STATE OF BLACK MIAMI 2026

Miami-Dade County
Black Affairs Advisory Board Report to the
Miami-Dade County Board of Commissioners



INTRODUCTION

The Black Affairs Advisory Board held the "State of Black Miami 2026" forum on Thursday, May 14, 2026, at the Marshall L. Davis African Heritage Cultural Arts Center in north central Miami Dade County. As the seventh most populous county in the United States and home to a community of some three million residents, Miami-Dade County's governmental structure remains focused on providing services and resources to its residents. The African American population of Miami-Dade County hovers around 18%, representing one of the nation's most culturally and diverse ethnic municipalities, with deep roots among African Americans, Caribbean Americans, and African immigrants.

The "State of Black Miami" serves as one of the Board's most comprehensive and transparent assessment of the conditions, challenges, and opportunities facing Black residents across our diverse communities across the African American, Haitian, Caribbean, Afro Latino, and the broader African diaspora.

As Chair of the Black Affairs Advisory Board, Pierre Rutledge and State of Black Miami 2026 Committee Chair J. S. Rashid, have repeatedly expressed the clear mandate of the Black Affairs Advisory Board: "To advise the Board of County Commissioners, elevate community voices, and advance the quality of life for Black residents in a dedicated and responsive manner." In that regard, the State of Black Miami 2026 forum was centrally located in the community, and the conversation took the form of a "Village Dialogue" with a focus on the past and present, while outlining a roadmap for the future of the community. With this goal in mind, community organizations were identified and encouraged to collaborate on the status of issues outlined at previous State of Black Miami forums and participate in the formulation of strategic recommendations for presentation to the Miami-Dade County Board of Commissioners. Further emphasis was placed on developing continuing efforts for collaboration between community groups and organizations in view of the impact of SB1134, which calls for the elimination of boards affiliated with DEI (Diversity, Equity & Inclusion), effective January 1, 2027.

BACKGROUND

In 2016, then Commission Chairman Jean Monestime convened the first "One Heritage: State of Black Miami" forum for the purpose of identifying and negotiating solutions for challenges faced by the county's Black residents, which would be presented to the entire Miami-Dade County Board of Commissioners. The event was repeated in 2017 and in 2018, the Black Affairs Advisory Board obtained permission from Chairman Monestime to continue this discussion in years to follow. As a result, the Black Affairs Advisory Board has continued this conversation as part of its "Village Dialogue" series. Pressing issues which continue to be of concern include Youth and Education, Criminal and Social Justice, as well as Housing Affordability and Healthcare.



FINDINGS & RECOMMENDATIONS

PANEL I: YOUTH AND EDUCATION

PANELISTS: Mr. Gale Nelson, *President & CEO, Big Brothers, Big Sisters*; **Mr. Christopher Simmonds**, *Principal, CARE Elementary School*

MODERATOR: Dr. Germany Dixon, *Black Affairs Advisory Board*

RECAP: The discussion primarily focused on the status of students of color who have been deeply impacted by school choice vouchers, inadequate facilities and achievement gaps. Youth-based organizations such as Big Brothers, Big Sisters and private voucher-based institutions such as CARE Elementary School, have been working toward closing these gaps through innovative programs aimed specifically at the impacted demographic. It was suggested that community-based organizations or programs work strategically and collectively to tackle these issues. Miami Dade Public Schools has been negatively impacted by the number of students opting to leave the system along with dissatisfaction of staff shortages due to public school teachers' salaries, facilities in disrepair and school closures due to declining enrollment.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Encourage and continue direct collaboration and meetings with public schools' leadership. Follow-up with meetings between the incoming Superintendent of Schools, School Board members, counselors, and aligned community groups.
- Confront the impact of school choice vouchers on public schools' enrollment.
- Address and amplify early childhood learning opportunities in order to disrupt the youth-to-prison pipeline.
- Address teacher shortages-particularly in the areas of science and math, due to inadequate pay based on the high cost of living in South Florida.
- Advocate for the conversion of underutilized educational facilities for conversion to provide housing for teachers as well as other school staff members.
- Realize and address the impact of AI on our educational system and students, i.e, provide them with the training and skills to utilize Artificial Intelligence (AI) while recognizing its impact on society as well as implementing safeguards.
- Develop and share more on 'career pathways" and financial literacy programs for our youth.
- Encourage parental involvement and provide assistance to those parents who want to become more involved in their children's educational process.

PANEL II: CRIMINAL & SOCIAL JUSTICE OUTCOMES

PANELISTS: Mr. Desmond Meade, *Executive Director, Florida Rights Restoration Coalition*; **Senator Dwight Bullard**, *Sr. Political Advisor, Florida Rising*

MODERATOR: Dr. Jonathan Spikes, *Black Affairs Advisory Board*

RECAP: Mr. Desmond Meade provided his visionary approach on the historic campaign to restore voting rights through Amendment 4, which provided access to voting for returning citizens and how that process should serve as a template for future engagement. Senator Bullard addressed the current political and legal climate which is negatively impacting African American voters in the State of Florida and the effort to overcome these issues.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Engage voters, regardless of age by determining their interests and concerns, then encouraging them to vote. Establishing partnerships with community-based organizations that provide support through voter education and access to voting sites.
- Work with community-based organizations, religious as well as educational institutions to increase the number of eligible voters, while strengthening voter protection against systemic exclusions.
- Make the community aware of the issues that directly impact them as well as their various institutions, while encouraging them to become more involved in the political issues that directly impact their communities.



PANEL III: HOUSING AFFORDABILITY & ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY

PANELISTS: Mr. Oliver Gross, *President, New Urban Development*; **Mr. Williams Diggs**, *Executive Director of Miami-Dade Economic Advocacy Trust (MDEAT)*; **Mr. Bruno Phanord**, *President, BOA Investment Group*; **Mr. Eric Knowles**, *Executive Director, Miami Dade Chamber of Commerce* and **Ms. Metris Batts**, *Executive Director, Overtown Business Association*

MODERATOR: Mr. Jihad Rashid and **Mr. Brandon Bartley**, *Black Affairs Advisory Board*

ISSUE OVERVIEW: The United States, and in particular South Florida, face a persistent shortage of affordable housing and rental homes. This gap drives high rent burdens, housing instability; evictions and homelessness-challenges that fall disproportionately on communities of color due to disparities in income, wealth and credit access. Additionally, affordability issues also impact community-based organizations aimed at creating opportunities for businesses and community members.

RECAP: Panelists touched on several impactful issues such as housing affordability-particularly as it relates to homeownership as a means of increasing generational wealth. The Miami-Dade Economic Advocacy Trust (MDEAT), which was originally designed to improve Black residents' access to affordable homeownership has been hampered by Black residents' limited access to high paying jobs or opportunities. A majority of the funds for home purchases have pivoted more toward Hispanic residents, who were steered to the MDEAT homeownership program through local banks. This has resulted in a lower than anticipated number of Black homeowners taking advantage of homeownership programs, including the MDEAT Homeownership Program. Meanwhile, Black developers and construction companies face similar hurdles due to not being able to compete on the local level. The federally mandated elimination of set-asides for Black contractors has had a negative impact on Black businesses and has resulted in them receiving a miniscule percentage of County contracts. This system also contributes to the lack of generational wealth and income, which directly impacts businesses and opportunities in communities of color. Community based entities such as the Miami-Dade Chamber of Commerce and the Overtown Business Association are offering services and recommendations to the community in order to provide support for greater economic opportunities.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Encourage local governments to utilize county or city owned lots and Black contractors to build affordable housing units. Single lots can be used to build multi-level units to address the lack of buildable lots.

- Explore the use of ADU (Accessory Dwelling Units) on County or city owned land to address severe housing shortages for single member households or young household members.
- Encourage the resurrection of minority contracts being awarded to Black businesses and contractors-despite opposition from the federal government.
- Encourage community investments to accomplish generational wealth.
- Place greater emphasis and provide support for community-based organizations that help small businesses thrive.



Daniella Levine Cava
Mayor

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