

## **AFRICAN-AMERICAN LEADERS EXPRESS CONCERNS OVER LIVING WAGE BILL**

December 3, 2001 -- Several African-American leaders expressed their concerns today about the living wage legislation scheduled for a vote by Allegheny County Council on Tuesday, December 4, 2001. At a press conference at the African-American Chamber of Commerce, Chamber President Doris Carson Williams joined Bill Strickland of the Manchester Craftsmen's Guild, Lee Hipps of the Urban League of Pittsburgh, Tony Bell of Hill House Senior Services and Connie Balthrop of Operation Nehemiah in urging County Council to reject the living wage ordinance.

"Although its sponsors are well intentioned, the living wage has unintended consequences that would hinder economic development and reduce human services in the African-American community," said Ms. Williams. "I have asked these community leaders to join me today to provide real-life examples of the negative impact that this bill will have on African-American businesses and nonprofit organizations."

Bill Strickland of the Manchester Craftsmen's Guild is working with the Allegheny County Department of Economic Development to construct a greenhouse facility on the Northside of the City of Pittsburgh and a larger facility in the City of McKeesport. At these facilities, Mr. Strickland will train young adults in the field of horticulture to help them develop a trade. However, because County assistance is involved in the greenhouse projects, the living wage bill would require that these trainees be paid at least \$9.12 per hour (\$10.62 per hour without benefits). According to Mr. Strickland, "The wage requirements imposed on our greenhouse developments would place these projects in serious jeopardy and deprive many young adults of the opportunity to learn a trade and improve their lives."

Lee Hipps, Executive Vice President of the Urban League of Pittsburgh, and Tony Bell, Director of Hill House Senior Services indicated that the living wage bill would cause a reduction in the services provided by their organizations as nonprofit contractors for Allegheny County. "The Urban League contracts with Allegheny County to provide vital services in the areas of low-income housing and minority job training. An unfunded wage mandate would force us to reduce or eliminate many of those services in order to cover the cost of escalating salaries," stated Mr. Hipps.

"Hill House provides a place for low-income senior citizens to have a meal, make friends and receive care. The costs associated with this bill could deprive many of our seniors the opportunity to enjoy these benefits," expressed Mr. Bell.

Connie Balthrop of Operation Nehemiah has been working for many years to redevelop the former East Hills Shopping Center. Through her efforts and many others in her organization, the promise of the EastGate Commerce Center will soon be realized. With assistance from Allegheny County, Operation Nehemiah hopes to attract new businesses into the East Hills area for the first time in many years. However, because the County is assisting in the development of this site, any business locating there will be covered by the living wage ordinance. "The living wage mandate will make it virtually impossible for us to attract major retail outlets to the EastGate Commerce Center, depriving the area of much-needed new jobs. Ironically, this legislation appears likely to hurt the very people it is intended to help," said Ms. Balthrop.

Citizens wishing to express their thoughts on the living wage ordinance should call 412-350-6490 and ask to speak to their council representative.