

New NLC Task Force To Focus On Expanding Economic Opportunity

Launched by National League of Cities (NLC) President Matt Zone, a new task force will pursue a three-pronged strategy over the next year that will include municipal engagement and peer learning; documentation of promising and emerging city approaches; and education and training for city officials.

“Cities are where hope meets the streets,” said Mayor Kasim Reed, City of Atlanta, Georgia.

Mayor Reed’s insightful words in his opening reflections as chair of NLC’s new task force on Mobility and Opportunity in November 2016 recognizes the vital role that city leaders must play to address the growing economic gaps that plague our cities.

NLC President Matt Zone, a Cleveland councilmember who has committed to making economic opportunity his key issue for his year as NLC’s chief elected officer, launched the task force comprised of 22 local elected officials from across the country in November 2016. Under the leadership of Mayor Reed, the inaugural meeting marked NLC’s commitment to address economic disparities and the beginning of a three-pronged strategy over the next year that will include municipal engagement and peer learning; documentation of promising and emerging city approaches; and education and training for city officials.

As shown by discussions throughout the recent election process, although unemployment is at an all-time low, millions of financially strained families are desperate to find ways to increase their economic stability. Growing economic disparities in communities across the country highlight the need for access to well-paying jobs, housing and assets for families struggling to achieve the American Dream. These



challenges are a key concern for city leaders as the financial health of a city depends on the economic security, and mobility of its residents.

City leaders can prioritize expanding economic opportunities for residents while also balancing municipal budgets. Research from the Urban Institute has found that financially healthy families are more likely to be able to contribute consistently to local government revenues and are less likely to need city supports. City revenue streams depend on utility payments, sales and property taxes generated by residents and local businesses. If the local economy isn’t thriving and residents are not financially stable, the city as a whole suffers.

The solutions for these issues are increasingly found at the city level, as policy action is often stalled at the federal and state levels. In this environment, city leaders are well-poised to stabilize their cities by serving as champions for expanding economic opportunity.

Cities are already taking action. In Pittsburgh, for example, task force member Mayor Bill Peduto is working hard to ensure that all residents can participate in the City’s revitalization and newfound prosperity. Partnering with PolicyLink, the City developed a five-point plan focused on housing affordability in high-poverty neighborhoods;

equitable economic development; expanding employment and asset building opportunities; addressing racial inequities; and working with coalitions and community organizations to build community power.

Task force member and Boston Mayor Martin Walsh is committed to addressing poverty with an agenda focused on economic equity and inclusion. His agenda includes increasing wages and employment opportunities; business development strategies for low-income residents; wealth creation strategies including financial empowerment services and children's savings accounts; as well as strategies to build economic mobility for youth.

These strategies and many more identified during the first task force meeting will be examined during the group's year-long tenure. The task force is charged with identifying recommendations for local action to address common economic barriers keeping many families from sharing in our country's prosperity.

In his first speech to members as president of NLC, Councilmember Matt Zone challenged cities to make economic mobility "a pillar that supports our work for America's cities." He added, "Now more than ever, the economic well-being of our families is at risk, and we, as local officials, can be the key instruments of change and

economic mobility. We must build a future where every one of us has economic mobility and opportunity ... we must be intentional about promoting equity in all of our policies and projects." 🍃

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