Memorandum

To: Ferguson, Missouri, City Council Members:
   The Honorable James Knowles III, Mayor of Ferguson;
   Mr. Mark J. Byrne, Mrs. Kim Tihen, Mr. Dwayne T. James, Mr. Tim Larson, Mr. David Conway, & Mr. Keith Kallstrom

From: Black Student Association Executive Board, New York University Robert F. Wagner Graduate School of Public Service

Date: December 3, 2014

Re: Improvement of Community Relations

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this memorandum is to offer recommendations in order to improve community relations in Ferguson, Missouri, following the shooting death of Michael Brown. The subsequent political unrest and tension within the Ferguson community has resulted in a strained relationship between City Leadership, The Police Department, and Ferguson constituents. In order to encourage open and actionable dialogue the entailing recommendations should be considered.

BACKGROUND

The New York University Robert F. Wagner Graduate School of Public Service (NYU Wagner) prepares its students to become leaders by actively engaging in the pressing social issues of our time. The Black Student Association at NYU Wagner exists to provide support and social networks to the Black student community by enhancing educational and social experiences. The events on August 9th have placed the city of Ferguson under an international spotlight, and the world will be watching as Ferguson rebuilds its community.

In these moments, what must not be lost is that the issue of strained community relations is not unique to Ferguson. Nationally, over the last several years race and class have divided several communities, as violence has devastated relationships between police and constituents. As representatives of the NYU Wagner Black Student Association, we are interested in providing the City Council of Ferguson with constructive ways to address the concerns of residents so that the city can become a model of tolerance to the rest of the country.
COMMUNITY IMPROVEMENTS: MENDING THE BONDS

Mending The Bond: Citizens and City Council

One of the key components to restoring community trust is establishing a sense of accountability between citizens and Ferguson City Council Leadership. Ferguson City Council recently instituted comment cards as a means to receive community feedback on what issues need to be addressed. While comment cards are a start, it is necessary to maintain an accountability framework that ensures that constituents not only receive consistent feedback on their concerns, but also have a means to follow-up with the appropriate channels. The accountability framework would address constituent's concerns by completing the following:

- Accountability representative would receive constituent question or feedback on an issue via comment card, which includes constituent’s contact information
- Accountability representative writes a letter and/or email on the city council’s stance on the issue at hand and any/all work being done in the community on the specific subject – with follow up reference information for the constituent.
- Accountability representative would send out the response to the constituent, and post the question and answer on the city council website for the public.

The idea of the accountability framework is derived from common practice correspondence that happens at a national Congressional level. This accountability piece is also common practice in businesses, as a means to establish an open platform for discussion and remediation of concerns.

Mending The Bond: Police and Community

One of the hardest-hit relationships currently affecting the city of Ferguson is the one between police and residents. In order to restore this relationship it is necessary that Ferguson police interact with citizens from a positive perspective and establish a progressive force within the community.

In order to gain a better understanding of the community, police officers and other law enforcement officials must be required to complete diversity anti-bias training. This training would include components such as: examination of stereotypes, importance of cultural differences, etc. Diversity training is common practice in public defense positions as it helps public leaders understand the social dynamics of the constituents that they are serving.

Additionally, it is necessary that the police force become more involved in and become key players within the Ferguson Youth Initiative (FYI). FYI was created in 2012 and serves the
youth of the Ferguson community by doing the following: encouraging them and engaging them as active members of the community, developing programs as needed, and further communicating and partnering with existing community youth programs\(^1\). FYI works with community leaders and businesses on constructive programs for Ferguson youth. Greater participation with FYI would provide The Ferguson Police Department with a better understanding of issues impacting Ferguson youth. This understanding would provide an opportunity for The Ferguson Police Department to lead impactful community building initiatives for youth and young adults.

**Mending The Bond: Mayor and Community**

Community engagement starts from the top down, which is why it is imperative that Honorable Mayor James Knowles III be at the forefront of restoring community engagement with his constituents. Honorable Mayor James Knowles III should begin this effort with Cities of Service, a free initiative that was founded by Former New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg (I-NY) in 2009 to promote the following mayoral service initiatives\(^2\):

- Developing a comprehensive service plan and a coordinated strategy focused on matching volunteers and established community partners to the areas of greatest local need
- Working with other mayors and elected officials to advance strategies and best practices that accelerate the service movement and produce measurable results;
- Encouraging other mayors to join this national effort to engage our citizens
- Ensuring that the voice of cities is heard in federal legislative, policy, and program discussions related to service, which will help the country achieve the ambitious goals of the Serve America Act.

Cities of Service started with 16 mayors and has grown over the last five years to nearly 200 mayors, improving the lives of over 47 million Americans across the nation\(^2\). Cities of Service provides a guideline for mayors to follow to implement community initiatives, and even offers the opportunity for funding. Cities of Service has been a powerful force in cities across the country with results impacting different areas including, but not limited to:
- Removal of 1.9M pounds of litter from city streets,
- Over 4K pounds of fresh produce distributed in food deserts,
- CPR training to 160K Americans by community volunteers\(^2\).


As a City of Service Ferguson would not only gain programmatic and logistical support for community initiatives, it would join a community of other cities around the country that are committed to the betterment of their quality of life through community service.

CONCLUSION

Ferguson, Missouri is a city that has been marked by indifference, but has the potential to be more resilient than ever before. By implementing the aforementioned solutions to rebuild community relations among City Council, The Police Department, and constituents, Ferguson will begin an important first step to ensuring the future vitality of the city. We believe that these solutions will set the foundation for cohesion and collaboration across the city’s representative leadership groups.

We know it is a difficult time in Ferguson at the moment, and we hope that this memorandum can help support your efforts as your city moves forward to the future.

_Prepared By: Black Student Association Executive Board Member Beneque E. Cousin with the support of NYU Wagner's Black Student Association Executive Board_