

Commission on Human Rights

Kentucky Civil Rights Leader to speak on Martin King Holiday in Cynthiana

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John J. Johnson, Kentucky Commission on Human Rights executive director and well-known civil rights leader of over 40 years, will be the guest speaker at the Cynthia-Harrison County NAACP Martin Luther King Jr. National Holiday program. The public is invited to the free event including a luncheon.

The Cynthiana-Harrison County celebration will be on Monday, Jan. 16, and begin with a march at 10 a.m. (Eastern Standard Time). The service where Johnson will speak follows at 11 a.m. at the Ebenezer United Methodist Church, 305 North Locust Street, Cynthiana, Ky., 41031. The luncheon at the church will immediately follow at about noon.

For more information about any of these activities, contact Kenneth Newby, president of the Cynthiana-Harrison County NAACP at 859. 234.1818 or 859.707.1599.

The Kentucky Human Rights executive director will talk about how the late Dr. King's messages of equality, justice and empowerment are relevant today.

John J. Johnson has been the Kentucky Commission on Human Rights executive director since 2007. He 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.