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**Jerome Underwood, President and CEO of Action for a Better Community, to Receive National Award for Racial Equity and Justice Work**

ROCHESTER, New York – Jerome Underwood, President and CEO of Action for a Better Community, will receive the National Drum Major for Justice Award from the National Community Action Partnership at their Annual Convention in Atlanta on Thursday, August 24, 2023.

The National Drum Major for Justice Award is named in honor of Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s famous sermon, "The Drum Major Instinct" from February 4, 1968, in which he said, in part:

*"Yes, if you want to say that I was a drum major, say that I was a drum major for justice. (Amen) Say that I was a drum major for peace. (Yes) I was a drum major for righteousness..."*

The National Community Action Partnership, a membership organization representing over 1,000 public and private Community Action Agencies across the United States, presents this award to:

Recognize individuals who have not only worked to examine structural race, gender, and other inequities within their Community Action Agency and community but have also built the capacity to address equity within their agency and communities to ensure all families have access to opportunity.

Mr. Underwood was nominated for the award by both Rochester Mayor Malik Evans and Monroe County Executive, Adam Bello. Mayor Evans, in his nomination letter, observed:

*"Whether he is talking about the challenges facing a young mother in the Head Start program or the deep and complex historical legacy of redlining and other forms of racial inequity in our city, Jerome brings both his personal passion and his determination to bring about transformational change. He is a respected elder in the community and an incalculable resource to our collaborative efforts. He understands that no one person can do the work, often repeating a favorite proverb, "If you want to go fast, go alone; if you want to go far, go together."*

County Executive Bello also noted Mr. Underwood's passion for equity and justice through his participation in Monroe County's Commission on Racial and Structural Equity (aka the RASE Commission):

*"I have witnessed first-hand how Jerome Underwood used a mix of urgency, passion, and a spirit of partnership to advocate for systemic change in our community. I consider him a true community resource on issues of equity and racial justice."*

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Mr. Underwood is a founding member of the Greater Rochester Black Agenda Group (BAG). One of its first public initiatives was to successfully lobby the Monroe County Department of Public Health and the City of Rochester to formally declare racism a "Public Health Crisis." This effort contributed to the National Community Action Partnership making a similar declaration less than one year later.

Mr. Underwood has also convened ABC's annual Signature Conferences to bring community leaders and others together to promote a deeper understanding of how structural racism has negatively impacted people of color in the areas of housing, home ownership, health, economic development and many other areas.

Regarding his recognition, Mr. Underwood had this to say: "It is indeed an honor to be selected for such a prestigious award. I am grateful yet motivated as there is still so much work ahead in order to make the kind of systemic change that would bring about equity and justice for those who have been denied it for so long. The dedicated staff of ABC also deserve recognition for the tireless justice work they do daily". Additionally, a short video recognizing Mr. Underwood's work in the Greater Rochester community can be found [here](https://youtu.be/YeoEDFVD5rs)

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#### **About Action for a Better Community – [abcinfo.org](http://abcinfo.org)**

Action for a Better Community, Inc. (ABC) is the **only** state- and federally-designated Community Action Agency serving Monroe and Ontario Counties. Established in 1964 and launching services in 1965, ABC has served as a service provider, advocate, change agent and community capacity builder to help alleviate the causes and conditions of poverty in the local community. Through services such as Head Start/Early Head Start, Energy Conservation/Weatherization, outpatient substance use counseling, workforce development, adult education, youth and school-based programs, public health outreach and community engagement, ABC serves thousands of Monroe County residents each year. ABC also maintains dozens of community partnerships with public, private, non-profit and faith-based organizations to ensure anti-poverty efforts are sustained and effective in both Monroe and Ontario Counties.

#### *About the National Community Action Partnership – [communityactionpartnership.com](http://communityactionpartnership.com)*

The National Community Action Partnership is a national, 501(c)3 nonprofit membership organization that provides technical assistance, training, and other resources to Community Action Agencies, nonprofit and public groups funded by the Community Services Block Grant (CSBG), a federal program that allocates funding to states to connect Americans to greater opportunity. Community Action comes out of President Lyndon B. Johnson's War on Poverty and from the advocacy of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.