



NATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF COLORED PEOPLE

## NORTH CAROLINA STATE CONFERENCE

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UNC  
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WORK AND OPPORTUNITY

August 6, 2012

### **Open Letter to the People of North Carolina Invitation to the Truth and Hope Poverty Tour Report, Mass Meeting and Summit Saturday, August 11, 2012, Rocky Mount, NC**

On January 3, 2012, the NC NAACP, the UNC Center on Poverty, Work and Opportunity, the NC Justice Center, the Institute for Civic Engagement and Social Change at NCCU, and the AARP of NC launched a statewide “Truth and Hope Putting a Face on Poverty in North Carolina Tour.” The opening chapter of this social and economic justice journey culminates with a mass meeting Summit on Saturday, August 11, 2012 at the Opportunities Industrialization Center, 402 E. Virginia Street, in Rocky Mount, North Carolina. [9:30 a.m. – 3:30 p.m.]. We write to invite elected officials, media and business leaders to attend the opening sessions exploring – through personal testimonies, a compelling original film documentary, newly assembled economic data, and frank community discourse – the scourge of poverty, amidst plenty, in the Tar Heel State [9:30 a.m. – noon]. We are confident that you will find the faces and the narratives of economic distress and challenge, as we have, to be perspective and predisposition altering. Please join us.

When we began this effort eight months ago, Rev. Barber announced that we were “engaging in this tour to shine the light of truth on poverty and despair in North Carolina... The truth is, government and the private sector have not adequately addressed the historical and structural causes of deep poverty. Long before the Great Depression and the recent Great Recession, hundreds of thousands of God’s children of all colors lived on the edge” of survival. Recent economic storms “have made this structural” injustice even worse. The tour, we argued, “would not solve the problem, but will expose it, force us to see the faces, the people, and the real conditions behind the (appalling) statistics ... and move us to (undertake) the hard, necessary and righteous work of addressing it.”

Having traveled over two thousand miles, visited 27 communities, and met with thousands of vocal and energized North Carolinians, we can attest that the challenge of pervasive and debilitating poverty is the greatest wound, the largest transgression, the most potent public policy test that we face as a people. It violates both our foundational constitutional commitments and our defining and civilizing religious commands. Its injustices are visited most heavily, as has been the case for generations, on persons of color – with African-Americans, Latinos and Native Americans suffering poverty and unemployment rates dramatically higher than their white counterparts. And our poorest are, too frequently, our children – the youngest and most vulnerable among us. If we are to be the people we claim, we must move to address the stunning, betraying plague of poverty. And we must address it now.

Despite what we have seen and heard, we have also heard, and we know, that there is a better way. If we tap our deepest moral values and deploy our best gifts, we can use targeted economic and infrastructure investments, developing green technologies, opened and equal access to education, and imaginative job creation strategies to address the ugly realities of poverty. If we follow the enduring ethic of love, we can beat our swords of racism into plows that till a new soil of brotherhood and sisterhood. If we see the poor as our neighbors, if we remember we are our brother's keeper, we can work to respect the dignity of all. We can love all people. We can see all people as God's creations.

The Truth and Hope Poverty Tour Summit will explore our challenges, our priorities and our possibilities. It will further a movement – launched and pressed forward by the NC NAACP and a massive HK on J coalition – to put North Carolina poverty center stage in our political deliberation. We invite you to join that cause.

Sincerely,

Rev. Dr. William J. Barber, President  
North Carolina NAACP

Gene Nichol, Professor of Law and Director,  
UNC Center on Poverty, Work and Opportunity

CC: Members of the NC General Assembly  
Governor of the State of North Carolina  
All candidates for Governor, Lieutenant Governor, Council of State and General Assembly  
Media  
NC NAACP Adult Branches and Youth and College division  
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