, corporate management, banking, health, business and government.

“It is exciting to see such a comprehensive legislative agenda addressing the need for policies to ensure economic empowerment and environmental justice for Black and Brown communities in Maryland” said **Dr. Sherita Hill Golden, Vice President and Chief Diversity Officer at Johns Hopkins Medicine**. “In order to achieve health equity, it is crucial for all of our citizens to have access to healthy and affordable food and housing, parks and green spaces for exercise, and economic opportunities that enhance access to healthcare.”

Speaker Jones will be introducing legislation to expand economic opportunities for more wealth inclusion. The bill will require any company receiving State capital funding over \$1 million to demonstrate racial diversity on its board and in its mission; mandate any company doing business with the State to demonstrate racial diversity on their board beginning in FY23; and create a State equity scorecard that shows a corporation's diversity and spending that go to minority businesses. Despite gains, minority women represent less than five percent of board members in the United States.

"Police reform is needed; however, we will never be able to truly see the changes until we eradicate systemic poverty. Systemic poverty, which is rooted in racism, continues to be the biggest enemy to Black people. We want to work, we do not want handouts, we do not want to commit crimes...we want to work," said **D. Watkins, author and professor**.

The Agenda will also include bills to:

- Prevent loan and credit applicants from being denied if they can provide alternate forms of credit worthiness (Queen);
- Create tax-free savings accounts to help first-time homebuyers afford the high cost of a down payment, closing costs etc. (Brooks);
- Adding a Certified Business Enterprise component to help Maryland minority companies compete for State bids (Washington);
- Improve the State's procurement process and provide more technical resources to minority businesses (Wilson);
- Redirects \$10 million to TEDCO's Builder's Fund so minority business have access to more meaningful venture opportunities (D. Barnes);
- Establish Health Equity Resource Communities dedicated to closing gaps in our healthcare system (Barron/J. Lewis);
- Declare racism a public health crisis and require all healthcare providers to complete bias training as part of their licensing process (Pena-Melnyk).

"With Speaker Jones' extraordinary leadership, I am proud to support the nation's first truly comprehensive statewide policy agenda for racial justice and economic progress in Maryland," said **John B. King Jr., former U.S. Secretary of Education under President Obama**. "As the country continues to reckon with over 400 years of anti-Blackness, it is incredibly clear that our work is far from done in addressing systemic inequity. It is urgent that we do more than just take steps, but rather make leaps for Black justice in our state. We simply cannot afford for Black equity and excellence to be a side conversation."

The legislative package will be introduced in the House of Delegates in the coming days.

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