

**January 31, 2016**

**Remarks of Assemblymember Michael A. Blake – As Prepared for Delivery  
State of the District Address**

Constituents, community leaders, elected officials and all those assembled, thank you for joining us today for our first State Of The District where we get the chance to share the progress, the opportunities and the path forward for the 139,000 people of our beloved 79th Assembly district.

I thank my family and friends for being here today, especially my anchor, my heart, my mother Hilary Lawrence who is here in the front row. She looks good.

I also thank my team, current and former. Aaron Carr, John Sanchez, Indiana Roman laid the foundation of how a team serves the people. They served honorably and did everything for the 79th District. Don't get Aaron going about heat or education. May we pause to acknowledge and congratulate my previous team.

Now, we have two new visionaries. As the former political director of the Working Families Party and former Campaign aide to President Obama, Britney Whaley is the perfect pick to be our Chief of Staff. She is qualified, ready, a calming presence and shows again my commitment to people of color and women of color getting leadership opportunities in my administration where my Chief of Staff, my Legislative Director and my two Transition Co-Chairs are all women, let us welcome Britney Whaley.

Jonathan Kelly, our new Constituent Services Manager, served our nation overseas in Afghanistan while in the Army National Guard and also brings remarkable private sector experience formerly working at Charles Schwab and BNY Mellon. His discipline and work ethic are unmatched, and as a smart man, he recently proposed to his new fiancée. Let us welcome Jonathan.

To the rest of my team - Joelle, Sam, Dion, Ricky, Fitz and all, thank you for believing in me and building a better Bronx together.

We are here at a remarkable institution called Dreamyard that collaborates with Bronx youth to build pathways to equity and opportunity through the arts. Because of the leadership of people such as Jason, we spoke of a possible partnership with Technology groups to provide jobs to Bronxites and met the team of Mission Continues, Veterans who want to serve in our communities after their service. Dreamyard is perfectly placed to be transformational. Physically, it's within an area that too often is left behind. But emotionally, it can serve as the anchor for dreams to be realized. We are also here because Dreamyard is showing what we are trying to do. Building a better Bronx in spite of the challenges that may exist in our community. I understand that you may have a challenge, but our zip code should not be a G.P.S. precursor to our future.

One year ago, I was honored to be given the honor to be the assemblymember for our 79th assembly district. From the beginning, we shared a vision called 3-2-1, which builds upon the vision that we discussed during the campaign of focusing on jobs, housing, criminal justice and education.

The three "E's," standing for economic development, education, and equality for all. The 2 paths to achieve the three "E's" of strengthening minority and women owned business enterprises and creating a career oriented education system so that our young people can go from the cradle to the career. And the one being the vision -- a vision that can hopefully excite us, a vision that can inspire us, a vision that will mobilize us as a community. A vision of changing the socio-economics of the South Bronx to make us the urban metropolis of the world.

These may sound like lofty goals, but I must be clear that we came into this knowing that we had to have a bigger vision, bigger than the visions we've had before if we want to see real change in our community. Many people may not realize or know that the Bronx officially became the Bronx in this assembly district. Just down the street at the original courthouse on January first 1914, the Bronx became the sixty second county of our beloved Empire State. But yet, when the courthouse doors were shut in 1977, from 1978 until 2015, It seemed like nothing more would be done. Some people felt the same way about our community. These same people spoke about our community as if we have a deficit

when we all know that everything we needed - the talent, the skill, the drive - is right here in our community. But now, we have a vision of how we transform not just the courthouse building but a community. From a community transformed, we transform the city and from a city transformed, we transform a state. And we will show how this borough will transform a nation.

I am proud to say that, while we acknowledge that we have much more work to still do, the state of our district is incredibly strong. It continues to improve. It continues to grow. It continues to be united. It continues to show that we are indeed building a better Bronx. Allow me to share the progress that we have made, the opportunities that still exist, and our vision and path forward.

I am convinced that yes we have had a good start, a start that has empowered our communities, a start that people feel that they are part of a process, a process where you voted for me, you encouraged me, you inspired me to do particular things, and I am convinced that we have done those things. Everyone needs to know progress and let us assess what some of that may be.

### **Economic Development**

When I entered into office December 15th of 2014, our district faced a 7% unemployment rate, a 9.4 under employment rate, and a house median income of \$24,554 compared to the overall state of the Bronx's \$34,000 and New York City's rate of \$50,000. (Urban Justice Center)

We are changing the dynamic. We are focused on making sure that our communities not only have jobs, but that they have the skills for the jobs of the present and jobs of the future. Because what is the point of having all this training if you can't get a job, or provide for your family? Jobs that are motivating and cultivating minority and women owned business enterprises to ensure a long term economic future. Why? So that they can hire from our community and empower our community. And attract investment to bring good

paying middle class jobs to our district. That is how we're continuing to show we're building a better Bronx.

With the help of so many nonprofit and private entities we've accomplished some of these goals. Juma Ventures - an incredible organization that goes around the country into sporting venues and different facilities - came to us and said, "Let's train and hire our youth. Let's give them opportunities. Let's set them onto a new path and a new vision." Through this partnership we've provided 44 jobs and financial literacy to young people within our district, and for every dollar they saved towards college that dollar was matched by Juma Ventures. Participants have stated it was one of the greatest experiences they've ever had. Our office also served as a summer youth site providing two young women from Bronx Works, Dana Dunkley and Brianna Byrd, who are here with us today, the opportunity to work, to earn money, to gain a living, and to understand that you can do good and do well at the same time.

## **MWBE**

We've empowered our minority women owned businesses, and our small businesses, which we must be clear, are two different things. There are small businesses that are empowering the community at different thresholds, but then our minority women owned businesses have so many challenges and need access to capital, opportunity, and diversity. My passion has always been, and always will be, minority women owned business enterprises. Because I'm convinced that if and when you help them to grow their businesses, they can hire our young people, they can hire in our communities. And the bipartisan bill that we were able to get signed into law, a bill that was signed, thanks to the leadership of Governor Cuomo, and the State Senate sponsor the Republican Chairman of the Labor Committee Jack Martins, will now ensure, effective later this year, that our MWBEs and small businesses that are 200 employees and lower that are doing state contracting, will be paid in 15 days instead of 30 days. Why does that matter? Because now your employer is not wondering "will my employees' paychecks clear?" Employees do not have to decide between paying for groceries and or paying for prescription drugs. Your mom, your dad, your grandma, your granddad, your aunt, your uncle, maybe your niece,

nephew, or younger brother will understand that they don't have to just dream of starting a successful business, they can move forward with the confidence that comes with knowing that if they start their business, hire their employees, land that state contract, that they will be paid on time so that they can pay their workers on time. This is small business owners getting the support that they need. This is how we are building a better Bronx

When we think about where we go from here, we will continue to provide funding and support for our MWBE's, including a 30% spend on all contracts. Whether it is on the Penn Station project, J.F.K, or the bus depot renovation, we must ensure that our communities are part of those projects to get those jobs. We need to ensure that we're finding more ways for Section 3 enforcement, so that when thousands of projects get funding that they hire people in our communities. We do not need others to come in. The 79th district is home to quality people who are ready to do the work right now. I introduced the bill directing the commission of housing community renewal to oversee the public housing authority's compliance, so that Section 3 enforcement would occur. I've also met with many commissioners to figure out more ways to collaborate and engage with them. Whether it is partnering with Maria Torres Springer of the Economic Development Corporation and Citigroup to find entrepreneurial funding for our communities, or working with CUNY Chancellor James Milliken, who selected our office to receive CUNY's 2016 Terence D. Tolbert Public Service Intern. This internship program was set up in the name of Terence Tolbert, who tragically passed away suddenly in 2008 when working for President Obama. Through these efforts we are building a better Bronx by working with our partners to create jobs.

Last year, I announced a partnership with Workshops In Business Opportunities (WiBO), and I'm proud to announce that we've secured the \$15,000 in state funding to provide free 16 week entrepreneurial classes at Boricua College to educate our entrepreneurs and encourage them to become innovators. Why? These classes will walk participants through the process of creating a business, marketing, and financial management plan, so our local business owners can grow, and so they can then in turn hire more of our residents. We are

sick and tired of seeing so many of our companies not being financially strong enough to stay here and hire Bronxites, just because they weren't given the resources they needed.

Not just looking at low paying jobs, but middle class jobs, and jobs that will sustain us into the future.

Last year, we announced a partnership with M.T.A., the Metropolitan Transit Authority, and the National Urban League, to conduct workforce training and job placement. Thanks to the leadership of Chairman Tom Pendergrass, and Chief Diversity Officer Michael Garner they have determined that the chairman himself will ensure the funding to make sure that the residents of our 79th district, are part of the Kawasaki Project happening in Yonkers. It is time for us to get the good paying jobs that other communities have had. That is how we are building a better Bronx.

At our Liquid Talent event this past November, an incredible exercise of demonstrating that yes, you can prepare for the jobs of today, and the jobs of tomorrow, where we made three transformational announcements. First, Our partnership with state Senator Jeff Klein on Bronx Hire, and their new on the go initiative. Which will not only address unemployment by making sure Bronxites have the tools they need to get the jobs of today and tomorrow by the state providing funding for companies to provide certifications for current and future jobs. Bronx Hire initially provided free certifications for those that were doing training and security jobs. But now we launched Bronx Tech Hire will ensure that tech certifications occur, so that a company can determine that I now have funding to train, hire, and to empower Bronxites. That is how we are building a better Bronx.

Second, Meta Bronx - A startup collaboration of tech innovators which came together from scenic and mass ideation, two of the first tech entrepreneurs that are here in the Bronx - decided to grow and accelerate to the next level by creating a new entity so that we can empower our tech companies to create the first tech accelerator ever in the Bronx. What does that mean for you? It means that there now will be a centralized place in our

communities where people that are interested in technology can realize their dreams among like minds. As Reshma Saujani, from Girls who Code, always says, "It is time for us not just to be consumers, but the creators." When we are the creators, we create economic opportunity, and we create economic opportunity, we create opportunity for all.

Third, but the most game changing, Maurice Owens, a fellow Bronxite, who served his country under Presidents Bush and Obama in the situation room, was equally committed to empowering his hometown of the Bronx. He joined the Libra Group, which announced a \$500,000 commitment through its American Entrepreneurship Award to the district over the next ten years, \$50,000 per year for an entrepreneur. The Bronx is one of only two places in the nation, the first being Miami, which will receive this award. More information will soon come out about the American entrepreneurship award. But it is another example of how we are continuing to show we are building a better Bronx.

We will continue to build, through legislation so that MWBE's are aware of why they did not get contracts they bid on, collaborate with the state and the city on their disparity study, where we commend the Counsel to the Mayor Maya Wiley, who is here today, and lastly announce that in partnership with SOBRO, New York will become the 20<sup>th</sup> city for Walker's legacy, an organization founded by Rochester Native Natalie Cofield in honor of Madam CJ Walker to empower women of color entrepreneurs.

All these things demonstrate that through economic development, we are building a better Bronx. But before the job, one must go to and graduate from school.

## **Education**

There are 91 schools in our Assembly District. Some yes are struggling but many are surging in the right direction. We were reminded of that these past two weeks. As part of Peace Week, we visited three different schools: Bronx School for Law Government and Justice, The Morris High School campus and the KIPP Academy at the Concourse Village Complex.

Students signed pledge cards across our city to pledge for peace, with the winner of that competition getting Nick Cannon to visit their school. Numbers are being finalized, but currently Law Government and Justice and KIPP are among the top three in all of New York City.

It shows, when you present something positive to a young person their lives are changed for the better forever. We will advocate for more funding especially because our Assembly District is owed the most Campaign for Fiscal Equity Funding in all of New York City. At the staggering amount of 61 million dollars, down from 76 million a year ago. Imagine parents, educators, superintendents what it would mean for our young people to have the funding owed to us. No longer do I want us poor on resources but rather rich on results. It is a reason why I will fight for more of our schools to become Community Schools. Because, the 17 Community Schools that we have in our district show that when we give that child an extra hour of after school, or mentoring on the weekends, or support and tutoring, it will not only make sure they're not on the street, it will make sure that they're in the classroom - not in the courtroom. That is how we are building a better Bronx.

I want for people to understand that we do not have failing schools. We have struggling schools that need more support. I am not saying that things are perfect; I am saying that some things need to change. And we have to be open, ready, and willing for some of those changes. Whether it's supporting for our district schools, standing up for charter schools especially the independent and mom and pop ones, private or parochial, everything must be on the table for the children of the 79<sup>th</sup> district. Children that are looking to us to not fight with one another but work with one another. I always reflect on the young man that came up to me during the campaign and said, "hey man aren't you the Obama guy?" I take that as a nice compliment because, it means he thought something could be possible when he saw me. What we see in our district though is not a crisis but an opportunity.

Last year, 38.5% of those aged twenty-five and up in our district were without a high school diploma. Think about that. Almost four out of ten who were at least 25 years old in our community didn't have a high school diploma. Our office knew, we have to embark on a campaign to change this dynamic. **THIS IS PERSONAL FOR ME.** I went to PS79, near

Creston and Burnside, which was talked about in savage inequalities of children in American schools written by Jonathan Kozol. Our funding situation was not described as soaring or sensational, but savage. We as leaders need to stop the infighting and finger pointing and get to work helping our children. Too often our politics get in the way of our pupils. Our slogans get in the way of our students. Whether it's Junior High 118 or Dewitt Clinton High School or any school in our assembly district, we need to stand up for our kids so they graduate and get a job. This is why we collaborated with many entities so that we could start changing the narrative in our communities.

For example, We partnered with Viacom which hosted a career panel at New Visions Charter High School, introducing students to careers in advertising sales, website content, public affairs, art direction, and integrated marketing. Young people need to understand that I don't just want you to pass an exam, I want you to see into your future. Last September we partnered up with MSNBC and #YesWeCode for the Growing Hope event showcasing the new faces of tech. At the Historic Bronx Courthouse, aspiring young people engaged with entrepreneurs on how to pave the way for a brighter future. That's why we're so focused on creating opportunities, community services and creative solutions like the push for a technology accelerator in the Bronx. It's a reason why we want to utilize hip hop, salsa, doo-wop and all the forms of music to transform our communities through technology. How can we be the place of origin of these three musical historical transformational entities, but we don't have a museum for them? We want to work with the universal hip-hop museum to change that and launch the museum right here within our district. Starting first with an online presence and then hopefully having the brick and mortar right here in the district.

We announced that Technology for Families in Need, an incredible non-profit which Nigel and Jerry are here today, they donated 23 tablets to young people in our district. And as part of an inter-generational effort of education, an additional 100 desktops for senior citizens. That is how you change the game. When someone leaves from their school or enters a senior center, they now know they will be connected through technology. But it's also about providing the opportunity to experience things previously unimaginable.

Last May, President Barack Obama, came to the Bronx to Lehman College to announce the My Brother's Keeper alliance. Seven of our young men were able to go and be guests in that audience. Seven of our young men were able to participate in a round table to interact with the leader of the free world. Seven of our young men had their lives changed forever. Seven of our young men now know and are reminded that our lives do matter. Darinel Montero, from Bronx International High School, within the Morris high school campus, introduced the president. He told his incredible story of emigrating from the Dominican Republic, and how he still would work nights at fast food establishments but would make a point to be in school each and every day. We decided that we would not allow for that to be just a one day occurrence. Therefore I am honored to be an Advisory board member for the My Brother's Keeper Alliance the only state legislator in the nation to serve in this capacity. And along with Regent Lester Young I will be hosting a workshop at the New York Association of Black, Puerto Rican, Hispanic and Asian Legislators Caucus. Focusing on how were changing the narrative for boys and young men of color. Whether it be elementary, junior high, high school or college, we want to be a part of your activities. This past June more than 70 schools in our district received graduation certificates. Close to 2,000 students walked across the stage and realized that a public official appreciates their efforts. We participated in 17 back to school events and family days and more than 300 hundred book bags.

One of our very own interns, Amore White, who is here in the audience today, did an interview with David Banks and I on NY1 about the impact of the Eagle Academy and our internship on his life. I was feeling a certain kind of way because he was dressed better than I was, but it's all good. We wanted to get him some shine too. I have presented legislation for the State to study the Eagle Academy Model of successfully graduating young men of color and them matriculating into college that we will continue to contain this in our legislative agenda. We will not stop until young people know we believe in them.

I will also push for funding The Young Men's Initiative, to recruit more male teachers of color, and fund the Recommendations State's Blue Ribbon Commission to ensure our students are career ready.

We're not only going to transform things that are happening within our schools, but also what is happening after school. So while there may be challenges it does not mean that we can't find ways to highlight and support good work. From the leadership of Lou Torres at CS 55 to Joaquin Vega at Bronx International High our leaders are empowering our students, we must not only provide monetary support for our youth, but also celebrate the success of those that are doing well. Most Valuable Kids is an example of this achievement. After I gave a speech at the Concordia Summit this past fall about what public-private partnerships are doing for the Bronx, a gentleman named Gary Freilich – the owner of MVK - walked up to me and said "I want to learn more how to support your work." "I have an initiative that if student does well that we will make sure that they can go to free sporting events as long as the food is provided for them." Its programs like this that can show our youth that hard work pays off and that those hours studying after school are worth it, both in the short term by getting to go cheer on their favorite athletes, and in the long term by allowing them to achieve their dream of going to college.

At my Inauguration I committed to working with Operation Hope, a National Non-Profit, dedicated to financial literacy, to implement Project 5117, an initiative program for Operation Hope, which has reached more than 910,000 students in more than 700 schools across the country. The five stands for 5 million young people getting financial literacy by 2020, the one being that one million of them decide to become entrepreneurs. The second one being that 1,000 HOPE inside centers were established in financial institutions so entrepreneurs can start their business and the 7 to help families achieve a 700 credit score. Our office decided to focus on implementing the Banking on our Future portion of 5117. Through this initiative, we will ensure our children are fully equipped and prepared to take control of their financial future by giving them the tools they need to make smart economic decisions. Thanks to the leadership of Erik Coler and Ryan Adams at the New York State Education Initiative who are in the audience today, we will be able to execute this initiative at least 10 schools starting in March and show our young people that we don't just want you to go to school and graduate from school, but we want you to understand the value of education beyond the classroom of life. That is how we are building a better Bronx.

Lastly, we decided to take the final steps of education advancement through legislative priorities mentioned such as CFE funding, Community School support and through our advocacy for aides in cafeterias, crossing guards, administrators and getting our teachers professional development they deserve. But, it's also about bridging the gap of reading and opportunity. Diallo Shabazz, the Executive Director of the 100 Black Men of New York and a former aide at the Department of Education is here today. He consistently has been a champion for our students and identifying partners who will help our young people. Knowing my passion for Technology, he introduced me to the leadership of Tata Consulting Services – who are Technology experts and sponsors of the New York City Marathon. They have taken a keen liking to our students, our vision and are starting the conversation with us around a major commitment. I am honored to announce that TCS has set a goal to donate up to 10,000 books to our assembly district, which will dramatically help us address the tragic literacy rates in our community so that our students finally get the support they deserve. All of these steps are how are bringing together the public, private and not for profit sectors so we are Building a Better Bronx. A Bronx that requires greater equality for all.

### **Equality for All**

Equality for all being a third E is how we continue to move forward. When you look at the 79th district, you will recognize the incredible things of the present and be excited by what's coming in the future. A future that helps all of us not just some of us. Last year, we announced 7-9 in the 79, town halls - seven topics, in ninety minutes, at different venues. We did them at Webster houses, Forest Houses, Nos Quedamos just to name a few. We hosted African leaders to talk about entrepreneurship, language access, immigration and equal opportunity. This is important given that the West African community is the largest here of any in the world (except for West Africa itself). But we have to do more. We have to do more when we understand that 21% of our residents live in public housing. Sitting in without heat and waiting for necessary repairs is unacceptable. We have to do more when people are coming up to us saying I don't have heat. When people are saying that their water has just been turned off. When people are saying, "Why am I paying my

rent but still not getting the support that I need?" We know we have more to do to provide equality for all.

Thanks to the leadership of Speaker Heastie and Governor Cuomo, for the first time in more than a decade, we secured state funding in the amount of more than \$2.2 million dollars to go toward security cameras, door locks, intercom improvements, ADA enhancements for all the different complexes in our district. Now we know we have more to do, but this is an incredible first step. Because you should not think that if I live in public housing, my next housing will be provided by the prison system. That's not how it should be. Rather, it should be a place where you can live out your dreams. It should be a place where you can realize your dreams. Whether you live in a NYCHA apartment or a rent-stabilized one we are here for you.

One of my first acts in office was to address the challenges that happen for those that are looking for their rent to be stabilized. Thankfully, we were able to get that done through the legislative process, extending rent stabilization for four more years. But we have more work to do. State Senator Gustavo Rivera invited me to join him on educating seniors about SCRIE, Senior Citizen Rent Income Exemption so that senior citizens can understand that if you're below \$50,000 in your income, that you can have your rent frozen. Now, we must take it to the next level by showing all people in our community that we want to make sure that affordable housing is not just a slogan but a reality.

When I came in office, I was told about the deplorable and unacceptable conditions that were happening at some of our senior centers. How could it be that those that have given so much to our communities are being left by the wayside? How are they not getting things that are so essential, so humane, so necessary such as heat and hot water? This travesty was most present at the Arturo Schomburg senior center where I saw seniors in the community room shivering in the cold with their jackets on. My team refused for that to continue. We immediately took action and would not stop until the repairs occurred. I returned back to the senior center where Trudy, who is here in the audience today, said, "Michael, WE ARE WARM!" But we didn't stop there. We went over to the Melrose Condominiums, secured a lawyer to prevent a lien on their complex, and collaborated with

the mayor to preserve and construct more affordable housing in areas of our district. When there were still challenges, we partnered up with Denise Miranda and her team Urban Justice Center's safety net project, hosting "Know Your Rights" sessions so people can understand their tenant's rights over the landlords. This is why we're doing what we're doing. It is building a better Bronx so that someone can live, and live well.

It is not right that we continue to have such a homelessness crisis. It is not right that people are working and don't have enough money to eat and pay rent. They're working and still poor. That's not right. But, what is right is when someone stands on the side of justice, and for housing justice. Whether you live in a Mitchell-Lama apartment, a family home or are homeless and getting back on your feet, we will be on your side. It is time for us to take the next step so that the people have access to quality and affordable housing and the homeless get the help that they deserve.

We hear the members of our community when they say we should restore the Pyramid Center back to a community space. But simultaneously we must support BronxWorks and equally help the mentally ill homeless men get the support that they need. We are currently in conversations with City Hall to transition the men into other supportive housing throughout the Bronx. While renovating the building to eventually become the community center we deserve. The Pyramid Center is symbolic because it was originally a Y.M.C.A and then became a youth detention center. It is time for the South Bronx and the young people within it to get the services all other communities so often receive. That is how we are building a better Bronx.

When talking about equality for all and quality of life issues we cannot forget about health and wellness. What are we doing for health so that our communities are living and eating better? Whether be Yoga in the Park, led by Walter Newsome, FAN for Kids who trained youth at our Concourse Village Family Day or the soon to be implemented Dharma Girls program which has been in existence since 2000 in Maryland, Virginia, and Delaware where young girls become more self-aware powerful and confident, we are committed to implementing Borough President Diaz Jr.'s vision of not 62 here in 79<sup>th</sup> District.

I don't want people running to Bronx Lebanon at the first sign of discourse because the Bronx is number 62 meaning last, in all counties in the state for health statistics. Whether it be addressing asthma so our youth can breathe better or eradicating legionnaires so communities feel safer, our district will be a safe and health district for all. We will not stop there. I'm tired of our people being unhealthy in this community. We will transform reality for the better. We're continuing conversations with conscious ventures lab to create a healthy food accelerator, following on the incredible success in Howard County, Maryland, where companies focused on healthy food will be supported to grow their businesses showing that you can do good and do well at the same time.

But as we talk about equality for all, we must focus on criminal justice reform.

### **Criminal Justice**

It's one of my core issues. It is one of the biggest reasons I ran for office. It's what drives me. As the indicated the number of serious crimes in the Bronx has fallen 75% since 1990. But when Jaquan, a young black male is shot at 2:00P.M. the day before Thanksgiving, we know that for many people they don't feel like crime is going down. When we think about how young Lloyd Morgan who was playing outside at 4 years old over by Forest Houses could get hit by a stray bullet, we know that crime has not gone down for all. Shianne Norman Lloyd's mother is sitting with us today. When you see her we know that crime has not gone down for all. And when we think about Kalief Browder we know we have more to do. When President Obama wrote about solitary confinement in the Washington Post last week, out of all the different people who suffered from criminal injustice, he mentioned Kalief, who's family are constituents of ours and whose mother and brother are sitting here today. Kalief was in solitary confinement at Rikers because he couldn't afford bail and wouldn't accept guilt for a crime that he did not commit. After years of injustice, last year, Kalief took his life. Whether is Jaquan, Lloyd or Kalief now more than ever we must demand criminal justice, and must provide equality for all.

As the Co-chair of criminal justice committee for the Black, Puerto Rican, Hispanic and Asian Caucus we are working on the before, during and after legislative package to

transform what's happening in our communities. Together, we can do this, but we have to show people that criminal justice doesn't just happen when someone is incarcerated. It happens by ensuring that people have economic opportunities before Incarceration, workforce training while incarcerated and receiving full services to transition successfully back into the community including mental health services after they come back home.

## **Before**

It is unconscionable that New York is one of two states in the nation where 16 and 17 year olds are still tried as adults in criminal court. How could we be in a space where someone could make one mistake and the rest of their lives are impacted forever? Now yes, the governor did make it a point to have an executive action to move 16 and 17 year olds out of those facilities and into facilities for Children and Family Services.

But every time I think about the Browder family, I know that's not enough. About a year ago, I was in church with Mama Browder, who is in the audience today. We were sitting at the church and she had tears in her eyes reflecting on Kalief. She had a young man come over, and a gentleman also with him, to talk about the progress he was making at Bronx Community College. She just kept asking "Why?" Then Akeem, his brother, had this commitment - this vision - of "we have to do more." That convicted my spirit. The night before the press conference for New York City Peace week, led by visionary founder of Lifecamp Erika Ford who is here today, I was in Rhode Island giving a speech but was determined to get back to New York for all the families who need us to do more. Erika and Eric Farmer of Save our Streets are committed to do more by hosting Peace Week events at our district schools for the rest of this year. Their commitment shows we must have even greater commitments ourselves. So I make this my pledge to the Browder family and all those assembled. I will not stop until raise the age is signed into law in this state.

Until we do that, we're not building a better Bronx. So again, I will not stop until it is done. I will not stop until Shianne and her family know that were doing more to get guns of the street, I will not stop, until we have peace in the Bronx. I will not stop until we have justice.

## **During**

During this process for justice you meet and become family with members of the movement. From Justice League and Gathering for Justice who's 10 point plan for reform and March of 250 miles from NY to DC where I joined on the first day to March from Staten Island to Newark to Discovery for All, who fights to change the laws so that defendants are fully aware of actual evidence the prosecution has against them. I can keep fighting during these battles because I'm not fighting alone. When I go to Albany, I continue that fight. It is why I authored legislation, one ensuring and requiring that corrections and supervision officials provide inmates with a medical authorization form. Now, while the governor did not sign that bill, he did make a commitment to administrative changes, so that you can know that while your loved ones are incarcerated you can know about their health conditions. Equally, additional legislation making it mandatory for the Correction Medical Review Board to have access to autopsies. Some of these things may not seem like they have tangible impact, but knowing that you have transparency in a system changes things in your lives for the better.

## **After**

Criminal justice continues after a loved one is incarcerated. We provided funding to break the cycles of recidivism. Assemblyman Jeff Aubry and I collaborated to secure \$3 million dollars in funding for the Osborne Association to transform the former Fulton Correctional Facility and implement Fulton Future, focusing on re-entry. What we don't need are prison factories, but job factories, and if we want someone to stay out of prison make sure they have jobs, education and support when they get back home. We have to ensure transparency and justice for all.

How could it be that we're still having conversations that when you see on videotape that someone could lose their life due to the hands of an injustice that that person, that officer, can still keep their job?

Now I want to be very clear. Most officers are doing incredible and honorable work. They're the ones we call when trouble hits our communities. They're the ones that are standing by our side. But, let's also be clear. If someone does wrong they should be prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law, and a shield should not be a barrier for that justice. So while the Governor signed an Executive Order appointing the Attorney General a special prosecutor, when someone dies while in police custody. I will not stop until we get this signed into law.

I invite you to two important criminal justice events. The first this Wednesday at 6pm a civil rights roundtable hosted by myself, the office of Attorney General Eric Schneiderman and Councilwoman Vanessa Gibson at Concourse Village. The second is on February 13<sup>th</sup> during Caucus weekend, where I'm now the 2nd vice chair of the caucus. Myself, State Senator Gustavo Rivera, and Attorney General Eric Schneiderman will have a workshop releasing the AG's initial findings from his capacity as special prosecutor.

So, where do we go from here? We recognize that, yes, there has been great progress. Yes, we continue to do more. But, we have to understand that there are some things we haven't done. We must also understand that there is room for growth.

### **On My 2015 Commitments**

I understand we have to engage more with businesses, so that they can come and invest in our district. I want to make sure that African businesses like Ginjan (which does a ginger based drink) will be encouraged to come into the district and expand on opportunities that are happening there. I have to make sure that I live up the commitment of 7-9 in the 7-9. So that more of our community residents are part of the process.

Soon we will launch a new initiative called Fostering Change. When you reflect on the Bronx, the most diverse to assembly district in the nation, you have to reflect on the history of Rev. Wendell Foster - the first African-American elected official in the Bronx history - who not only is an incredible pastor in his own right at Christ Church, now turning it over to Rev. Bruce Rivera, but just an incredible visionary, which is entire family has embraced

and brought me in as one of their own. One of his daughters, Commissioner of Human Rights and former City Councilwoman Helen Diane Foster who is here today, reminds us of the responsibility to continue to fight for justice. Fostering Change entity of how we implement that justice in our community.

Because we can only build a better Bronx if we organize as a community to bring about that change. It can't just be about the status quo, and about the way people used to do things. There will be a new day in the seventy-ninth. Because, that is how we are building a better Bronx.

My most important responsibility is ensuring that there is prosperity and welfare for our residents. Since I took office, we have received 989 constituent inquiries. We have resolved 548 successfully. In addition, there were 283 closed cases, meaning that after initially contacting our office for assistance and our team making multiple attempts to contact said constituent to address the issue, the constituent did not follow up with us. Lastly, there are 158 unresolved cases that we are actively working on now. We are living up to our commitment to provide quality constituency services in our district for our residents.

When a fire in the district burned down a woman's home, and all of her possessions were destroyed, we coordinated with NYCHA and non-profit organizations in the district to get her back on her feet. When churches and non-profits came to us saying they needed more support for Thanksgiving, we partnered up with 100 Black Men of New York and provided \$12,500 dollars in total to three churches, Union Grove Missionary Baptist Church, Epworth United Methodist Church and Greater Holy Tabernacle, so that they could provide meals for the holidays. In addition we helped Webster Houses, Morrisania Air Rights and Concourse Village just to name a few, with their holiday food needs. When students reached out needing schools supplies, we collaborated with education reform now, New York Foundling and other community leaders to provide bookbags and other supplies that these youth needed for a successful school year.

We are working to deliver on all of our commitments from last year and continuing with our efforts of building a better Bronx. Being an elected official doesn't just mean you're a

legislator creating laws. You have to help someone pay their bills. You have to help someone change their life. You have to help someone get back on their feet when they need you the most. When we think about why we do this, we do this to provide service for all those in our communities. Services reminded to us anytime we are around our veterans who have given so much to our nation. Last year, we hosted a Black History Month event. Thanks to the leadership of Leroy and Anna Archible, we will be doing another one again this year honoring the veterans in our community. We demonstrated our commitment to empowering veterans by holding a resource fair to give them information they need to be successful. Because you should not serve our country and not be able to get a job, a home or the health services that they deserve. This issue is personal for me as my oldest brother is a Sergeant First Class in the US Army and as a member of the veterans affairs committee. We must always stand up and speak up for justice, for in the words of Dr. King, "life's most persistent and urgent question is what will you do for others?" Whether it's collaborating with MTV on its Look Different Campaign with the likes of Michael Skolnick, Kendrick Lamar and Big Sean or representing our district at the White House at a first of its kind State Legislator conference. I will always fight for you. Whether it's marching in the pride parade alongside our brothers and sisters supporting equality for all, or traveling to Israel to further my spiritual beliefs while also strengthening our ties in the middle east, to traveling to China as part of the China United States Rising Stars Delegation to show why this growing economy in Asia should collaborate with the most diverse county in America. I am here to represent you the people of the 79<sup>th</sup> district to the City, State, Nation and world.

This past King Day, we went to P.S. 146, and engaged the participants of the renaissance youth center about dreaming big dreams. As we are assembled here today, look around the room at the people next to you, the words and images on the wall. And reflect on where we were as a district just a year ago. You cannot tell me that we are not realizing big dreams here at the Dreamyard and here in the 79<sup>th</sup> district. We know we have made progress. We know we have more to do but, this will not end until we know that "Building A Better Bronx," is not just a slogan but, a way of life and a transformative way of thinking for this

district. That is why we are asking you to sign these pledge cards and sign our wall telling us how you commit to building a better Bronx.

When I look out at my mother, a Jamaican immigrant who was once homeless, who beat breast cancer, a teen mom who went on to work for 40 years at a manufacturing plant, battling asthma to provide for her four boys, and I think about my father who looks down from heaven who for more than 28 years was a proud member of 1199 and cleaned rooms at St. Barnabas Hospital who's favorite color is red but I'm sorry daddy because that I'm wearing blue because I'm a Democrat. I reflect on the journey of my family of going from no house in Jamaica, to the Black House at Northwestern University to the White House in D.C., and now the State house in Albany.

**A journey that shows if I can make it, any of us can, here in the South Bronx.**

I am convinced that greater days shall shine ahead for this district. I am convinced that greater days shall emerge when we understand that this is the moment. This is our moment. This is our time. We will show once and for all for all to those who reside here, all across the city, state and nation that we are truly building a better 79<sup>th</sup> district and absolutely building Bronx. Thank you! God bless you! And, God bless the citizens and residents of our 79th Assembly District!