



A Community Movement for Social and Economic Justice.

Remarks before the signing of the City of Buffalo Opportunity Pledge

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10/05/2015

Open Buffalo is a citywide civic initiative looking to make major long-term improvements in equality and justice in the city of Buffalo. We have over 50 community partners and allies, all working to address systemic issues we face in our community such as democratic participation, lack of quality jobs and economic opportunity, and addressing the “isms” — sexism, classism, homophobia, and racism.

Racism is very different from racial prejudice, hatred, or discrimination. Racism involves having the power to carry out systemic discriminatory practices through the major institutions of our society. We will never rid ourselves of prejudice, but we can remove systemic racism from institutions here in Buffalo, and that’s what we aim to do.

On behalf of the Open Buffalo Advisory Board, and the hundreds of Buffalonians represented in the Open Buffalo network, we are proud to work with Mayor Byron Brown and the hundreds of other Opportunity Pledge signers to ensure that diversity and inclusion aren’t just buzz words during heritage celebrations, but that every day we are diligently and relentlessly working to make sure residents — regardless of race, class, gender, disability, sexual orientation and identity, religion, and nationality — have a seat at the decision-making table and access to a bright and prosperous future.

We have developed a strategic plan in the pursuit of open opportunity for all in Buffalo. One key initiative is to ensure residents have the necessary leadership training and skills to advocate for themselves and to help shift public policy to that of diversity and inclusion.

In September, Open Buffalo launched our inaugural class of our Emerging Leaders leadership development program. We believe the first step in creating community change is empowering a diverse group residents to be the change-makers of tomorrow. Our goal is to make sure the leaders of our non-profits, policy-makers, business leaders, and community leaders reflect the diversity of Buffalo.

We also know that racism and poverty go hand in hand. We are seeing a wave of development in our city that we should all be proud of. However, a rising tide doesn’t necessarily lift all boats. Our High Road Economic Development initiative is a tool to protect our human capital, to ensure that workers from every part of this city have access to the high-quality jobs that will be coming to Buffalo. It is imperative that we remove roadblocks for ex-offenders, provide language access to ensure our newly arrived brothers and sisters receive necessary skills and training, and put forth a conscious effort to make our workforce reflect this beautiful city. As history has taught us



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time and time again, “trickle down” economics typically miss communities of color. Open Buffalo believes in building smart partnerships and establishing community benefit agreements.

We also know that, especially for young men of color, negative interactions with law enforcement can create ripple effects in that person’s life that limit economic opportunities for decades. Open Buffalo believes that by strengthening trust between communities of color and law enforcement, we can not only keep our streets safe, but stop the first incident that keeps many families in poverty. Open Buffalo has a Justice and Opportunity campaign, and we are pursuing citywide community policing tactics and creating a system of preventative measures, such as restorative justice practices, to help decrease the arrest disparities and incarceration rates between whites and communities of color.

Open Buffalo pledges to keep diversity and inclusion at the center of our work.

We will consistently look to increase community engagement and look for innovative ways and best practices to engage marginalized communities, share those best practices with our Opportunity Pledge partners, and support other initiatives across the city looking to do the same.