

Commission on Human Rights

Hartford Kentucky Martin Luther King event to feature State Human Rights Executive Director John Johnson

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Contact Information: Victoria Stephens
502-641-0760

John J. Johnson, Kentucky Human Rights Commission executive director and longtime civil rights leader, will speak at the 10th Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. Holiday Service in Hartford, Ky.

The event is free to the public and will begin at 6 p.m. (Central Standard Time), Monday, Jan. 16, at Harvest House Church located at 911 Oakwood Drive. The theme for the event asks, "Is the American Dream in Jeopardy?" The event is sponsored by Harvest House Church with its pastor Bishop Robert L. Randolph. There will be special music presentations by choirs and soloists from throughout the region and the church will hold a reception afterward. For questions about the upcoming event in Hartford, call Bishop Randolph at 270.313.5328 or 270.775.2871.

Hartford and surrounding towns in Ohio County lie in Kentucky's Supreme Court 2nd District, which is represented by Kentucky Human Rights Commissioner Alma Randolph Patton on the commission board. She will participate in the Harvest House service. "The Kentucky Commission on Human Rights is excited about this year's celebration of the life of Dr. King, and we encourage everyone to attend," Randolph Patton said.

She is available to the press for interviews about the Hartford event and can be contacted at 270.316.4118. She will also give greetings for the state human rights commission at the Owensboro Human Relations Commission King commemorative march at 10 a.m. (CST) on Tuesday, Jan. 17. The community's march is from Owensboro High School to Brescia University.

Bishop Robert Randolph of Harvest House said that several officials will participate in the Hartford service where Human Rights Executive Director Johnson will speak. "Kentucky State Rep. Tommy Thompson of Owensboro, Ohio County Judge Executive David Johnston, Hartford Mayor Charlotte Hendricks, and Beaver Dam Mayor Paul Sandefur are some of the officials who will attend in addition to people from all over our region," Bishop Randolph said. "We look forward to the proceedings and to welcoming our speaker John Johnson," he said.

John J. Johnson has been the Kentucky Commission on Human Rights executive director since 2007. Johnson began his leadership in civil rights, when at the age of 18, he became the youngest president of any NAACP Chapter. Before joining the commission, he spent 20 years in

Baltimore, Md., as an official of the NAACP national headquarters. He served as chief Programs officer for many years and directed a wide variety of initiatives, including Armed Services and Veterans Affairs, Voter Empowerment, Economic Outreach, Labor, Academic, Cultural, Technological and Scientific Olympics, the Prison Project, the NAACP library, and many others.

As part of the Freedom House Citizens Exchange Program, he spent two weeks visiting East Africa to help promote global democracy. In 2002, during Zimbabwe's Presidential Election, Johnson's NAACP delegation was the only American organization invited to work as independent observers. He eventually became the NAACP's chief executive of Operations, where he oversaw the Executive Office of the President and CEO.

Johnson has spent a lifetime leading equality causes. In addition to his career, he has been a dedicated volunteer and activist confronting many challenges, from integrating the segregated swimming pool in his hometown of Franklin, Ky., to the divestment of Kentucky's interest in South Africa. He served as Kentucky state president of the NAACP for 14 years, increasing Kentucky NAACP branches from four to 42. He served as an elected member of the NAACP national Board of Directors where he was elected one of its vice presidents. He served as chair of the Kentucky Coalition of Conscience, is a member of the Urban League, Kentucky Chapter of the National Association of Human Rights Workers, and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. Before leaving Kentucky to work in Maryland, he moderated a weekly radio program entitled Louisville Forum and wrote a column in the weekly newspaper, The Louisville Defender, entitled "Advocacy Line." His work in civil and human rights led to a street named after him, John J. Johnson Avenue, in his hometown of Franklin, in 1993.

He has received numerous awards and honors, including an Honorary Doctorate degree from Simmons University; a Distinguished Service Award from Kentucky State University; the Kentucky Southern Christian Leadership Conference Annual Civil Rights Leadership Award, and the Medger Evers Award for Outstanding Service, Sincere Devotion and Commitment to the NAACP. He served on the National Board of Directors for the A. Philip Randolph Institute, the Board of Directors of the National Committee on Pay Equity and the National Board of Directors of the National Coalition on Black Civic Participation. He chaired the advisory board of the National Great Blacks In Wax Museum, Inc.

The Kentucky Human Rights Commission is the state government authority that enforces the Kentucky Civil Rights Act, which makes discrimination illegal. To learn about civil rights or to receive help for discrimination, call the commission at 1.800.292.5566.