



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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David J. Johns Named Executive Director of the National Black Justice Coalition

**Former Obama Appointee and Tireless Champion of Education
Takes the Helm of NBJC #teachthebabies**

Washington, DC—The leadership of the National Black Justice Coalition announced today that David J. Johns has assumed the role of Executive Director as of September 1, 2017. Headquartered in Washington, DC, the National Black Justice Coalition (NBJC) is a civil rights organization dedicated to the empowerment of Black lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBTQ) people, including people living with HIV/AIDS. NBJC's mission is to end racism, homophobia, and LGBTQ bias and stigma.

“Growing up as a little Black boy in Inglewood, California, I did not meet or see people who showed up in the world like me—strong Black men who are equally proud about their Blackness as they are about being same gender loving (SGL),” stated David J. Johns. “I want people to see me, to know that I exist—that we, as a community, refuse to hide or check parts of who we are at the door, shrink or otherwise fail to show up in our fullness—knowing who we are and whose we are. I assume this responsibility, in part, because it's important for me to show up for younger people the way I wish adults had shown up for me—fully, honestly and without apology.”

In 2013, Johns was appointed as the first executive director of the White House Initiative on Educational Excellence for African Americans by President Barack H. Obama and served until the last day of the Obama Administration in January, 2017. The Initiative worked across federal agencies, and with partners and communities nationwide, to produce a more effective continuum of education and workforce development programs for African American students of all ages.

Prior to his White House appointment, Johns was a senior education and workforce development policy advisor to the Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions (HELP) under the leadership of U.S. Senator Tom Harkin (D-Iowa). Before working for the Senate HELP Committee, under the leadership of Tom Harkin, Johns served under the leadership of the late U.S. Senator Ted Kennedy (D-MA). In addition, Johns has been a Congressional Black Caucus Foundation Fellow in the office of Congressman Charles Rangel (D-NY). Johns has worked on issues affecting low-income and minority students, neglected youth, early childhood and k-12 education, and Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) among others. His research as an Andrew W. Mellon Fellow served as a catalyst to identify, disrupt and supplant negative perceptions of black males—both within academia and society.

Johns has been featured as an influential politico and advocate by several publications and outlets, including TheRoot.com, CNN, NBC, BET, *EBONY* and *The Washington Post*.

“During my tenure, I plan to focus deeply on the empowerment of the Black family, which includes the families we are born into as well as those we create—while honoring the opportunity to remain a central repository for advocating for and responding to the needs of Black LGBTQ/SGL individuals and communities. Critical to this work is engaging all Black people in transformative dialogues that honor the diversity of Black families and the

roles that Black LGBTQ/SGL people continue to play—in both family and community—and advancing policies that ensure civil rights for Black LGBTQ/SGL people,” Johns continued.

Johns succeeds Sharon J. Lettman-Hicks, who led NBJC for eight years. Lettman-Hicks will continue her role as the Chief Executive Officer of NBJC and focus on board development, infrastructure and long-term sustainability.

“I had the pleasure of working directly with David Johns when I was appointed to serve on the Commission of the White House Initiative on Education Excellence for African Americans, where David served as the Executive Director,” Lettman-Hicks said. “David’s mere presence fills a room. His intellectual prowess, compassionate heart, and deeply-rooted knowledge of public policy and the plight of underserved and marginalized communities—especially the African American experience—gives me more than hope for our work and future leadership in Black America. He defines excellence and leaves no challenge unanswered. Johns is exactly the right person to articulate our needs and understand our connectedness to our families.”

Johns added, “As the Executive Director of NBJC, I will lead aggressive campaigns that disrupt and supplant deleterious stereotypes about Black LGBTQ and same gender loving people. These campaigns and related activations will, among other things, highlight more of the diversity that exists within and makes our community strong.”

A wide variety of influential African American leaders and civil rights allies also added their voices in support of the appointment of David Johns as the executive director of NBJC:

Angela Rye, CNN Political Commentator and Principal/CEO of IMPACT Strategies, stated: “David Johns is among the most authentic, passionate and purposed voices of our generation. Whether teaching the babies in schools across the country, developing legislation on Capitol Hill, or advancing policy and practice from the White House, David is committed to increasing opportunities and outcomes for Black people. David’s leadership is timely given the Trump Administration’s assault on LGBTQ people, and I am excited to see how his leadership advances both African American civil rights and LGBTQ rights.”

Reverend Al Sharpton, President and Founder of the National Action Network, stated: “As long as there have been black people, there have been gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender black people, and the relationship between civil rights and LGBTQ rights is inextricably linked. As we continue the work of the movement where many of us literally risk our lives daily, fighting for justice and equality for all who deserve, may we never forget to acknowledge and support the need for leaders who understand this important relationship and who are unapologetic in advocating for and advancing the public policy issues impacting our community, holistically. David Johns is a proven leader, policy expert and public advocate. I have worked with him closely and have seen him get his hands dirty and roll up his sleeves to do the work on the ground; traveling from state to state, community to neighborhood, to address the disparities and implement strategies for solutions to advance and protect our rights. I am excited about what his leadership means for the next generation of civil rights leaders and truly look forward to working with him and the National Black Justice Coalition.”

John B. King, Jr., Former U.S. Secretary of Education and current CEO and President of The Education Trust, stated: “In my role as Education Secretary, I worked closely with David to ensure that the Department’s agenda was responsive to and supportive of African-American students and communities. I was always impressed that David’s leadership focused on the experiences of the experts—real students in classrooms all across the country. David is an authentic leader and outspoken advocate whose passion for increasing equity and opportunity through education is palpable. David is an excellent choice to enhance the work of the National Black Justice Coalition going forward because of his deep understanding of the needs of African-American LGBTQ individuals. I am confident that he will use the experiences he has acquired and the

relationships he continues to cultivate to benefit African-American LGBTQ individuals and to strengthen our nation.”

Susan L. Taylor, Founder and CEO of National CARES Mentoring Movement and Editor-in-Chief Emerita of *ESSENCE* magazine, stated: “No one better understands the urgency and dimension of calls to ensure African Americans' and the nation's embrace of our Black LGBTQ sisters and brothers than David Johns. One of the most gifted and lucid young intellectuals of our time, he speaks points powerfully to the pitfalls of excluding an army of able and willing warriors for freedom and justice, and the leverage that a broad-based, inclusive leadership offers a divided nation struggling to find its moral center. David Johns is the healer and eager teacher needed to lead NBJC as we work to create the new and just world crucial to our survival.”

“It is no exaggeration to say that David is in the top one percent of leaders with whom I have worked in the past 40 years. With the ability to integrate research, policy and theory, David is an effective and authentic leader whose passion for equity and opportunity is palpable. The National Black Justice Coalition is recognized for serving as a national voice for one of the country's most marginalized communities. David, with his keen understanding of the environmental context and larger sociological, economic and political issues that impact African American and LGBTQ individuals and communities, is uniquely suited to lead this effort.”

Freeman A. Hrabowski
President
University of Maryland, Baltimore County

“David Johns is a master educator who believes in the rights, possibilities, and brilliance of every single student. Our collaboration on issues of racial justice in education, and addressing the intersection of race, gender identity, and sexual orientation helped support educators in providing a safe and nurturing learning environment for our LGBT youth. Just as he did in his role as the Executive Director of the White House Initiative on Educational Excellence for African Americans, we know David will lead the NBJC with extraordinary expertise, infectious passion and powerful advocacy.”

Becky Pringle
Vice President
National Education Association

“At a time when the country is under attack for the very legacy of civil rights that has pushed America closer toward its founding principles of liberty and justice for all, authentic, strategic and bold leadership is needed to ensure that we're all working better together to support the work required to ensure that we do not roll back but rather advance. David Johns is one such leader and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) is excited about his leadership at the helm of the National Black Justice Coalition, and the opportunity that we have to work better together to support the needs of Black people, specifically the needs of our Black LGBTQ brothers and sisters.”

Derrick Johnson
Interim President
NAACP

"David Johns is an outstanding choice to lead the National Black Justice Coalition! In this especially critical time, Johns is well-positioned to bring strategic thinking together with his knowledge on racial justice and education to the important work of NBJC. His experience in government and academia provides a unique opportunity for intersectionality on issues that will advance the civil and human rights agenda for the Black LGBT community. John's appointment to lead the NBJC is an important step in the evolution and work of the Black LGBT community."

Wade Henderson
Immediate-Past President
The Leadership Conference on
Civil and Human Rights

“To know David Johns is to know he is a powerhouse. David is one of the nation’s most passionate advocates for Black children and families. While serving at the White House, David was an instrumental partner in the work of the National Black Child Development Institute—his thoughtfulness, passion and expertise in both federal policy and promising practices have strengthened our work. We are excited to continue working with David as he takes his strategic prowess to the National Black Justice Coalition to meet the holistic needs of Black children, families and communities.”

Tobeka Green

President and CEO
National Black Child Development Institute

"The leadership of David Johns has been essential to the disability community gaining access to people, organizations and coalitions previously not available to them. He understands that true allyship has to be intentional to be successful. As a long time co-conspirator in building more inclusive movements—and being a fan of NBJC—I welcome the opportunity to work with him in this new and exciting endeavor."

Rebecca Cokley

Former Director of Priority Placement
The White House

“David’s appointment is a gift to the country; his intelligence, compassion and resilience are just what we need to continue to bridge the divides which others foment. They could not have picked a brighter star.”

Robert Raben

President and Founder
The Raben Group

“It is great news that NBJC has chosen David Johns as its next Executive Director. With David’s experience and passion, NBJC is poised to be an important voice in an era where LGBTQ people are under attack and facing rollbacks on basic civil and human rights.”

Judith A. Browne Dianis

Executive Director
Advancement Project

“The work David does for our community is invaluable. His passion, forward thinking and leadership have been the catalyst for much needed change in our community for years! I look forward to supporting David and the NBJC under his tenure.”

Karamo Brown

Television Host and Producer

“The viability of a national organization that can function as a voice in both black political landscapes as well as LGBTQ landscapes is so critical. NBJC has provided a principal voice for those of us whose voices are only partially represented in the aforementioned spaces. I cannot think of a person better equipped to build on the foundation of NBJC than David Johns. David is a thoughtful, diplomatic and bold leader who creates spaces that are aligned with building presence and power for LGBTQ Black people. David is fearless and resolute about the need for conversations about LGBTQ Black people in normative space—with people who are unprepared for and sometimes even unwilling to have conversations about the threat Black homophobia poses to the collective empowerment of black people, for example. ... David is unapologetically black, gay and proud.”

Tim’m West

LGBTQ Community Initiative Manager
Teach for America

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