

Town of West Hartford

50 South Main Street
West Hartford, CT 06107-2431

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

West Hartford celebrates the life of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Monday, January 15, 2018, 10:00-11:30 AM

WEST HARTFORD, CONN. (January 3, 2018) -- Join us for the 22nd annual celebration of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s life on **Monday, January 15, 2018** at the **West Hartford town hall auditorium, 50 South Main Street, 10:00 - 11:30 AM**. Each year the event that pays tribute to Dr. King's ideals and vision grows more popular and inspiring. The event draws nearly 400 people each year.

The celebration is free and open to everyone of all ages.

This year's keynote speaker is Jay Williams, president of the Hartford Foundation for Public Giving. Mr. Williams was appointed on July 17, 2017 following the retirement of Linda J. Kelly who served the Foundation as its President for over 11 years.

Upon the announcement of his selection, Mr. Williams commented, "Over the past couple of years, I have had the opportunity to work with Hartford and surrounding towns on community and economic initiatives. I am excited to be able to continue working with local communities through the Hartford Foundation for Public Giving. The Foundation's ability to serve as a catalyst, a thought leader, and a convener will provide opportunities to address critical needs during these most challenging times. I am honored that I will be able to lead an institution that works toward the improvement of the overall quality of life in the region through informed philanthropy," said Jay Williams.

Mr. Williams recently served as U.S. Assistant Secretary of Commerce for Economic Development where he led the federal economic development agenda for the United States as head of the U.S. Economic Development Administration from 2014 to 2017. He brings experience and knowledge in capacity building, workforce readiness, economic security and urban revitalization.

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Mr. Williams has also served as Deputy Director of the Office of Intergovernmental Affairs at The White House where he was the principal liaison between President Obama and local elected officials. He came to the White House after serving as Mayor of the City of Youngstown, Ohio for over 5 years. Prior to that appointment Mr. Williams led a Community Development Agency in Youngstown and also has functioned as an executive in community banking in Ohio.

Dr. Elena DeVaughn of the West Hartford African American Social & Cultural Organization, one of the sponsoring organizations, will provide the introduction of the keynote speaker.

Rev. Mia Douglas of Asylum Hill Congregational Church, Hartford, will give the opening prayer and Mayor Shari Cantor will welcome attendees. Tammy Exum, who served on the West Hartford Board of Education from 2013-2017, will serve as master of ceremonies.

Each year two students from the public high schools are selected to give the student perspectives on Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. This year Grace Evans of Conard High School and Deonna Hightower of Hall High School were chosen.

Musical performances will be provided by the Conard High School Jazz Combo, Voices of Bristow Middle School and Conard's Voices of the World Choir.

Student artwork, essays and poems from West Hartford elementary schools will also be on display.

Immediately following the event, there will be an opportunity for attendees to discuss thought-provoking questions related to the day's program, race, community and Dr. Martin Luther King's ideology. King often spoke about the "fierce urgency of now" to build a beloved community. Participants will have the chance to make a commitment to act in a way that will help build our community," said Tracey Wilson, town historian and member of MLK Day planning committee.

"This year, we will give this diverse, thoughtful audience an opportunity to stay after the celebration for an interactive discussion on race, equity and action steps that build on the messages that will be shared on this holiday," she continued.

This interactive program is for people of all ages and will run 45-60 minutes.

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The West Hartford African American Social & Cultural Organization, Town of West Hartford, West Hartford Public Schools, and West Hartford Human Rights Commission are annual sponsors of the event. West Hartford Community Television will air the event live on Comcast channel 5 and replay it on Channels 5 and 95. Refreshments are provided by the Elmwood Senior Center.

For more information, contact Renée McCue, public relations specialist, Town of West Hartford at (860) 561-7521 or email Renee@WestHartfordCT.gov.

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