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Howard University and Operation Capital City Launch Leadership & Entrepreneurship Accelerator for Justice-Impacted Leaders; AACCNJ Supports as Sponsor, Speaker, and Program Contributor

(Washington, D.C. - June 2026) – Ten emerging justice-impacted leaders from New Jersey, New York, and Connecticut will gather in Washington, D.C. this June for the Howard University School of Business Office of Executive Education and Operation Capital City (OCC) Leadership & Entrepreneurship Accelerator Program, an innovative four-day intensive designed to transform lived experience into leadership, entrepreneurship, economic mobility, and community impact.

The accelerator brings together aspiring entrepreneurs, community leaders, and changemakers who have overcome justice system involvement and are committed to building businesses, strengthening communities, and creating opportunities for others. Through executive-level instruction, leadership development, artificial intelligence applications, financial management, professional branding, resilience training, and capstone project development, participants will gain the tools needed to lead with purpose and build sustainable futures.

The African American Chamber of Commerce of New Jersey (AACCNJ) is proud to serve as a sponsor of this year's accelerator, reinforcing its commitment to advancing economic opportunity, entrepreneurship, workforce development, and second-chance initiatives for formerly incarcerated individuals. We are proud to contribute \$5,000 to this impactful initiative.

Through initiatives such as Empowered Reintegration, AACCNJ has worked to create pathways to employment, entrepreneurship, leadership development, and long-term economic mobility for individuals returning from incarceration. The Chamber's support of the Howard University and OCC accelerator program reflects a shared belief that justice-impacted individuals possess extraordinary talent, resilience, and leadership potential that can positively transform families, businesses, and communities.

Among the selected participants is Anton Barnabela, a New Jersey entrepreneur and former AACCNJ workforce development participant. Through AACCNJ's workforce development efforts, Barnabela received sponsorship to pursue his Commercial Driver's License (CDL), creating a pathway toward economic stability and business ownership. Today, he operates his own transportation business and continues to build a foundation for generational wealth and long-term success. His selection for the Howard University and OCC Leadership & Entrepreneurship Accelerator Program reflects both his personal commitment to growth and the transformative impact of investing in individuals seeking a second chance.

As part of the program, Dr. John E. Harmon, Sr., IOM- Founder, President, and CEO of AACCNJ, will serve as a featured speaker and capstone reviewer. Dr. Harmon will facilitate a leadership session focused on legacy-building and will join a distinguished panel of evaluators reviewing participant capstone presentations during the program's closing ceremony.

"The Leadership & Entrepreneurship Accelerator Program is designed to help justice-impacted leaders recognize the value of their lived experiences and transform those experiences into executive capital," said Kim R. Wells, Executive Director of the Office of Executive Education at the Howard University School of Business. "We are honored to partner with organizations like Operation Capital City and the African American Chamber of Commerce of New Jersey that understand the power of investing in people, fostering innovation, and creating opportunities for transformational growth. This program demonstrates what is possible when we intentionally create spaces where leadership, entrepreneurship, and lived experience intersect."

"This accelerator is about rewriting narratives and expanding possibilities," said Omar Aikens, Founder and Executive Director of Operation Capital City. "As a returning citizen, I understand firsthand the barriers that many justice-impacted individuals face when pursuing careers, entrepreneurship, and leadership opportunities. This program demonstrates what can happen when institutions like Howard University, community organizations, and business leaders come together to invest in people rather than their past circumstances. Every participant in this cohort represents resilience, talent, and untapped potential. We are building leaders who will create opportunities not only for themselves, but for future generations."

"The African American Chamber of Commerce of New Jersey is proud to support this groundbreaking initiative because we know that talent is universal, even when opportunity is not," said Dr. Harmon. "Justice-impacted individuals often possess extraordinary determination, adaptability, leadership, and entrepreneurial spirit. By investing in their growth and providing access to networks, resources, and mentorship, we are helping to build stronger businesses, stronger communities, and a stronger economy. Every individual deserves the opportunity to turn potential into purpose and purpose into prosperity. The next generation of entrepreneurs, employers, and community leaders is already among us—we simply have to be willing to invest in them."

The Howard University School of Business Office of Executive Education and Operation Capital City Leadership & Entrepreneurship Accelerator Program represents a powerful model for advancing equity, economic mobility, and leadership development through collaboration among higher education,

community organizations, and business leaders. Participants will conclude the program by presenting capstone projects that showcase their vision for business growth, community impact, and sustainable leadership.

About The African American Chamber of Commerce of New Jersey

The AACCNJ performs an essential role in the economic viability of New Jersey. While providing a platform for New Jersey's African American business leaders to speak with a collective voice, the AACCNJ advocates and promotes economic diversity fostering a climate of business growth through major initiatives centering on education and public policy. The Chamber serves as a proactive advocacy group with a 501(c) 3 tax exemption, which is shared by the National Black Chamber of Commerce.

About the Howard University School of Business Office of Executive Education

Founded in 2009, the Office of Executive Education at the Howard University School of Business serves senior professionals and the global business community through two flagship offerings: the Executive MBA (EMBA) program and a suite of executive leadership programs. The Executive MBA is designed for experienced professionals seeking to elevate their leadership and strategic impact. The executive leadership programs offer customized certificates and training led by distinguished Howard University faculty and internationally recognized industry experts, delivered on campus, in the greater DC area, and abroad. The Office has hosted students, entrepreneurs, and innovators spanning industries including technology, health, finance, asset management, defense, human resources, international affairs, cultural spaces, and communications. Rooted in Howard University's legacy of leadership and service, the Office of Executive Education prepares executives to lead with vision, confidence, and impact in today's complex business environment.

About Operation Capital City

Operation Capital City (OCC) is a Trenton, New Jersey-based nonprofit organization founded by Omar Aikens, a returning citizen, entrepreneur, and community advocate dedicated to empowering justice-impacted individuals through leadership development, entrepreneurship, workforce advancement, civic engagement, and mentorship. Through innovative programming and strategic partnerships, OCC helps individuals transform lived experience into leadership, economic mobility, and community impact while creating pathways to opportunity for returning citizens and their families.