

SLIDE #1

Black and Hispanic Caucus Minority State of the City Address

May 4, 2008

Take a Look at this Closely

1. Introduction

Mr. President, Mr. City Town Clerk, Colleagues and Guests,

Good evening and welcome to the Black and Hispanic Caucus Minority State of the City Address.

It is an honor and heavy responsibility to present this address tonight.

These are difficult economic times. Our City is making many positive initiatives. Tonight we will look at the conditions in our neighborhoods so that we can pull together even more with solutions that make our City stronger.

If I would dare to ask my 29 Colleagues, how many Latinos and African Americans live in your ward? How many Aldermen represent at least one hundred Black and Hispanic families? Please raise your hand. How many Aldermen represent two hundred or more Black and Hispanic families in your ward? Please raise your hand.

As we can see, we are all in this together.

I would like to recognize and acknowledge the Black and Hispanic Caucus for the tremendous task of representing the needs of Black and Hispanic families, who face the greatest disparities in every aspect of life. The need of Black and Hispanic families, and the solutions to these needs are the needs and solutions for all families.

Now, would the Black and Hispanic Caucus and all those who represent Black and Hispanic families in their ward please stand? To live, to see, to know and search for solutions to improve the quality of life is what we are all about.

A hand of applause to everybody.

I would like to acknowledge members of the Caucus, family, guests, different community groups who have contributed including Michael Abeshouse, Adriana Arreola, Paul Bass, Dr. Abi Benitez, Gladys Bonomi, William Clark, C. J. Cuticello, Che Dawson, Merle Eaton, Joelle Fishman, Rev. Bonita Grubbs, Eva Heintzelman, Andrea Jackson-Brooks, Adam Joseph, Albert Lucas, Ron Manning, Deborah Marcuse, Kica Matos, Jorge Perez, Frances Padilla, Art Perlo, Mary Rosario, Viviana Santana, Debra Sullo, Alec Vincitorio. We say thank you.

You could walk to the Hill neighborhood, Fair Haven, Newhallville, Dixwell, any part of the city of New Haven and there is the same conversation. I can't find a job, the rents are high, I'm losing my house, I can't afford the taxes, I'm so tired I'm working two and three jobs I don't have time for me. The conversations people are having are echoed into all our neighborhoods. People are desperate and struggling with what bills to pay first from one pay check to the other.. They are looking for answers.

When the people are feeling despair, that there is no hope and they don't see a way out, then our nation, our state and our city, everyone needs to be searching beyond our imagination, out of the box and finding defining solutions that are meaningful to stabilizing our communities and bringing back hope.

It's a moral responsibility that we all have to uplift each other. There is a saying that when everything goes wrong the only thing you must not lose is hope. When you lose hope where is the meaning for you to live? It's like you're walking without purpose inside a tunnel where there is no light.

As you will see in the facts to follow, even with the stimulus package from President Obama there is a long way to go to solve this huge problem. The state is also in a budget crisis. Cuts on many important and needed programs that will hurt the most vulnerable are being debated.

I invite you on a journey into our neighborhoods. Take a look at this closely and imagine the solutions that we can accomplish together.

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2. Poverty and Unemployment

Poverty is the largest driving force behind the cradle to prison pipeline crisis. Although a majority of poor children live in working families playing by the rules their parents cannot earn enough to escape from poverty. (*Children's Defense Fund*)

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In New Haven, 20% of African American families, 35% of Hispanic families, and 9% of white, non-Hispanic families lived in poverty between 2005 and 2007. The situation is much worse now.

Poverty affects all of us. If you are not in poverty today, you could be tomorrow. As long as our whole community is not rising together, we cannot be successful.

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Good, living wage jobs with good benefits including health care and the right to organize are the key to coming out of the economic crisis. From March 2008 to March 2009, overall unemployment in New Haven increased by one-third.

Even those figures understate the problem because discouraged workers and first time job seekers are not included in the unemployment rate (*Source: CT Department of Labor*). Based on current economic conditions it is reasonable to assume the situation is more serious now.

It is not an exaggeration to say that by the end of this year, 10,000 jobs will be needed to employ everyone who needs and wants one, and real unemployment in New Haven could approach 20%.

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Unemployment in New Haven is already at 22% for African Americans, 17% for Latinos, and probably above 50% for teenagers (age 16-19). (*Source: US Census 2005-07. Estimates for 3/2009 by Art Perlo*). I hope you agree with me that these figures are too high.

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3, Prisons / Re-entry

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The Children's Defense Fund states that “a jail or detention cell after a child gets in trouble is the only universally guaranteed child policy in America.... It's time to guarantee every child in the richest nation on earth the health and mental health, early childhood experience, quality education, safe and stable housing and safe neighborhoods, and quality out-of-school time care they need to stay out of trouble and avoid imprisonment.”

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Every week about 25 people are released from prison to live in New Haven. There are now 2,253 New Haven residents incarcerated. The disparities are stark. 60% of those in the prison system are from four neighborhoods: the Hill, Fair Haven, Newhallville and Edgewood/West River.

If the \$77 million spent to incarcerate New Haven residents was spent on early childhood education, after school programs, and opportunities for higher education we would have different outcomes. *(Source: Kica Matos letter)* Young people need to have the sense of a positive future they can attain in order to strive for it.

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4. Housing and Homelessness

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HOMELESSNESS

The need for housing and services for people who are homeless in the City of New Haven are on the rise, due in large part to the worsening economy and the loss of jobs in the region.

New Haven's family shelters report an increase in requests by over 50% in the past six months. The shelters serving single adults are also facing increases and limited capacity. On the worst nights of this year's winter, there were as many as 125 men seeking shelter.

The Point in Time Homeless Count of January 2008 showed 816 people homeless on that given night. Of that number 254 were people in families including children.

These alarming numbers don't really represent all those who are homeless due to foreclosure, being evicted, and overcrowding. Due to the current foreclosure crisis we are faced with a state of emergency and need to prioritize homelessness. This is a real life threatening issue to the stability of any family. The federal, state, city, region, non profits, univeristy, business, churches everyone has a moral obligation to assuring that this has to be stopped and doesn't continue. We have to by every means, organizing, fund raising, in response to the immediate and chronic homelessness. People should be able to afford a place to live and have a place to live. Everyone is entitled to have a roof over their

head, a place to call their home.

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FORECLOSURES

The number of people impacted far exceeds the number of foreclosures. Many foreclosed properties are multi-family and often the tenants are evicted¹, usually with virtually no notice.

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Beyond the hundreds of families directly affected, thousands have been impacted from the blight, crime and depressed property values arising from abandoned houses, and from having evicted owners and tenants double up with already-crowded relatives and friends. The city faces increased police, sanitation, and social service costs, and decreased property tax revenue.

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If we look at the numbers from 2006 to 2008 we see the escalation.

In my first term as Alderwoman, reviewing the 2004-2005 city budget, we foresaw an exodus of poor people of color from our city. In 2006 overall in New Haven there were 55 foreclosures. As of 2007 there were 167 foreclosures. In 2008 there were 406 total, according to the data from ROOF project, with the breakdown West River 14, Hill 76, Fair Haven 78 and Newhallville 49.

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As of 2009 the same pattern continues and the most affected areas are Quinnipiac Meadows, Newhallville, the Hill neighborhood, Fair Haven and Dixwell.

The Board of Aldermen should be commended for passing the anti-blight ordinance that just took effect requires bank-owned properties to register with the city and post the name of a local contractor who is responsible for maintaining the property. However, passing the law is not enough. We have to make sure we achieve full compliance.

The action plan allocates its very limited funds to allow acquisition of about 25 properties. The plan is to target "tipping point" neighborhoods.

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5. Education and Youth

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The Black and Hispanic Caucus State of the City address two years ago raised the awareness by addressing the issue of closing the education achievement gap in our city.

According to the Department of Education the city-wide dropout rate is 18%. The numbers of African American and Latino students who drop out must be fully researched. These numbers are alarming.

Using as an indicator the statistics on suspensions which have been made available, we can see that all of the most distressed cities have high suspension rates and these children are disproportionately

1 "Renters make up an estimated 40% of families facing foreclosure due to eviction" -- Fighting Foreclosures by Daniel Fireside, *Dollars and Sense*, March/April 2009

African American and Latino. While a complete breakdown is not available, state-wide numbers show that Puerto Ricans have a 54% graduation rate and a 46% drop-out rate.

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Parent involvement is a must. From the early grades through college years in order for our family to have a really solid foundation we must provide opportunities for parents to engage in the school, in the community and in government.

In order to nourish, engage and support parents we have to get rid of the obstacles that prevent them from being there, for example daycare, food for events, transportation, translations. Then we can assess the family's basic needs: housing, health care, employment, child care, education.

I would like to recognize some of those parents that are working in the different fields:

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The Columbus Family Academy Parent Teacher Organization has become a place to gather, learn and promote change among students, parents and staff. Meetings, trips and other activities allow for parents to attend with their children and take into consideration that parents are the first teachers and our partners in educating our students.

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Fair Haven Middle School PTO has created a tag sale room with such items as clothes, diapers and books available to parents on reportcard night, and bi-lingual weekly information to enable Spanish speaking parents help their children with homework, reducing the rate of suspensions to a handful.

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Mothers for Justice, a group of women dedicated since 1993 to empower, educate and organize low-income women and their families, increase awareness of social issues through action and advocacy and improve quality of life for the community as a whole.

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New Haven Parent Leadership Institute, a project of Christian Community Action trains parents to become child advocates in the community beginning with a retreat and continuing for 20 weeks including a Children's Leadership Institute for the children of the parents in the program.

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Pequeñas Ligas Hispanas, a youth and family center without walls, of over 1,500 students and parents since 1991 offering instruction in 25 sports, dance, musical instruments, writing, film making, visual arts, comprehensive pathways to college, cultural and social leadership development.

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Teach Our Children, a bilingual, multicultural, parent-led organization formed in 2005 with 400 parent

members who have fought for equal access to the school system for Spanish-speaking parents, access to Board of Education meetings, homework for suspended students, fair discipline and recess.

...and a long list of meetings and parent groups that were held in 2008-2009 across the city in our New Haven public schools. From August 2008 to May 2009 there were 497 meetings held for parent involvement city-wide.

We are highlighting the process they use to engage parents. We should support efforts like this that will give the environment of learning, understanding and planning for a successful future. We should embrace, engage and foremost to look at this closely and listen to what they are saying.

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6. Solutions and Recommendations

This address suggests priorities for what we as a city can do with the resources we have. As we take a look closely, we see that the city alone cannot provide all the solutions. To achieve our priorities we must also address what we as a city can do to work in partnership with state and federal government.

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POVERTY AND EMPLOYMENT

Positive Initiatives the City has taken include:

Federal Recovery Act stimulus funds already applied for will provide construction jobs, youth summer jobs and provide jobs or prevent layoffs in the school system.

Construction Workforce Initiative has trained nearly 1,000 New Haven residents

Suggestions:

Coordinate job training opportunities and connect training to commitments for local hiring from New Haven employers

Expand the City's Living Wage Ordinance to apply to more people at a higher rate

The City should develop a marketing strategy to insure that all people of color are able to participate and benefit.

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PRISON RE ENTRY

Positive initiatives by the City:

The Street Outreach Workers Program creating relationships with at-risk youth and providing mediation and resources for more positive paths in life.

Ban the Box Ordinance hiring policy to prohibit unfair discrimination in hiring those with prior convictions.

Suggestions

Open the Q House

Enhance existing programs to meet the overall needs of those re-entering New Haven from prison

Expand Ban the Box hiring policy to all employers

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HOMELESSNESS

Positive Initiatives by the City:

Tent City organized to raise funds to keep the shelter open in winter

Stimulus funds allocated for homeless prevention rapid re-housing program

Suggestions for further action:

Make a top policy objective that everyone should be able to afford and have a place to live

Continue fund raising

Reachout to all stakeholders to develop an action plan

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HOUSING – Foreclosures

Positive Initiatives the City is taking to stop foreclosures:

Anti-blight ordinance

Outreach to people before they are foreclosed

Suggestions for a pro-active strategy to stop foreclosures:

Protect neighborhoods and discourage foreclosures by vigorously enforcing anti-blight ordinances and making the foreclosure and maintenance of properties as expensive as possible for the financial institutions.

Support for grass roots organizing to educate and mobilize homeowners.

Work for state legislation that will increase homeowners' and tenants rights.

Take every opportunity to push for national legislation to resolve the underlying problems.

Anti-blight activities should not result in gentrification. The City should be committed to fight for every neighborhood.

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EDUCATION AND YOUTH

Postiive Initiatives:

New Haven Mentors involving adults in our community to mentor or tutor school children

Youth Map to be launched coordinating information about all youth programs in our City

Youth at Work summer jobs programs

Suggestions to close the achievement gap: The first thing to solve any problem is to recognize the issue. I would like to take this time to commend Dr. Reginald Mayo and Mayor John DeStefano and the teachers and staff from all our schools for their willingness and commitment to make this a priority in the coming years.

Increase investments in early childhood education and after school programs

State tax reform so public education is not funded by local property taxes

Opportunities for higher education

Enhance and support existing youth programs

Increase parent involvement city-wide

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STIMULUS PACKAGE

There are a number of ways the \$700B+ stimulus package passed in February could help New Haven. (*Source: Recovery.Gov*) These include:

- Funding for shovel-ready infrastructure projects.
- Significant funds for education
- Youth jobs, CDBG, Energy conservation measures
- Help for the state (especially Medicaid), which lessens the pressure on state government to cut funding for New Haven.
- Temporary cut in the payroll tax, with an increase of about \$8/week in workers' paychecks.
- Extension of unemployment compensation

The City is already applying for funding under the stimulus package.

An easy-to-read summary of all funding requested and approved under the stimulus package should be available. This will help show the positive impact it is having, and lay the basis for encouraging Congress to follow up with additional funds.

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Suggestions on Stimulus Funding

Take steps to insure that city residents, especially young people, are trained and hired for the construction projects.

Work for maximum community involvement in planning and applying for funds, and in creating a positive climate for passage of additional stimulus legislation.

Establish an Advisory Committee to help insure participation of African American and Hispanic communities in planning, jobs and all aspects of stimulus spending.

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7. Summary and Call to Action

One important task we face is informing our communities that it is important to take part in the census, which determines how much federal funding we get. We have to let the people know it is safe to take part and we all must count.

President Barack Obama has said, "Change will not come if we wait for some other person or some other time. We are the ones we've been waiting for. We are the change that we seek."

This is a State of Emergency Call to Action. To every parent, child, family, community, agency, business, educational institution, political leader, union, cultural leader, faith organization, the city, the state and the region.

The first thing that must be done is to take this information and spread it around the City to inform everyone that we are losing our children. This national cradle to prison pipeline crisis is here in New Haven with alarming numbers. Homelessness, foreclosure, poverty, unemployment, education, are part of that. We must inform and tell our kids "Don't become a statistic" not only to tell and inform our families but to say we're not going to let it happen and we are going to do something about it.

After we inform, the next step is to make a commitment to turn this situation around, and then to develop a strategy and plan of action.

All sections of the community need to be around the table together to figure out what each of us has to offer to reach the potential of a truly Model City.

We've done different things as a City that nobody thought could be done. The Community Benefit Agreement, the ID card and many others. Now it's time to take a bigger step.

To quote again from the report of the Children's Defense Fund, "America's Cradle to Prison Pipeline:"

“We must not be satisfied with a foot of child care, a leg of health care, a thigh of nutrition, a hand of housing, a neckbone of education, a back-bone of after-school care, a toe of gun control, a shoulder of parental education and training. We must address the needs of the whole child who does not come in pieces but in families and lives in communities shaped by cultural and national values that must become more just in practice and honored by responsible adults with power.”

We need to go with this information and bring this presentation neighborhood by neighborhood to all the stakeholders and find out what each one has to offer. Then we should plan for a city-wide summit to strategize the creation of a working document that we will abide by to end the disparities that will enable us to create a model city.

Our communities are diverse. We have a great and rich diversity within the Black and Hispanic population. We have African Americans, Haitians, Jamaicans, Somalians, Eritrians. Latinos include Puerto Ricans, Cubans, Mexicans, Peruvians, Salvadorans, Chileans, Costa Ricans, Colombians, Ecuadorans and even Spaniards each with their own culture and traditions.

One thing that we have in common is that we are all striving for the same things, we are all trying to live the American Dream with a home, education for our kids, good health, a living wage job and to be culturally enriched.

This is the time to search our minds and souls and seek out for answers. We have the moral obligation to end the disparities that separate us. The person who is walking in the streets, coming out of prison, without hope is equal to the person who has all the knowledge and doesn't share it. It all equals a stumbling block to the public safety and well-being of everyone who lives in our city. We are all born with a gift or talent that through the years we develop, enhance and that we should share. An engine needs all of its parts functioning in order for the car to move forward.

To conclude, we do not have all the solutions to all of our problems. However, by working together we do have the ability and moral obligation to find those solutions and seek for excellence.