When we think of Black History, we must think beyond the limitations of one month and further back than historical chattel enslavement. Black history is replete with the foundations of culture and civilization. Classical Greek/Roman historians and the 5,000 year-old walls of the pyramids attest to the “African” origins of architecture, agriculture, astronomy, commerce, geometry, government, medicine, metallurgy, philosophy, physics, religion, surgery, trigonometry, writing and numerous other sciences and social systems.

We must tell of the contributions of our ancestors and pay tribute to our heritage that is so rich and integral to the growth and development of the nations of the world. We must force examination of Black History from the margins of the story of mankind and onto the center of the world platform, where it rightfully should be. In the words of Dr. John Henrik Clarke, “History is a clock that people use to tell their time of day. It is a compass... Most importantly, an understanding of history tells a people where they still must go, and what they still must be.”
The mission of the Black, Latino, and Asian Caucus is to protect, advocate for, and empower all residents and communities of color in New York City through legislation, public policy, and funding.
Dear Friends of the BLAC,

It is with great pleasure and deep pride that we introduce the inaugural edition of the Black, Latino, Asian Caucus’ newsletter.

As the newly-elected co-chairs of the BLAC, we are grateful for the opportunity to help shape the body’s work in the next two years, and are very excited to roll up our sleeves and get started.

As we enter the latter half of the legislative session, it is important that we take this opportunity to reflect on what we’ve accomplished so far—not just as individual Council Members or as Caucus Members, but as a living, breathing organ of the Council as a whole. We are proud of the work we have done: The BLAC has demonstrated unity in the face of political pressure, has spoken out against police misconduct, and has amplified the voices of millions of New Yorkers who often go unheard on issues like housing and education. However, there is clearly much more work to do, and we can say one thing for sure—we’re ready.

The BLAC makes up over half of the City Council. As New York continues to expand and diversify, we sincerely hope that the Caucus grows too, furthering its reach in every borough and reminding the City’s leaders that we are here, we are strong, and we are working hard to fulfill our mission of empowering and uplifting communities of color.

There are exciting things to come, and we appreciate the role that each of you plays in the Caucus’ work.

In Service,

Robert E. Cornegy, Jr.
Co-Chair
Council Member, 36th District

Ritchie Torres
Co-Chair
Council Member, 15th District
2016 Legislative and Policy Agenda

LEADING POLICY PRIORITIES

UNIVERSAL YOUTH EMPLOYMENT

Now more than ever, NYC students face barriers to employment that prevent them from participating meaningfully in local and national affairs. Countless studies have shown that when students are engaged through structured work experience programs, they focus more in school and develop well-rounded, complementary skill sets. Further, the availability of jobs and internships for youth decreases at-risk behavior and truancy. The Caucus supports universal youth employment and efforts to expand Summer Youth Employment Program (SYEP) offerings. Doing so ensures that our youth have every opportunity to excel, and are properly prepared to enter the workforce as young adults.

GIFTED AND TALENTED PROGRAMMING

Many NYC school districts have too few Gifted & Talented programs for the number of qualified students. In fact, four school districts have zero Gifted & Talented programs at all, and these districts are all in low-income communities of color, including a district in Speaker Mark-Viverito’s Council district.

The Caucus calls for the inclusion of Gifted & Talented testing as part of Universal Pre-K services, and for a reform of the specialized high school admission process that would automatically grant admission to specialized high schools for any student ranked in the top 3% of his/her graduating middle school class. This performance-based model helps students succeed, regardless of socioeconomic status.

CRIMINAL JUSTICE REFORM ACT

Too often, low-level criminal offenses are used to disenfranchise people of color by creating a system in which people of color are disproportionately targeted for arrest and incarceration. As a result, families are torn apart due to incarceration and tens of thousands of people are shut out of the job market, the housing market, and the paths to citizenship because of the stain of low-level offenses on their criminal records. Further, burdensome court costs worsen economic hardship for at-risk New Yorkers.

Caucus Members supported the Criminal Justice Reform Act, which will reduce these negative impacts and relieve the substantial court backlog, helping the city provide the fair and speedy trials to which every New Yorker is constitutionally entitled. With fewer pending cases in the courts and fewer people being arrested and jailed, the NYPD’s overburdened resources will be available for more productive community and policing work.

NEW YORK CITY HOUSING AUTHORITY

For so many residents of public housing, a criminal conviction creates a tragic ultimatum: The breakdown of a family household, or a forced removal from public housing. A current pilot program called “Family Re-Entry Program” has successfully begun to correct this harmful public policy by assisting qualifying individuals in their re-entry to their communities.

The Caucus supports the full implementation of a stronger Family Re-Entry Program, which will dramatically reduce the recidivism rate for formerly incarcerated persons and promote family reunification and stability.

MINORITY- AND WOMEN-OWNED BUSINESSES

Economic opportunity for small businesses in NYC is often hampered by deeply engrained race-based contracting practices. Historically, Black, Latino, Asian, women, and immigrant entrepreneurs have been shut out of the government contracting market.

The Caucus calls upon the city to invest more in MWBEs to promote equity in city contracting and help struggling communities of color achieve their economic potential.


POLICY PRIORIT: POLICE & COMMUNITY RELATIONS

POLICE REFORM

THE TIME IS NOW!

In January, BLAC Members met with NYPD Commissioner Bill Bratton for the first of a series of quarterly meeting between the Commissioner and the BLAC.

It is no secret that the NYPD and the City Council disagree on many issues—Commissioner Bratton has made it clear that interventions by the legislature on policing practices are not well-received by the Department. However, in the spirit of maintaining open lines of communication, the Commissioner and the Caucus have committed to building a working relationship by conducting regular meetings to air concerns and progress updates.

BLAC Members stressed the importance of thoughtfulness in public commentary, citing incendiary press comments made by Bratton.

BLAC Members also raised concerns over the lack of diversity at the NYPD—not only in recruiting, but especially in promotional path. At the follow-up meeting in May, the Commissioner reported increased numbers of recruits of color, and new programs aimed at diversifying the leadership ranks.

Most importantly, BLAC Members opened the door for the Commissioner to share his thoughts or concerns regarding the current police reform bill package under consideration by the Council, specifically the Right To Know Act, being championed by BLAC Members Torres, Cornegy, and Reynoso. While the Commissioner declined to comment on any of the proposed bills, Caucus Members vowed to continue to fight for the police reform package.

Rebuilding After Floyd...

The BLAC proudly submitted an amicus brief on behalf of the plaintiffs in the landmark 2013 case Floyd v. City of New York, in which a federal judge found that the NYPD had violated New Yorkers’ constitutional rights and racially profiled Black and Latino New Yorkers through its stop-and-frisk campaign. As a stakeholder in this suit against the city, the BLAC remains committed to bridging the gap between police and the community by working with the court-appointed Facilitator in the Joint Remedial Process (JRP) to organize forums, focus groups, and leadership meetings to lay the foundation for a new policing model.
On February 2, BLAC Members stood side by side with the parents of Ramarley Graham and the mother of Eric Garner to demand that the Department of Justice prosecute all the NYPD officers responsible for Ramarley’s murder. This date marked four years since Ramarley was killed, and still no case has been brought against the officers responsible.

18-year-old Ramarley was killed on February 2, 2012 when NYPD officers stormed into his home and gunned him down in his bathroom, in front of his grandmother and six-year-old brother. Ramarley was unarmed.

Advocates and allies gathered with BLAC Members King, Mendez, Williams, and Gibson to deliver their grievances to Mayor de Blasio.

BLAC Members join the Graham and Garner families to call for prosecutorial action for Ramarley’s murder.

Law Day 2016: 50 Years of Miranda

What Is Law Day?

Law Day is observed every year on May 1st as a celebration of the role that law plays in our society.

This year, Law Day marks the 50th anniversary of the landmark case Miranda v. Arizona, in which the U.S. Supreme Court held that criminal admissions made during custodial interrogations were inadmissible where the suspect had not been informed of his right to remain silent or right to an attorney.

Case Background

Argued in 1966, the Miranda case was decided alongside three other cases of similar nature: Vignera v. New York, Westover v. United States, and California v. Stewart. In all four cases, the defendants were physically isolated and questioned by law enforcement or prosecuting attorneys. All defendants gave written statements, which were used against them as evidence in their criminal trials, and none of the defendants were informed of their rights to silence or representation.

Miranda’s Legacy

As a result of these cases, it is now a legal requirement that criminal suspects be informed of their rights to counsel and silence when taken into police custody (often referred to as being “Mirandized”). This requirement has become one of the most widely-known aspects of criminal procedure, and can make or break a criminal case if omitted.

Data consistently show that people of color are disproportionately victims of misconduct by law enforcement, and so this Law Day, we celebrate the invaluable effect of this case law on the millions of people in the United States who become involved with the criminal justice system.
The BLAC proudly sponsored the Council’s annual Lunar New Year celebration in City Hall to welcome the year of the Monkey. The Caucus was honored to present a Proclamation to Helena Wong, former Director of the Committee Against Asian-American Violence (CAAAV). Helena’s tireless efforts for justice for all communities of color and low-income New Yorkers make her an outstanding community leader.

The Lunar New Year celebration was truly an evening to remember as guests from around the world enjoyed traditional dance performances, delicious food, and an homage to the achievements of Asian-Americans who work hard each day to keep New York City diverse and exciting.

On January 13th 2016, BLAC Members Koo and Eugene were joined by their colleagues to celebrate Korean-American Day, honoring the achievements of Koreans and Korean-Americans in the United States. This date marks the 113th anniversary of the first arrival of Korean immigrants to the United States.

The affair ended with a spectacular performance of traditional drumming and dance.
**Briefing by AAF**

In January, the BLAC sponsored a Council briefing by the Asian American Federation (AAF) on the current state of Asian New Yorkers. Advocates from AAF’s partner organizations discussed the changes in demographics and population growth of Asians in NYC, and the challenges they face in immigration and social services provision. Members and staff were updated on exciting new changes in small predominantly-Asian neighborhoods, such as the rapid growth of the small business sector and the consequential quality of life improvements for community residents. ♦

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**Gospel at City Hall**

In February, the BLAC joined Council Member Donovan Richards in celebrating gospel music in City Hall Chambers. Breathtaking performances were delivered to a packed house on this unforgettable night of joy and remembrance.

A fitting tribute during Black History Month, the Gospel event was truly a success and a moving reminder of the impact that religious institutions have had on communities of color for centuries. ♦

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**Our Future Leaders**

In April, BLAC Members were pleased to participate as judges in a mock debate session as part of the Middle School Quality Initiative.

The program proved to be a great success, as four student participants astutely made arguments about the influence of rap music on young people, allowing them to hone their newfound professional skills in real-world applications. ♦
**Council Member Carlos Menchaca, Chair of the Committee on Immigration**

Q: What is the idNYC card and how do I get one?

A: idNYC brings New Yorkers closer to government services and cultural activities.

“idNYC is a new government-issued photo ID that is free and easy to obtain. The identification card is available to all NYC residents, making it possible for individuals who have more difficulty obtaining government-issued ID to finally have one. It comes with a free one-year membership at several City museums, concert halls, botanical gardens and more. It’s easy to get one, just book an appointment online at: http://www1.nyc.gov/site/idnyc/index.page.”

**Council Member Vanessa Gibson, Chair of the Committee on Public Safety**

Q: If I’m the victim of a crime, besides reporting to the NYPD, where can I go for support services?

A: Look to local non-profits for counseling, financial assistance, and more.

“Safe Horizon is a non-profit funded by the Council that provides information, counseling, and other assistance to crime victims in NYC. Their hotline [866-689-HELP (4357)] has more than 150 languages available. They also work with the NYS Office of Victim Services, which helps with medical and counseling bills, burial and funeral costs, and lost wages. They also provide support to a network of victim service providers across New York State.”

**Council Member Inez Barron, Chair of the Committee on Higher Education**

Q: What are some lesser-known financial aid opportunities for CUNY students?

A: Take advantage of the City-funded CUNY Merit Scholarship program.

“All high school and CUNY students should be aware of the merit scholarship program, which is funded by the City Council each fiscal year. Any CUNY student who graduated from a New York City high school and maintains a B average is automatically eligible for the merit scholarship, which deducts $800 per year ($400 per semester) from the student’s tuition.”
We've all heard of *Brown v. Board of Education*. Many consider it the most influential court case of the 20th century, as it would revolutionize the American education system, economy, and social structure. What many don’t know is that *Brown* was built on more than just one set of facts. It was the culminating case in a carefully curated body of lower court cases, all of which demonstrated the pervasive inequalities that were inherent under the "separate but equal" logic of *Plessy v. Ferguson*. This long-term strategy proved incredibly effective, as the numerous favorable lower court decisions served as a persuasive foundation for the Supreme Court to correct a demonstrably broken system. Simply put, by the time Thurgood Marshall and his team got *Brown* to the Supreme Court, there was simply no other way for the Court to rule.

But before the years-long litigation campaign that led up to *Brown v. Board*, there was another trailblazing case that challenged the "separate but equal" status quo: *Mendez v. Westminster*. Notably, Thurgood Marshall argued that case too, and even used some of his legal arguments from the *Mendez* case years later in *Brown v. Board*.

It cannot be overstated that *Mendez* played a pivotal role in one of America’s most important revolutions—the Civil Rights Movement. And yet, students are rarely taught about this seminal case that helped set it all into motion.

In 1945, Mexican and Mexican-American children in California were not permitted to attend school with white students. Children of Mexican descent were believed to be morally, physically, and intellectually inferior, and were forced to attend "Mexican schools" often housed in barns or dilapidated buildings with inferior educational materials.

When Gonzalo and Felicitas Mendez’s children were barred from attending school in the all-white Westminster school district, they launched a class action lawsuit on behalf of 5,000 families challenging the discriminatory practice under the Fifth and Fourteenth Amendments. A federal judge ruled in their favor and with legal support from the NAACP, the American Jewish Congress, the ACLU, and the Japanese American Citizens League, the plaintiffs won a historic victory when the Court of Appeals upheld the ruling.

California Governor Earl Warren codified the ruling by signing The Anderson Bill into law, making California the first state to officially desegregate its public schools. Eight years later, the Supreme Court would issue the ruling in *Brown* that desegregated all public schools in the United States—in an opinion written by none other than Chief Justice Earl Warren.

This April marks the 69th anniversary of *Mendez v. Westminster*. It becomes clear that the struggle for justice in America is not unique to one or two ethnic groups, and that it is only through unity that we advance justice. After all, discriminations based on race, sex, ability, orientation, or any other factors are not "separate but equal" forms of discrimination. Rather, they are mutually dependent cogs in an antiquated machine.

We’re certainly not done yet—there's still far too much work to do. But let’s use cases like *Mendez* and *Brown* as reminders of just how palpable legal and social change are when we unify our parallel causes and demonstrate solidarity not just within individual movements or ethnic groups, but across the “board.”

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*Xusana R. Davis, Esq.
Director
Black, Latino, and Asian Caucus*
### LEGISLATIVE SPOTLIGHT

#### ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

*Intro. 886—Barron*

Identifying and addressing environmental injustice

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#### LANGUAGE EDUCATION

*Intro. 1062—Chin*

Providing language classes for certain foster youth

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#### RIGHT TO KNOW ACT

*Intros. 182 & 541—Torres & Reynoso*

Police identification requirement and notice & Consent to search

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#### CRIMINAL JUSTICE REFORM ACT

*Intros. 1056-59—Speaker Mark-Viverito*

Reduced penalties for low-level, quality-of-life offenses

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#### FEMININE HYGIENE ACCESS

*Intro. 1128—Ferreras-Copeland*

Mandates availability of feminine hygiene products in NYC public schools

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### INTRODUCED

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Intro</th>
<th>Sponsor</th>
<th>Bill Title</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>108</td>
<td>Rose</td>
<td>Prohibiting Employment Discrimination</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>464</td>
<td>Wills</td>
<td>DOC Absentee Voting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>899</td>
<td>Gibson</td>
<td>Nursery Access on Riker's Island</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>917</td>
<td>Wills</td>
<td>Synthetic Cannabinoids</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1029</td>
<td>Eugene</td>
<td>Paid Leave For Parents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1059 &amp; 1174</td>
<td>Eugene</td>
<td>Blood Pressure Machines</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>698</td>
<td>Wills</td>
<td>Post-Conviction Innocence Claims</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>979</td>
<td>Gibson</td>
<td>Wrongful Convictions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>999</td>
<td>Eugene</td>
<td>Conflict Resolution in Schools</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### PASSED

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Local Law</th>
<th>Sponsor</th>
<th>Bill Title</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Ferreras-Copeland</td>
<td>Streamlining NYC Budget Process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Miller</td>
<td>Retaining Jobs in Groceries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Comegy</td>
<td>SCRIE/DRIE Rent Protection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Cumbo</td>
<td>Reporting on Health Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Gibson</td>
<td>Sex Education Training</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>Williams</td>
<td>Translating City Websites</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31</td>
<td>Speaker Mark-Viverito</td>
<td>Eco-Friendly Building Standards</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32</td>
<td>Williams</td>
<td>Green Building Standards</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33</td>
<td>Ferreras-Copeland</td>
<td>Riker's Island Reporting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36</td>
<td>Mealy</td>
<td>Attorney Fees &amp; the Human Rights Law</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>37</td>
<td>Mendez</td>
<td>Expanding Human Rights Protections</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>38</td>
<td>Williams</td>
<td>Protecting Domestic Violence Victims</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>39</td>
<td>Eugene</td>
<td>Training on Vulnerable Youth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45</td>
<td>Ferreras-Copeland</td>
<td>Environmental Control Board Amnesty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>49</td>
<td>Speaker Mark-Viverito</td>
<td>Taxi Fare Quotes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51</td>
<td>Rodriguez</td>
<td>Universal For-Hire Driver License</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55</td>
<td>Gibson</td>
<td>High Crime Area Services Coordination</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>58</td>
<td>Comegy</td>
<td>Displaced Building Service Workers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60 &amp; 61</td>
<td>Williams</td>
<td>Building Tax Exemptions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>837</td>
<td>Barron</td>
<td>Pell Grants for Incarcerated Individuals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>928</td>
<td>Speaker Mark-Viverito</td>
<td>Upholding DACA and DAPA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1000 &amp; 1001</td>
<td>King</td>
<td>Three-Fifths Clause</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Stay informed!
Visit LEGISTAR.COUNCIL.NYC.GOV for more BLAC-sponsored legislation and for video recordings of all Council hearings.
ADVOCACY HIGHLIGHT

BUDGET & LAW
- BLAC Releases 4-Point MIH Rezoning Platform
- BLAC Releases Bond Financing Report
- BLAC opposes Gov. Cuomo’s $485M CUNY funding cut
- BLAC demands increased funding for youth jobs
- BLAC demands NYPD investigation into Ramarley Graham’s murder
- BLAC demands more funding for universal youth employment

CULTURE & SOCIETY
- BLAC Member Ydanis Rodriguez introduced Car Free Day in NYC
- BLAC Members honor leaders throughout various districts for Women’s History Month
- BLAC Members honor leaders throughout various districts for Black History Month
- BLAC Member Speaker Mark-Viverito launches #SheWillBe campaign
New York City’s proposed rezoning plan was the focus of a great deal of discussion over the last several months. From City Hall to City Island, there was no shortage of input from advocates, elected officials, and everyday neighbors, as the Administration worked day and night to create a plan that fit as best as possible for New Yorkers.

During the intensive negotiation period, the BLAC released a 4-point platform outlining its position on the Mandatory Inclusionary Housing plan. Under the leadership of BLAC Member and Chair of the Subcommittee on Zoning, Donovan Richards, The Caucus called for affordability levels that would include as many low-income communities as possible. It is no secret that the poorest communities often tend to be communities of color, and gentrification almost always pushes out longtime community members in favor of new residents in higher income brackets. The Caucus proactively pursued a plan to protect the character of New York City’s most diverse neighborhoods and to ensure that Black, Latino, and Asian New Yorkers are not priced out of their homes, their neighborhoods, or their city.

While there is still much work to do to combat rapidly-rising rent prices and threats to cultural diversity around the city, the Caucus is proud of the thousands of working hours that the Council and the Administration put into the housing plan, and the BLAC will continue to demand the housing reforms that New Yorkers deserve. ♦

BLAC’s MIH Principles

1. Deeper affordability to include families with incomes as low as 30 to 40 percent of AMI
2. Mixed-income housing to ensure that housing developments do not disproportionately target specific AMI levels
3. Disincentivizing off-site development by deepening affordability for developers who choose to build off site to ensure inclusive and integrated neighborhoods, and
4. Job completion standards that are appropriately inclusive of MWBEs, local hiring, wage and benefits standards, workforce development, worker safety, and infrastructure considerations

It’s budget season again, and the BLAC has hit the ground running to advocate for programming that will provide New Yorkers with much-needed services in fiscal year 2017. This year, the BLAC met with over 80 different organizations! Members from all five boroughs sat with myriad community organizations and discussed ways in which the Council could help meet the unique and diverse goals and needs of each community. Each year, the Caucus engages in a thoughtful deliberative process to help direct city funding to some of the hardest-working—and often underserved—organizations providing critical programming and services for New York’s most vulnerable residents. ♦
On April 5, 2016, the Black, Latino, and Asian Caucus hosted an event with Speaker Mark-Viverito unveiling a plaque in memory of the Honorable James E. Davis.

Council Member Davis was elected to the City Council in 2001. On July 23rd, 2003, he was assassinated in an act of senseless violence during a City Council meeting. The plaque will serve as a lasting monument to the memory of Council Member Davis and his service to New York City.

Let us honor the legacy of Council Member Davis and the over 500 New Yorkers who are victims of gun violence each year. To learn more about the Council’s work to combat gun violence, check out the New York City Council’s Anti-Gun Violence Initiative.

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