

Mayor Dwight C. Jones
Remarks to Open Community Wealth Building Summit
June 25, 2015

Good morning, and welcome.

These are troubled times in many American communities. These past few months we have again and again witnessed tragic and painful reminders that many scars of our history as a nation remain unhealed, and that we still have not completed the work of extinguishing hate and violence from our midst.

What took place in Charleston last week, a city with which Richmond is linked by history, was both a violent assault on innocent human life and a calculated attack on the very foundations of civil society and of democracy, the inherent worth and dignity of all persons. All of us in Richmond stand in solidarity and shared grief with the victims of that crime and with the people of Charleston.

We in Richmond also cannot afford to ignore the lessons from events in Baltimore last month, or the nationwide movement to insist that black lives matter. The right lesson to draw is not simply concerning the importance of strong relationships and trust between the police and community members—though, as we have long acknowledged in Richmond, this is critically important. But, when we reflect on the disturbances in Baltimore, we are also reminded that society pays a heavy price for long-term patterns of exclusion and suffocating poverty. The grievances of those who feel shut out from society will, in one way or another, be heard.

These are somber reflections to start our morning together. But they help underscore the absolute seriousness and moral urgency of our work here in Richmond to build a more inclusive city.

Over 40 years ago, Dr. King warned us that our choice as a society was simply “chaos or community.” The events of recent weeks across the country has vividly illustrated just how stark, and how, real, that choice truly is.

By many measures, Richmond has made enormous progress as a city and as a community over the past several years. Violent crime is down. The City’s population is growing at a rapid clip—now up to 218,000 people, its highest level in a quarter-century. We are a markedly less polarized community than the Richmond of a generation ago.

But being able to talk across lines of race, economics, and geographic location, while necessary, is no longer good enough.

When I established the Mayor’s Anti-Poverty Commission in 2011, it was with recognition that our community faced a crisis of extraordinarily high poverty rates, perpetuated from one generation to another in a cycle of despair. That crisis was and is a moral crisis, a fiscal crisis, and a standing indictment of who we are as a community. The high rates of adult and child poverty in our City impact every aspect of our life as a community, from education to fiscal health to ability to attract and keep businesses.

The establishment of the Commission also signified a recognition that our existing strategies and policies simply were not working. Nor could we realistically expect some large infusion of state or federal resources, or even an economic boom, to solve our problems for us. Instead, we needed to find creative new

strategies, and we needed to find ways to more effectively use the resources we already have—within government and within the community as a whole.

Additionally, we also needed to change the understanding of poverty in Richmond—to view it not as a problem involving “those people” in out-of-sight, out-of-mind neighborhoods, but as the responsibility of the entire community.

While City government certainly must do its part, we needed to involve universities, hospitals, businesses, philanthropy and other institutions in ways that had not been done before in Richmond, to leverage ideas, resources and relationships into a strong civic network capable of working with government to produce lasting systemic change.

To that end, dozens of community members devoted large amounts of time to the work of first the Anti-Poverty Commission and then the Maggie L. Walker Initiative for Expanding Opportunity and Fighting Poverty, to analyzing the issues, identifying top priorities, and then specifying action steps to advance those priorities.

The Maggie L. Walker Initiative also has taken deliberate steps to assure a seat at the table for those most impacted by poverty day-to-day and provide a strong community voice on the front end, via the Maggie L. Walker Citizens Advisory Board.

Then in 2014, I established the Mayor’s Office of Community Wealth Building to be the focal point for coordinating an ambitious agenda advancing each of the major recommendations of the Anti-Poverty Commission’s work:

- Expanding workforce development;
- Engaging in targeted economic development;
- Moving towards development of a regional transportation system;

- Pursuing redevelopment of our major public housing communities with a commitment to no involuntary displacement of residents; and
- Taking steps to mitigate the impact of poverty on educational outcomes and develop a strong cradle-to-career educational pipeline

We have moved the needle already in each of these areas. Later this morning, Dr. Thad Williamson, Director of the Office of Community Wealth Building, will provide more detail on our progress, as will the panels later today focused on education, economic development, and President Obama's My Brother's Keeper Initiative. Here I just want to note a few highlights:

- The Office itself has been established, a strong team has been assembled, and the work of establishing a coordinated focal point for implementing a vision of community wealth building touching on multiple policy areas has been pursued with vigor by this administration over the past year. We are up and running!
- Attracting Stone Brewery to Richmond fulfills one of the goals of the Anti-Poverty Commission report; to attract a major new employer with hundreds of jobs to the City. Now that Stone is coming, we will be working to link residents to employment opportunities at Stone and take advantage of this investment to leverage revitalization of the entire Fulton community.
- The Broad Street Bus Rapid Transit project—the GRTC Pulse—received a **\$24.9 million** grant from the federal government to allow us to build the region's first bus rapid transit route across the breadth of the city. With every major project comes challenges and changes—that is not surprising. What we must keep in mind is the larger vision of building a city that is truly committed to multimodal transportation, thereby making it easier for residents without a car to get around and get by—and the even larger prize

of finally having a proper regional transit system to link City residents to opportunities outside of the City.

- For too many of our youngest citizens, disadvantage starts virtually at birth. That's why I was delighted this week to announce a \$300,000 grant from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation -- the 5th-largest foundation in the United States - - to support our efforts here in Richmond to develop a new collaborative framework to support early childhood education.

Since last summer, the Office of Community Wealth Building has been working with Richmond Public Schools staff and with community providers to build a new framework to efficiently and effectively address our early childhood needs. The Kellogg Foundation has recognized the potential of Richmond to emerge as a national leader in linking early childhood needs to a comprehensive poverty reduction strategy.

- Our FY 2016 budget commits \$3.6 million to initiatives under the Maggie L. Walker Initiative umbrella, an additional \$426,000 for an innovative water savings program to benefit low-income households, and substantial additional support to nonprofits and community organizations working to combat poverty—groups like Peter Paul Development Center, Groundwork RVA and their partners the Kinfolk Community in this neighborhood, and many more.
- A highlight of the FY 2016 budget is a \$425,000 investment in RVA Future—a collaborative initiative to connect high school students in Richmond to college and career opportunities with potential to lift lifetime earnings and transform the trajectory of our young people's lives. Next

school year we will launch Future Centers in at least three of our high schools, dedicated, fully-staffed spaces that will engage students in planning their lives after high schools. Our long-term goal is to be in all the high schools and to raise sufficient funds to offer Promise Scholarships to all graduating students.

My staff is working closely with RPS and RPS Education Foundation staff to successfully launch this program. We will hear more about RVA Future later in the day, but this exciting initiative offers an opportunity to lift the horizons of our students and our community as a whole.

We have had a very productive and impressive first year of implementation. But we also know we have a long way to go.

The work of community wealth building is not a one-time event—it's an ongoing process that is going to take progressively larger and more effective investments over time not only from the City, but from the entire community.

Right now in Richmond we have, apart from college students, about 42,000 people in poverty, including nearly 15,000 children. We need to set a long-term goal of cutting child poverty 50% and overall poverty 40% in the City in the next fifteen years. To accomplish that, we need a concerted, determined focus on creating good jobs and entrepreneurial opportunities married to a serious commitment to train and connect our residents and neighborhood businesses to those opportunities. It is doable, but only if we remain serious in our commitment to lasting change.

To that end, in the coming months I will be announcing proposals to formally institutionalize the Office of Community Wealth Building as well as related steps to assure that this effort not only continues, but thrives even after my term is complete. Poverty reduction for Richmond cannot be a flavor-of-the-month cause, or a matter of political convenience. It must be a fundamental commitment that informs everything the City of Richmond undertakes.

There are so many factors and forces beyond our control, we must do everything we can to take full advantage of the resources we do have. In addition, we must be alert to opportunities to make major progress in our community. When major opportunities to improve quality-of-life, meet community needs, and attract investment come knocking, we need to answer the door.

Recently, Central Virginia has engaged in an impassioned conversation about healthcare for children in our community, and the possibility of creating a freestanding children's hospital.

It's an important goal for our community and for the Commonwealth as a whole.

But one thing has been missing from this conversation: Facts about the health of children. People deserve to know the facts.

And while Virginia is blessed with many fine hospitals and dedicated doctors and nurses, the fact is that the Commonwealth's health outcomes for children are in the middle of the pack, at best.

The fact is that Virginia lags behind national numbers in childhood immunization rates, access to mental health care, and infant mortality, which is higher in the City of Richmond than the average for any of the 50 states or the District of Columbia.

For African American babies born in the City, the infant mortality rate is more than TWICE the rate for the Commonwealth as a whole.

The percent of babies born with low birth weight is substantially higher in Richmond than in the state as a whole, and it's higher still for African American babies.

When babies born with low birth weight, they often have multiple serious health problems as children. If they need specialized care, they often have to leave town to get it.

But if they're poor, they usually don't have a way to travel for care out of town.

We all know that these numbers are connected to the fact that 26% of our people live in poverty.

It's just a fact that poor people have worse health outcomes.

In fact, the New York Times recently highlighted a VCU study which found that a child born in Gilpin Court can expect to live no longer than a child born in Haiti, the poorest country in the western hemisphere.

That's a fact right here in the capital city of one of the wealthiest states in America. It's immoral and it's an outrage.

With facts and numbers like these, I simply cannot sit by and accept the argument that health care for children in central Virginia is fine just the way it is.

That's why, in the coming days I will convene a group of interested stakeholders from around the region, to better understand what these facts mean for our children and for our community.

I want to be clear: Virginia's capital city needs a freestanding children's hospital, to serve the needs of all our children, especially the ones who are poor.

I'm committed to it, and I'll work with anyone who wants to bring this hospital to life.

That's just one way to advance the resurgence of Richmond that has already started—and this time, to make sure the resurgence includes everyone. That's what today is about. The Maggie L. Walker Initiative offers us a vehicle, a priceless opportunity, to pull the entire community together for the sake of uplift, equity, and advancement for all and to redeem the promises of history.

As I said at the outset, we face tough times right now as a nation and in our communities. Maggie Walker knew tough times, too. She knew the deck was stacked against her and her community in so many ways, but she didn't let that stop her.

Today, we can't let the challenges and problems stop us either, or succumb to the temptation to say it's all too hard and complicated to tackle. We need to be guided by a higher vision—a vision that hears the pleas of the excluded yet also sees and acts upon the possibility of change. That's what today is about.

I invite all of you this morning to lend your support and your best efforts to rewriting Richmond's tale of two cities, and to join us in the work of building one city, a Richmond that truly works for everyone.

Thank you.