



Black Business & Professional Association

Creating Opportunities • Celebrating Excellence • Investing In The Future

180 Elm Street, Toronto, ON. M5T 3M4 • Phone (416) 504-4097 • Fax (416) 504-7343 • E-mail: bbpa@bellnet.ca • Website: www.bbpa.org • Registered Charity No. 108073503RR0001

November 24, 2015

Dear Chair of the Economic Development Committee and members of Council,

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today as it relates to the report coming out of the Black Business and Professional Council Advisory Body, initiated by Deputy Mayor in collaboration with Councillor Thompson and the City's Economic Development office. Over the last year or so, it has been encouraging to experience the support from the city of Toronto for the Black Business Community, especially since the Black community is a significant ethno-cultural group in the Toronto cultural mosaic.

Over 200,000 blacks live in Toronto, many of whom are significant contributors to the City and by extension Ontario and Canada's economy and cultural vibrancy. I am Pauline Christian, the president of the Black Business and Professional Association (BBPA), Canada's largest Black Business and Professional charitable organization that facilitates the advancement of the Black Business and Professional community, showcasing 3 major flagships, and it's recently launched BBPA Centre of Excellence (COE) and Business Incubator, located in the financial hub at 180 Elm St off University Avenue. The BBPA COE was a collaborative effort between the BBPA, the City of Toronto via the Toronto Community Housing and the province via the Ontario Trillium Foundation. The BBPA supports programs and initiatives that support:

1. Economic development and entrepreneurship: Flagship is the annual National Black Business and Professional Convention (NBBPC).
2. Higher education: Flagship is the National Scholarships., offering the largest amount of funding, raising from \$ 200k - \$250k annually.
3. The recognition and celebration of excellence: Flagship is the annual Harry Jerome Awards. The BBPA Harry Jerome Awards is known to be one of the highest forms of recognition in the Black community, where Canada's best in the Black community is celebrated annually.

As for me, I wear many hats in our community. As a business owner in the residential healthcare retirement industry, I am grateful for the opportunity being afforded to me and my family as we continue to experience steady business growth in the most beautiful and multicultural country in the world.

Albeit, I have being the recipient of good mentorship and great opportunities, including some challenges; on the other hand, I am cognizant of the fact that many Black business owners have experienced unbearable challenges. As per our most recent survey, seemingly, our Black business owners need a stimulus package/effort. In one's opinion, the City is strategically poised to lead the

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western world on this front, as it relates to reviving the Black economy and creating a sustainable framework whereby Black businesses/families can grow and prosper. Today many view the Black economy in a state of dire strait and need to be rescued from the Black Socio-economic Plight, if you will.

Being a Black entrepreneur for over 10 years and leading a Black business charitable association affords me critical intelligence and hands on experience to somehow understand the plight of the Black entrepreneur. When we take stock of the journey of the Black entrepreneur, the myriad of contours, hills, valleys, pitfalls and roadblocks that intersect their journey to Socio economic advancement, this requires a call for action.

Bearing the aforementioned in mind, I had a pleasant surprise when I received a call in 2014 from Councillor Michael Thompson regarding the Deputy Mayor's initiative to put an Advisory in place, bringing key leaders in the Black business community to address issues preventing the growth and prosperity of the community, as well as better understanding the needs of the Black Business community. In collecting this type of intelligence on the Black businesses, the city would be more informed and be able to plan appropriately for our businesses, and/or now factor in the Black business community in their strategic priorities, allowing Black businesses to prosper and grow. Indeed the City has acted on their promise by the EDC report you have in front of you today.

Undoubtedly, the survey is a first step in the right direction of having public access to information regarding the characterization of Black business operations in Toronto to inform business planning, business training gaps and policy direction in support of the growth of Black business. However, it is imperative that there are subsequent surveys to capture the under-representation of missing sectors of the Black business community, if the appropriate policy measure is to be formulated and apply comprehensively. The City needs to be assured that there is greater coverage and true characterization of all black business enterprises.

As per the survey, the Black community is very strong in the creative industries and so we need surveys that are designed to capture their characterization and needs in terms of policy and financial support. This will determine how to commodify/monetize social enterprises that can add value to the tourism and creative arts industries, especially given Toronto' status as a multi-cultural/ethnic city-a boost for its tourism industry.

We need to have an in-depth qualitative and quantitative survey that focuses on self employment with the view to determining how the city can support the development of this sector in terms of funding for start-ups, fiscal incentives for sustainability. This is a sector that can provide employment for others and build wealth and a legacy of prosperity in the Black community.

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I beseech the City's economic development department to seriously take note of the recommendations coming out of the Black Business and Professional Council Advisory Body. In addressing some of the recommendations, please be mindful of the disparity between the needs of the different ethnic groups of the Toronto Black business community, as well as the sectors within the overall community. See your report, pages 12 and 13 respectively. For example, some of the initiatives already implemented by the City to meet the needs of the overall young entrepreneur sector might be able to assist this focus group with a bit more intentionality. Leveraging and cross pollination will be effective measures and approaches we may want to consider to ensure inclusion of certain ethno groups in existing programs. This would help in meeting the needs while reducing cost to the City.

Let's take seriously the areas identified by the survey as key areas that Black businesses need support from the City, to help Black businesses, especially start-up companies improve their business and build the capacity to expand as seemingly, a significant percentage of Black businesses do not make it over the 5 year mark, as reflected on page 6 on your report.

Additionally, as per the report, the city needs to focus on key areas of support like in the areas of financial support, training, networking and mentorship, marketing, expansion and affordable space. These areas are in high priority.

As it relates To the BBPA, the city is working with us to conduct some of these workshops at our Centre of Excellence and business incubator. This gesture has been well received by our community. Working alongside Mr. Michael Williams, Mr. Chris Rickett, Ms. Nina Gesa and our chair Dr Chandler-Crichlow of the BBPCAB and community leaders and partners, namely Blacks in Canada, First Friday, by blacks, the Jamaica Canadian Association Tropicana and A Different Booklist, was a ground breaking collaborative experience, shifting the paradigm in the right direction. We thank the businesses who participated in the survey.

It is my desire that we keep the communication path open going forward between the City and the Black community. It is very evident that the growth of the Black community is vital to the economic growth of our City, as when one succeeds, we all succeed.

Thanks Toronto City Council for taking the right steps to include and improve the Black community.

Looking forward to a continued working relationship with you.

Pauline Christian
President, Black Business and Professional Association

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