

Building One America

Inclusion, Sustainability, Opportunity

Cornell William Brooks
President
National Association for the Advancement of Colored People
4805 Mt. Hope Drive
Baltimore MD 21215

October 13, 2016

Dear President Brooks and members of the NAACP Board of Directors,

Building One America applauds the call by delegates at the 2016 NAACP National Convention for a moratorium on the expansion and proliferation of private charter schools in the United States - citing their role in increasing racial segregation and the potential for abuse and profiteering by powerful investors seeking control over public funds and public institutions.

Building One America and its allies in the civil rights, regional equity, and inclusionary housing movements enthusiastically support this position and especially for these reasons.

Like the NAACP, BOA does not believe all charter schools are bad nor do we believe the individuals who support, work in, or send their kids to charter schools are wrong or unwise. Most parents, teachers, and administrators who participate in charter schools are only seeking what is best for students and children. This is especially true in communities that have been gravely harmed by the effects of concentrated poverty and years of racial isolation where choices have been severely limited and opportunity is scarce.

But it is just these conditions - where yawning disparities in life chances caused by school segregation along with decades of discrimination by race and class - that the charter school industry is obscuring, exploiting, and actually intensifying. The tremendous challenges faced by teachers and administrators in poor black and brown districts are largely a result of federal and state housing policies that have produced and reinforced segregation and debilitating concentrated poverty, and *not* low standards or a lack of accountability and "grit" as many in the charter movement have claimed.

The evidence of racial segregation's role in the so-called "achievement gap" has been crystal clear for well over half a century. But too many in power today, on all sides of the political spectrum, choose to ignore this stark reality while allowing deadly patterns of segregation to intensify and then push private sector alternatives as the latest scheme to address the issue without ever naming the problem.

By naming the dual problems of racial segregation and economic exploitation, the NAACP reminds us that wealth inequality and racial injustice are mutually reinforcing structures of oppression that harm Americans of all colors and backgrounds.

Even the most vocal opponents of the charter school movement too often fail to make the critical connection to racial justice leaving us open to criticism that it is *our* side stifling choice or restricting opportunity while offering no meaningful alternatives to the problems plaguing predominantly black and brown underachieving schools.

We know that such charges are based on a deeply flawed and cynical analysis that essentially blames the victims of poverty and segregation and holds responsible the administrators, workers and teachers who choose to serve in some of Americas most challenging environments and difficult circumstances – *circumstances that they are not responsible for creating.*

As the organization that showed us over a half century ago that school segregation was a racist structure hiding behind a myth that “separate” could be made to be “equal”, there is no organization in America better positioned than the NAACP to challenge the restoration of this dangerous narrative, which has been given new life by the charter movement.

Those of us who claim to care about poor and minority children should follow the example of the NAACP and reconnect with our history and recommit ourselves to ending racial and economic isolation in our regions. Putting the breaks on the proliferation of private charter schools until they can show that they are reducing and not furthering ethnic, racial, or economic segregation is a step in that direction.

The continued unchecked expansion of private charters in urban areas, no matter how many of our tax dollars they receive, no matter how powerful their Wall Street backers are, or how fiercely they lobby to obscure the truth and discredit their detractors will have zero impact on the central issue of narrowing the opportunity gap caused by racial and economic segregation. If anything, it will make it worse.

Sincerely,

Mike Kruglik
President
Building One America
Chicago Illinois

Algernon Austin
Senior Research Fellow
Center for Global Policy Solutions.
Washington, DC

Marie Lopez Rogers
Former Mayor, Avondale, AZ
Past President, National League of
Cities

Lawrence Mishel
President
Economic Policy Institute
Washington, DC

David Rusk
Founding President
Building One America
Washington, DC

William P. Jones
Professor
Department of History
University of Minnesota
Minneapolis, MN

Camille Z. Charles
Walter H. and Leonore C. Annenberg
Professor in the Social Sciences
Professor of Sociology, Africana
Studies & Education
Director, Center for Africana Studies
University of Pennsylvania
Philadelphia, PA

John Scotland
Pastor
Community Presbyterian Church
Brigantine, NJ
Building One New Jersey

Clayola Brown
President
A. Philip Randolph Institute
Washington, D.C.

Robert Kleidman
Associate Professor
Department of Anthropology,
Criminology, and Sociology
Cleveland State University
Building One Ohio

Myron Orfield
Executive Director
Institute on Metropolitan Opportunity,
University of Minnesota Law School
Minneapolis, MN

Ann Pratt
Director of Organizing
Connecticut Citizen Action Group
Hartford, CT

Marty Johnson
President and CEO
Isles Inc.
Visiting Professor
Princeton University School of
Engineering
Building One New Jersey

Rev. Rohan K. Hepkins
Mayor
Borough of Yeadon
Yeadon, PA 19050
Building One Pennsylvania

Paul A. Jargowsky
Fellow, Stanford University
Rutgers University
Professor of Public Policy
Center for Urban Research & Urban
Education, Camden, NJ

Rev. Terrence (Terry) L. Melvin
President
Coalition of Black Trade Unionists
Washington, DC