



Greater Milwaukee
& Waukesha County

MEDIA ADVISORY

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United Way's Diversity Leadership Society Announces Initiative to Tackle Barriers to Employment & Advancement

The four-pronged strategy will combine funding, advocacy, and programmatic strategies to help local individuals secure and maintain employment.

September 10, 2018 – **MILWAUKEE** United Way of Greater Milwaukee & Waukesha County's Diversity Leadership Society has announced a new signature initiative aimed at helping reducing barriers to employment and advancement for local, diverse individuals. The overarching goal of the initiative is to reduce unemployment among African Americans in the region by 15 percent by 2025.

Milwaukee and surrounding communities have the largest employment gap between black and white Americans of any metropolitan area in the country. Unemployment for black Americans is 13.8 percent, while unemployment for white Americans in the area is 2.7 percent. This gap can be attributed to a number of factors, but lack of education and training, reliable transportation, interaction with the criminal justice system, and frequent movement of diverse talent are all contributing factors.

"Family sustaining employment is paramount in stabilizing our neighborhoods, and United Way is uniquely positioned to address this critical need," said Joel Peterson, diversity development and community engagement manager at United Way. "By convening key institutions from the for-profit, non-profit and government sectors around reducing barriers to employment, we will collectively make meaningful impact in our community."

United Way's Diversity Leadership Society has committed to a four-pronged approach to address the issue of barriers to employment:

1. **Lack of Education, Training, and Credentials:** The Society has and will financially support programs that help adults learn to read, earn their GED or other employment credentials, and teach English as a Second Language (ESL).
2. **Transportation:** The Society will also support Driver's License Recovery for all and Universal Driver's Education programs for students in Milwaukee Public Schools.



Greater Milwaukee
& Waukesha County

3. **History of Involvement in the Justice System:** The Society will advocate for laws that promote expungement of records from public databases for non-violent offenders. Studies have shown that most employers are reluctant to hire applicants with criminal records, even for non-violent convictions.
4. **Diverse Talent Retention:** According to a 2017 study, Wisconsin is the 10th most outbound state in the country, with more than 60% of movers leaving the state for a job. With help from outside consultants, the Society will develop a survey tool to understand why diverse talent is leaving the region at such a high rate.

“We’re excited to announce this strategic focus designed to reduce barriers to employment for those who are most underrepresented in our employee pool,” said Grady Crosby, vice president public affairs and chief diversity officer at Johnson Controls and a co-chair of United Way’s Diversity Leadership Society. “When this community collectively decides to address challenging issues in order to change outcomes, we’ve seen great things happen. Increasing opportunities to obtain gainful employment is a community enhancement goal worthy of this strategic focus spearheaded by the United Way’s Diversity Leadership Society.”

“It is imperative that the Diversity Leadership Society plays the lead role in advocating for expungement of records for non-violent offenders,” said Jasmine Johnson, USGR government relations and corporate affairs for Pfizer Inc. and a co-chair of United Way’s Diversity Leadership Society. “From barriers to employment to the right to vote, both are critical components to advancing our community and economy.”

“This initiative will not only assist individuals with driver’s license recovery, but also help bring back universal drivers education to students who financially are unable to take such programs privately,” said Milwaukee Municipal Court Judge Derek Mosley, also a member of the Diversity Leadership Society Council. “By doing this, we will drastically improve driving habits and also open up employment opportunities around the region that have previously been unavailable to many in our community.

The [Diversity Leadership Society](#) is a United Way donor network comprised of individuals working together to ensure every family in the region has the opportunity to flourish, no matter their diversity of thought, gender, age, ethnicity, or geography. Members must contribute an annual gift of at least \$1,200 to United Way to be eligible to participate.

All individuals quotes in this press release are available for interview.

About United Way of Greater Milwaukee & Waukesha County: *United Way of Greater Milwaukee & Waukesha County fights for the health, education, and financial stability of every person in our local community. We win by Living United. By forging unlikely partnerships. By finding new solutions to old problems. By mobilizing the best*



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