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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE – September 10, 2026

**The African American Chamber of Commerce of New Jersey (AACCNJ)
Announces Guest Speakers for the September 23rd Business Leadership Conference in Edison, NJ
- The Honorable Ras Baraka, Mayor, Newark, NJ and Rev. Steffie Bartley, Sr., Pastor, New Hope
Memorial Baptist Church, Elizabeth, NJ &
Northeast Regional Director, National Action Network (NAN)**

TRENTON, NJ — September 10, 2026. The African American Chamber of Commerce of New Jersey (AACCNJ) announces **the Honorable Ras Baraka, Mayor, Newark, NJ and Rev. Steffie Bartley, Sr., Pastor, New Hope Memorial Baptist Church, Elizabeth, NJ & Northeast Regional Director, National Action Network (NAN)** as Special Guest Speakers for the September 23rd, Business Leadership Conference, which will be held from 9:00 a.m. – 3:00 p.m. at the Sheraton, in Edison, NJ.

The Keynote Speaker for the 2026 Conference is Kenneth L. Harris, Ph.D., President & CEO, National Business League (NBL). As the 16th National President and Chief Executive Officer of the National Business League (NBL) - the oldest and largest trade association dedicated to Black businesses and professionals in the United States, founded by Dr. Booker T. Washington in 1900—Dr. Harris leads a national membership base of more than 120,000 individuals across all fifty states and the global diaspora. The League is supported by over 125 Fortune 500 corporate partners.

The AACCNJ annual business leadership conference provides a forum for stakeholders to explore how the AACCNJ can increase opportunities for its constituency and serve as a conduit to build and define strategic partnerships that promote supplier diversity. **The 2026 conference panelists include:**

Topic: Banking on the future: Piloting Equitable Access to Public & Private Capital

Moderator: John E. Harmon, Sr., Founder, President & CEO, AACCNJ
Michelle Boddien, Chief Equity & Inclusion Officer, NJEDA
Sadiera Crawford, Vice President, J.P. Morgan Private Bank
Jorge Sam Cruz, Executive Director -New Jersey Local Initiatives Support Corp. (LISC)
Kayin Barclay, Senior Vice President, Advantage Capital

Topic: Positioning for Opportunities in the Public Sector

Moderator: Dr. Denise Anderson, Ph.D., MPH, CEO, Denise Anderson & Associates
Melanie Walter, Executive Director, NJ Housing & Mortgage Finance Association
Stephen Dilts, Chief Operating Officer, NJ Turnpike Authority
Paul F Sprewell, Esq., Director, Division of Civil Rights and Affirmative Action

Topic: Embracing Change & Digital Transformation

Moderator: Nadine Jones, Legal Strategist, Media Contributor & DEI Thought Leader

Tony Lowman, Chancellor, Rowan University

Rebecca Darling, Director Community Affairs & Partnerships, Coreweave

Derrich Phillips, President & Founder, Aspire Cyber

“We will continue to advance intentional conversations of best practices and transformational strategies while advocating effectively to bring about inclusive participation with an eye towards equitable outcomes in New Jersey, said **John E. Harmon, Sr., IOM.**”

Horizon Blue Cross Blue Shield of NJ and J.P. Morgan Chase will serve as the Premium Platinum Sponsors, United is the Gold Sponsor and NJ Transit is the Silver Sponsor.

Please visit <https://www.aaccnj.com/blc2026> for more information.

The National Business League

Established on August 23, 1900, by the visionary Dr. Booker T. Washington, the National Business League (NBL) holds the historic distinction of being the first and largest trade association in the United States devoted exclusively to the advancement of Black-owned businesses and professionals. For more than a century, the organization has stood at the forefront of economic empowerment, serving as a global catalyst for measurable progress and transformative impact.

Today, the NBL represents a powerful economic sector of approximately 3.6 million Black-owned businesses, which collectively generate more than \$206 billion in annual economic output and support 3.5 million jobs across the United States. This dynamic sector continues to grow rapidly, led by Black women—the fastest-growing entrepreneurial demographic in the nation—and a rising generation of innovators, with nearly two-thirds of Black business owners under the age of forty.

NBL National Headquarters

605 East Martin Luther King Highway | Tuskegee, Alabama 36083

Office: +1 (334) 313-6762 **Web:** www.nationalbusinessleague.org

National Action Network

Founded in New York City in 1991, National Action Network, Inc. (“NAN”) has been on the front lines of creating social change and last year celebrated its silver anniversary, representing a quarter century of an organization that gives voice to the voiceless and acts as a champion for the dispossessed.

Birthing out of the movement lead by Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., NAN has continued to give life to the Dream that Dr. King had that America would live up to its promise of equality under the law and equal opportunity for all its citizens. Under the audacious leadership of founder and President, Reverend Al Sharpton, and with the guidance of Board Chairman Reverend Dr. W. Franklyn Richardson (Senior Pastor, Grace Baptist Church, Mount Vernon, New York), NAN has steadfastly remained committed to the principles of non-violent direct action and civil disobedience to engage and confront the social vices of police misconduct and abuse, gun violence, official assaults on voting rights, workers’ rights, affirmative action, inequities in education and employment opportunities, access to capital, health care and discrimination motivated by race, class, gender, sexual orientation or status, religion and national origin.

National Headquarters:

House of Justice

106 W. 145th Street, NY, NY

Office: 877-626-4651

Ras J. Baraka is the 40th Mayor of the City of Newark

A native of Newark, whose family has lived in the City for more than 80 years, Mayor Baraka's progressive approach to governing has won him accolades from grassroots organizations to the White House. With a forward-thinking agenda that reduced crime to its lowest levels in five decades, addressed affordability while maintaining steady growth, lowered unemployment, returned local control of schools after more than two decades, and replaced all 23,000 known lead service lines in less than three years at no cost to residents, Baraka has defied expectations since taking office in 2014.

Mayor Baraka's futurist agenda has included the implementation of a groundbreaking partnership called Hire. Buy. Live. Newark, a program that marks the first time that any U.S. city has sought to transform its economy by combining employment, procurement, and residential strategies.

As part of his commitment to strengthen Newark's position in the expanded technology space, the City launched LinkNWK (pronounced Link Newark). This communications network of sidewalk kiosks provides Newark residents and visitors with free, gigabit Wi-Fi, mobile device charging, phone calls to anywhere in the U.S., access to municipal services, maps and directions, and real-time local information on city streets at no cost to taxpayers or users. Additionally, broadband and Wi-Fi have been extended to city parks and recreation centers, and the City seeks to ensure that every resident has access to free or very low-cost broadband to bridge the digital divide.

Mayor Baraka is recognized nationally as a thought leader in the space of urban revitalization, and his commitment to reducing crime in Newark, reimagining public safety, tackling the city's housing crisis, and developing innovative and community-driven approaches to eliminating income inequality has solidified his status as one of the country's most progressive elected officials.

City of Newark

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