

Crossing Bridges & Building Agendas

“I am where I am because of the bridges that I crossed.....

Sojourner Truth was a bridge.

Harriet Tubman was a bridge.

Ida B. Wells was a bridge.

Madame C. J. Walker was a bridge.

Fannie Lou Hamer was a bridge.”

- Oprah Winfrey

In order to build bridges for future generations to cross, the North Carolina Black Leadership Caucus has developed an eight prong agenda. This is only a glimpse.

EDUCATION

On average 35-40% of North Carolina's students do not receive a high school diploma at the end of four years. Black and Hispanic students are even more disadvantaged. Under the NC state constitution, affirmed twice in the ongoing *Leandro v. State of North Carolina* lawsuit, that all children are entitled to a sound basic education that provides with the skills and abilities to meet academic challenges and prepares them for higher education and/or entry into the workforce. The NCBLC wants fully funded research-based programs and strategies to reduce the disproportionately high suspension and dropout rate among minority students, and to ensure that all children's constitutional right to a sound basic education is met.

Black and Hispanic students who remain in school too frequently fall victim to the minority achievement gap, performing academically at lower levels than their white counterparts. The NCBLC believes that addressing the achievement gap must be a high priority in North Carolina and to that end, the NCBLC supports

- Efforts to address and reform the overrepresentation of minorities in special education and remedial classes.
- Efforts to recruit, hire, and retain qualified minority teachers in North Carolina's classrooms.
- Funding of the Disadvantaged Student Supplemental Fund at the level initially recommended by the State Board of Education, \$223 million, with accountability and transparency in the allocation of the funds by each local education agency.
- Enacting legislation to ensure that students who receive long-term and/or short-term suspensions continue to have access to a sound basic education as mandated under the North Carolina State Constitution.

- Class size reduction in grades K-3 to the research-based recommend ratio of 1:15.
- Enacting legislation to fully fund research-based programs and strategies to reduce the disproportionately high suspension and dropout rate among minority students.
- Requiring the State Board of Education to provide structured guidelines to all local education agencies for implementation of the new high school graduation standards to ensure maximum success for all students in meeting the graduation standards.
- Requiring the State Board of Education to implement accountability and reporting procedures to ensure that local education agencies (LEA) meet their educational goals and are fiscally responsible.
- Including foreign language instruction in the standard course of study at elementary and middle school levels.

HEALTH

Over one million people in NC lack health insurance and even more including state employees lack affordable health coverage that covers their physical and mental conditions. The NCBLIC wants a universal health care plan and coverage for all North Carolinians.

ECONOMICS

Over 45,000 homes were foreclosed in North Carolina in 2006. With more foreclosures expected due to predatory lending -unaffordable adjustable rate loans (ARMs) that result in increased mortgage payments as federal interest rates increase, more North Carolina homeowners will lose their homes as gas prices and job loss also continue to spike.

Numerous African Americans who qualified for traditional and safer mortgage loans were only offered predatory loans that carry higher and variable interest rates. The NCBLIC calls for a ban on predatory lending in North Carolina.

Of North Carolina's 1.1 million families with children, 49.2% earn too little to meet their basic needs according to the NC Justice Center. The NCBLIC calls for a Living Wage of no less than \$12.32 per hour for all North Carolina employees and state and federal tax credits and state and federal tax reforms for low income and lower middle class workers.

CIVIL & CRIMINAL JUSTICE

Over 60% of NC prisoners are minorities -typically black males. It costs an average of \$7,000 per year to educate one child and over \$30,000 per year to incarcerate one individual.

The NCBLC opposes the building or expansion of any new prisons or prison beds in NC without sentencing reforms that address the over incarceration of minorities and nonviolent offenders and a formal inquiry into disproportionate funding allocations per individual between correctional and educational state budgets. The NCBLC also calls for increased funding allocations to violence prevention programs and alternatives to prison such as job placement and re-entry and substance abuse treatment programs.

SOCIAL JUSTICE

North Carolina is one of only two states in the US that has a law that prohibits state and local governments from entering into collective bargaining agreements with employees. In North Carolina, this law is known as General Statute 95-98. The NCBLC calls for the repeal of G.S. 95-98 and supports the right to free speech and collective bargaining for all public workers.

In 1898, a group of white vigilantes sought to destroy the gains of African Americans and minority businesses following the Civil War and to mark the beginning of the Jim Crow era in NC government by organizing the largest overthrow of government in the United States now referred to as the Wilmington Race Riots of 1898.

Wilmington was a thriving Southern port city with a majority Black population when it fell victim to the violence that resulted the deaths of African Americans and whites. Those who could fled in mass numbers to escape the death and destruction, leaving behind their homes and businesses, and their means of economic survival.

The NCBLC calls for the inclusion of the history of the Wilmington Race Riots in the NC curriculum on NC state history, reparations for the descendants of victims and increased grants and state contracts for minority businesses and community development.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT

The public deserves openness and efficiency at the local government level and all other levels. The NCBLC supports full disclosure of local government meeting agendas and minutes and public comment periods for all citizens. The NCBLC also calls for increased openness and improved racial relations in local jails and between law enforcement and local residents.

POLITICAL AWARENESS & ENGAGEMENT

The right to vote in government elections is a right to affect change. The NCBLIC supports same day voter registration and opposes obstacles that interfere with any citizen's right to vote. In addition, the NCBLIC calls for a federal restoration of voting rights for ex-offenders.

ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

All people are entitled to clean water, air, and land that is free of pollutants and irritants. In rural NC counties such as Duplin County, residents are constantly reminded of environmental hazards due to poorly regulated hog farming and excessive hog wastes that elevate asthma and respiratory problems in their community with a constant and unforgettable odor.

The NCBLIC opposes the placement of environmental pollutants, hog wastes, and landfills near or within minority and lower income communities, especially considering the lack of resources in such communities to adequately fight such placements.