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Black Lawyers to Challenge Police Brutality in 25 Cities

By Freddie Allen
NNPA Senior Washington Correspondent

WASHINGTON (NNPA) - In an effort to combat police brutality in the black community, the National Bar Association (NBA) recently announced plans to file open records requests in 25 cities to study allegations of police misconduct.

Atty. Pamela Meanes, president of the black lawyers and judges group, said that the NBA was already making plans for a nationwide campaign to fight police brutality when Michael Brown, an unarmed black teenager was shot and killed by Darren Wilson, a White police officer following a controversial midday confrontation in a Ferguson, Mo.

Meanes called police brutality the new civil rights issue of this era, an issue that disproportionately impacts the black community.

"If we don't see this issue and if we don't at the National Bar Association do the legal things that are necessary to bring this issue to the forefront, then we are not carrying out our mission, which is to protect the civil and political entities of all," said Meanes.

The NBA, which describes itself as "the nation's oldest and largest national network of predominantly African-American attorneys and judges," selected the 25 cities based on their African American populations and reported incidents of police brutality.

The lawyers group will file open records requests in Birmingham, Ala.; Little Rock, Ark.; Phoenix; Los Angeles; San Jose, Calif.; Washington, D.C.; Jacksonville, Fla.; Miami; Atlanta; Chicago; Louisville, Ky.; Baltimore; Detroit; Kansas City, Mo.; St. Louis, Mo.; Charlotte, N.C.; Las Vegas; New York City; Cleveland, Ohio; Memphis, Tenn.; Philadelphia; Dallas; Houston; San Antonio, Texas, and Milwaukee, Wis.

In a press release about the open records requests, the group said it will not only seek information about "the number of individuals who have been killed, racially profiled, wrongfully arrested and/or injured while pursued or in police custody, but also comprehensive data from crime scenes, including "video and photographic evidence related to any alleged and/or proven misconduct by current or former employees," as well background information on officers involved in the incidents.

Not only will the NBA present their findings to the public, but the group also plans to compile its research and forward the data over to the attorney general's office.

Meanes said that the group's ultimate goal is to have a conversation with Attorney General Eric Holder and to ask him, and in some cases, demand that he seize police departments or take over some investigations that are going on in states or run concurrent investigations.

Meanes said that federal law prohibits the Justice Department from going into a police department unless a pattern or history of abuse has been identified.

"The problem is that the information needed for that action is not readily available in a comprehensive way on a consistent basis with the goal of eradicating that abuse," said Meanes, adding that the open records requests is the best way to get that information.

Meanes said that the NBA was concerned that the trust was already broken between the police force and the residents of Ferguson and that the rebellion and the protests would continue.

"We don't think St. Louis County should investigate this. We don't think the prosecutor should investigate this. There should be an independent third-party investigating this and that is the federal government," said Meanes.

Phillip Agnew, executive director of the Dream Defenders, a civil rights group established by young people of color in the aftermath of the shooting death of Trayvon Martin, an unarmed black teenager in Sanford, Fla., said that law enforcement officials taunted, antagonized and disrespected peaceful protesters who took to the streets of Ferguson and at times incited the violence that they attempted to stamp out in the wake of the shooting death of Michael Brown.

"An occupying force came into the community, they killed someone from the community, and instead of being transparent and doing everything they could do to make sure the community felt whole again, they brought in more police to suppress folks who were exercising their constitutional rights," said Agnew. "If your protocol results in greater violence, greater anger, and greater disenchantment of the people, you have to chart a different course."

On the heels of the NBA announcement, Attorney General Eric Holder launched two initiatives designed to calm anxiety and

frustration expressed by Ferguson's black residents towards the local police department over allegations of misconduct, harassment and discrimination. The Justice Department also introduced a "Collaborative Reform Initiative" to tackle similar concerns with the St. Louis County Police Department and to improve the relationship between police officers and the communities they serve.

During a recent press conference to announce the new initiatives in Missouri, Attorney General Eric Holder said that the Department of Justice is working across the nation to ensure that the criminal justice system is fair, constitutional and free of bias.



NCCU Earns High Ranking on Annual U.S. News & World Report List

North Carolina Central University continues its streak of excellence, earning an 11th place ranking in the U.S. News & World Report's 2014 survey of historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs).

NCCU was the third-highest-rated public HBCU in the country and the second highest among HBCUs in North Carolina. The overall placement at No. 11 is up one spot from the previous listing, which is published annually by U.S. News & World Report magazine.

Additionally, NCCU ranks at No. 65 among Best Regional Universities in the South.

The ranking is drawn from data such as retention and graduation rates, high school class standing for incoming freshmen, admission test scores, class size, strength of the faculty and reputation among education administrators.

NCCU scored well for its small class sizes; only 5 percent of NCCU classes have 50 or more students.

Other high marks received for the university highlighted its low student-faculty ratio of 15-to-1 and the class standing of incoming freshman during the 2012-13 year.

Annual alumni giving - now in double digits - was also a strength for the university.

"Our students, administrators, staff and alumni have worked extremely hard to help NCCU earn the distinction and recognition highlighted by U.S. News & World Report, and this is indeed this good news for our university," said NCCU's Chancellor Debra Saunders-White. "NCCU is a first-choice, global institution offering a premier higher education and our ranking affirms that we are in the business of educating and producing scholars and leaders who are prepared for the global marketplace."

According to U.S. News & World Report, the top 10 HBCUs in the nation are:

- Spelman College, Atlanta, Ga. (1); Howard University, Washington, D.C. (2); Morehouse College, Atlanta, Ga. (3); Hampton University, Hampton, Va. (4); Tuskegee University, Tuskegee, Ala. (5); Xavier University of Louisiana, New Orleans, La. (6); Fisk University, Nashville, Tenn. (7); Florida A&M University, Tallahassee, Fla. (8); Claflin University, Orangeburg, S.C. (9); North Carolina A&T State University, Greensboro, N.C. (10).



National Bar Association President Pamela J. Meanes

UNC board elects new chancellor for ECSU

CHAPEL HILL - Stacey Franklin Jones, a management and partnerships consultant with a background in higher education leadership, was elected Sept. 4 as the new chancellor at Elizabeth City State University.

A statement from the University of North Carolina system said the UNC Board of Governors elected the Boston native during a special meeting in Cary.

Jones succeeds Charles Becton, who had served as interim chancellor at the historically black college for the last 13 months.

UNC President Tom Ross said Jones brings a blend of leadership experience with a practical understanding of how to guide institutions through serious challenges, whether academic or financial.

Jones is a 1982 graduate of Howard University. She later earned masters' degrees in numerical science and technical management from The Johns Hopkins University and a doctorate in computer science from George Washington University.

From 1982 through 1993 Jones was in private industry as a defense and electronic systems software engineer and product development manager for Northrop Grumman in Maryland. She then worked for several years as an engineering manager and system architect for other Maryland-based companies before moving to higher education.

She began her academic career in 1997 in the computer science department at Johns Hopkins University, where she was a research scientist and adjunct member of the research faculty, teaching systems programming, co-designing a "surgery for engineers" course, and conducting investigations funded by the National Security Agency.

In 2000, Jones was recruited to Benedict College in Columbia, South Carolina, where she served two years as chair of the Mathematics and Computer Science Department before becoming dean of the School of Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics, a position she held from 2002 to 2008. In 2009, she was promoted to senior vice president.

In July 2010, Jones returned to Maryland to become provost and vice president for academic affairs at Bowie State University. The next year, she returned to the private sector.

Civil rights leaders want meeting with Hawks

By Ray Henry

ATLANTA (AP) - Civil rights leaders on Sept. 8 asked for a meeting with Hawks officials after a team owner disclosed that he wrote a racially charged email theorizing that black fans kept white fans away.

The Rev. Markel Hutchins said he and others wanted a chance to discuss what they think is a racist attitude permeating the entire organization. He did not request a meeting before hosting a news conference outside Philips Arena, where the basketball team plays.

"Evidently the culture of racism and bigotry that is pervasive and ever-present in the Atlanta Hawks leadership is embarrassing to the city of Atlanta and undermines the very best of Atlanta's history of race relations and being a leader for the nation and the world," Hutchins said.

It was not immediately clear whether the team would meet with Hutchins and his supporters, who also called for the team to contract with more minority-owned businesses and offer internships for minority students. A Hawks spokesman did not immediately return a message seeking comment.

Hutchins and others were responding to an announcement Sept. 7 that team co-owner Bruce Levenson would sell his controlling interest in the team, thanks in part to an inflammatory email he wrote two years ago. Levenson said he wrote the email in an attempt "to bridge Atlanta's racial sports divide." However, he theorized that black fans driving off white fans.

Levenson said he voluntarily reported the email to the NBA, which pressured Clippers owner Donald Sterling to sell his team after he was recorded scolding his girlfriend for bringing black men to games. Steve Ballmer became the team's new owner Aug. 12.

In Atlanta, the Rev. Gerald Durley told reporters that the team's bigger problem was its lack of success, not the race of its fans.

"Who would come with a team that's not winning? You've got to understand the market if you're talking about business," said Durley, who suggested that black fans could boycott games if they felt unwanted.



President Barack Obama takes a guided tour of Stonehenge with Heather Sebire, property curator, and Matthew Barzun, U.S. Ambassador to the United Kingdom, in Wiltshire, England, Sept. 5, 2014. (Official White House Photo by Pete Souza)