



January 30, 2018

Let's Get Ready for Black History Month!

Black History Month is an annual celebration of achievements by African Americans and a time for recognizing the central role of blacks in U.S. history. The event grew out of "Negro History Week," the brainchild of noted historian Carter G. Woodson and other prominent African Americans. Since 1976, every U.S. president has officially designated the month of February as Black History Month. Other countries around the world, including Canada and the United Kingdom, also devote a month to celebrating black history. The story of Black History Month begins in 1915, half a century after the Thirteenth Amendment abolished slavery in the United States.

Black History Month is not just a time to remember how far the United States of America has come, but it is also a time to build on the past foundation and continue to fight for, and achieve, improvement.

There are economic and societal challenges for black communities which include: inequalities in access to justice in the civil court system, an overburdened and ineffective criminal justice system, overcrowding conditions in correctional facilities, increased homelessness, increases in teen pregnancy, inadequate educational opportunities, a lack of affordable housing, insufficient delivery of social services to the less fortunate, and deficiencies in the delivery of public health services. Unemployment is a lingering problem for the economy as a whole, but especially for blacks. 75.5% of homicide victims in the state of Illinois are black. The inmate population in the Illinois correctional system is approximately 58% black, and the high proportion of young black males with a history of criminal convictions is a well-recognized phenomenon.

With Black History Month celebrating the abundant history of African Americans, I am happy to be joined by more than a dozen Illinois state agencies, many unions and community agencies, and community stakeholders to host an event to focus on uplifting and empowering African Americans for a brighter future. The Black History Month Kickoff Resource Fair will take place on February 1, 2018 from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. at the James R. Thompson Center, 100 W Randolph St., Chicago, featuring state employment opportunities and small business contracting opportunities. There will also be a press conference at the same location in the Blue Room of the Thompson Center at 11 a.m.

February 1st is Day One of the 2018 Black History Month Celebration, but unemployment in the black community continues to be too high, college enrollment too low, and violence on the rise. The kick-off of Black History Month is a great time to improve the delivery of state services to black families in Illinois. Our state has a responsibility for providing for the health, safety and welfare of the people, and

Illinois must do everything possible to eliminate poverty and inequality. This day marks a great day of “all hands on deck”, with every state agency making a commitment to improve the lives of black families in Illinois. Hope to see you there!

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'LSF', with a stylized, sweeping flourish at the end.

La Shawn K. Ford
State Representative-Eighth District