



# THE CPAC INFORMER

Political Issues Impacting the  
Caribbean American Diaspora

Volume 5 Issue 1 SPRING – SUMMER 2019

## Letter from the Chair

Dear C-PAC Members, Supporters, Friends;

Welcome to this edition of The C-PAC Informer. As we welcome the warmer spring and summer months, and the pageantry of activities including those of nature that accompany it, we give thanks with renewed spirit and vigor; especially for a time like this.

Four hundred years ago, between July 30 and August 4, 1619, Africans were brought to a location in Virginia, a mere 160 miles from Washington DC. And while there are discussions regarding the actual place of their arrival – Jamestown or Old Point Comfort (present day Fort Monroe in Hampton Virginia) – what history tells us is that they were the first to be sold into forced labor thus initiating the American slave trade.

It is against this backdrop of this abomination that something remarkable has happened in our region. For the first time in the history of the Maryland General Assembly, six members of the Caribbean Diaspora now serve in that eminent body. They are: Senator Shirley Nathan-Pulliam (Jamaica); Senator Arthur Ellis (Jamaica); Delegate Regina Boyce (Barbados/Jamaica); Delegate Joseline Pena-Melnyk (Dominican Republic); Delegate Jheanelle Wilkins (Jamaica); and Delegate Gabriel Acevero (Trinidad & Tobago).

The Honorable Shirley Nathan-Pulliam is a political pioneer in our region. Read about her and the other formidable politicians with Caribbean heritage who responded to our questionnaire in this issue of the C-PAC Informer.

The Bible tells us that, “in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God...”. We also know that, in the words of that great hymn by William Cowper, “God moves in mysterious ways his wonders to perform.” So, in honor of the African Diaspora having survived 400 years of an inhumane and brutal system, and in acknowledgement of Caribbean-American Heritage month, we invite our community to attend the Inaugural Caribbean Ecumenical Service. C-PAC, in collaboration with the leaders of several regional Caribbean organizations, hope that this faith-based service will bring together the Caribbean communities in our region in thanksgiving for having survived the snares set about us

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## Letter from the Chair *(continued)*

these many years. As James Weldon Johnson (of Bahamian ancestry) so poignantly penned in Lift Every Voice and Sing, “we have come over a way that with tears has been watered...” The service will be held at the historic Peoples Congregational United Church of Christ in upper NW Washington, DC on June 30, 2019.

We are beginning to prepare C-PAC for 2020. To that end, we are searching for the next wave of Caribbean Diaspora

leaders. It will be their charge to build on C-PAC’s past accomplishments and take the organization to new heights in the years ahead. We encourage you to visit us at [www.caribbeanpac.org](http://www.caribbeanpac.org) to learn about C-PAC. While there, click on <http://www.caribbeanpac.org/executive-board.php> to learn about the positions up for election later this year. What better way to honor our ancestors than to continue to be actively engaged in “advancing the political agenda of the Caribbean-American community”?

### CARIBBEAN-AMERICAN LEADERS IN THE MARYLAND GENERAL ASSEMBLY



**SENATOR**  
**Shirley Nathan-Pulliam**

*How is the work in the Maryland legislature relevant to the members of the Caribbean Diaspora in this region?*

As a State Senator, I am charged to represent all residents of the State of Maryland and more specifically the residents who cast their votes to enable my election as their representative. All policies and laws impact the lives of Caribbean’s living in MD. Healthcare, education, environment, school construction transportation and taxes etc.

*In your opinion, what, if any, are some of our responsibilities as members of the community regarding our local government?*

The community’s responsibility is to ensure that their agendas are addressed by registering and casting their vote during the election process.

*How long have you been serving as an elected or appointed official?*

I have been serving as an elected official for 29 years. I was elected to serve 4 years in the Democratic State Central Committee; 20 years House of Delegates; and 5 years presently in the Senate of The Maryland General Assembly.

*When you first ran for office, what were your reasons for wanting to serve?*

My initial nursing career started in the United Kingdom where I witnessed and utilized socialized medicine. Healthcare was available to all citizens. It was unbelievable to me that healthcare was not offered in the U.S. Healthcare is a right not a privilege, especially in a country as rich as America. This was the basis of my decision to seek public office. My platform sought to provide healthcare access and quality to all. This struggle remains relevant today. My theme then and now remains “The Nurse for your Political Health.”

*Have your reasons for serving changed since your first term?*

No. My reason for serving has remained consistent throughout my political career.

*What do you find most challenging about your job?*

Fiscal considerations mostly outweigh policy implementation. Even when we are aware of the negative outcomes.

*Why should Caribbean Diaspora Members care about the decisions that are made in your office? How are we directly impacted?*

My decisions and that of the General Assembly’s impact all of their lives. Policies govern the quality of the air that we breathe, the water that we drink and the amount of taxes we pay to the government.

*What accomplishment are you most proud of? Why?*

My accomplishments are many but those that make me the most proud, just to name a few include:

- a. Eliminating minority Racial and Ethnic health disparities in the State of Maryland with a National impact through the ACA. (My work with Senator Ben Cardin)
- b. Breast Cancer diagnosis and treatment for low-income women - 250% of the FPL with \$2.6 million.
- c. Oral cancer detection and treatment for underserved men - \$500,000.
- d. Statewide plan to address Race and Ethnic minorities in 2003.
- e. Creation of the Office of Minority Health and Health Disparities in statute within the Department of Health - 2004.

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## CARIBBEAN-AMERICAN LEADERS IN THE MARYLAND GENERAL ASSEMBLY (con't)

- f. Policies on cultural, linguistic, and health literacy competencies.
- g. Creation of the Social Determinants of Health, 7-year pilot in Baltimore City.
- h. Minority Business Enterprise
- i. Passing of the Reconciliation - a statewide conversation on race-2018.
- j. Hepatitis C coverage for all medical assistance participants a total sum of \$33.5 million - 2019.
- k. Cyber warrior training program that teaches minorities and the underserved cyber security (total coverage \$2.5 million)-2019
- l. Passing Education Blueprint for Maryland's future (Kirwan Commission) with an initial budget of \$255 million – I was co-sponsor as well -2019
- m. Passing of Caribbean Heritage Month in Maryland. celebrating the 75,000 Caribbean people living in Maryland-2019.

*What is the toughest decision you've ever had to make as an elected/appointed official? What made it especially difficult?*

Seeking another term in the midst of declining health but propelled by the need to accomplish my agendas that impact the lives of Marylanders. Pain made it especially difficult.

*What is the Caribbean saying or motto that you live by?*

I am always reminded of Claude McKay's Poem, "It is the Negro's tragedy I feel, which binds me like a heavy iron chain. It is the Negro's wounds I want to heal, because I know the keenness of his pain." Jamaican Motto - "Out of Many, One People"



**SENATOR  
Arthur Ellis**

*As a local government official, how, and how often, do you interact with the Caribbean community?*

Continually. Members of the Caribbean community asked me to co-sponsor several bills of relevance.

*How is your work in the Maryland legislature relevant to this group?*

As a Senator on the Education, Health, and Environment Committee, I am charged with holding hearings to determine if introduced legislation will move forward.

*What is the best way for members of the Caribbean community to engage with your office?*

Call 410-841-3616, or email my office; [Arthur.ellis@senate.state.md.us](mailto:Arthur.ellis@senate.state.md.us) to schedule an appointment.

*When you first ran for office, what were your reasons for wanting to serve?*

My reach as Senator will be Maryland-wide. Having the ability to introduce bills and affect the quality of life for all citizens.

*What do you find most challenging about your job?*

Negotiating with Senators, Delegates, and the Governor to pass money bills.

*Why should the Caribbean community care about the decisions that are made in your office? How are we directly impacted?*

For example, we just passed a bill that was signed by the Governor to have the Caribbean Heritage month in August.

*How can we in the Caribbean community help you to be more effective in your position?*

Testify for me in favor of appropriate bills or against bad bills. Also, financial support is essential for me to move up to leadership roles in the senate.

*Will you actively seek our support, as a distinct group, during the next election campaign?*

Yes.

*What is the Caribbean saying or motto that you live by?*

Out of many One People

*What is your island of origin?*

Jamaica



**DELEGATE  
Regina T. Boyce**

*As a local government official, how, and how often, do you interact with the Caribbean community?*

Given that I am a new delegate, I would have to say not much. However, I did co-sponsor the Caribbean Heritage Month with Senator Shirley Nathan-Pulliam this session, and I am first-generation Caribbean American. My interactions with the Caribbean Community outside of family tends to be with state Caribbean events and festivals.

*How is your work in the Maryland legislature relevant to this group?*

My work in the Maryland General Assembly affects needed change in the lives of families, especially communities of color that often are affected by policies that do more harm than good. I serve on the Environment and Transportation committee which views

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## CARIBBEAN-AMERICAN LEADERS IN THE MARYLAND GENERAL ASSEMBLY (con't)

legislation regarding the environment, transportation and motor vehicle, housing and real-property, land use, ethics and local government. Transportation, housing, land use and environmental matters disproportionately affect people of color more than non-people of color. This is what I hope to accomplish with my colleagues: ensuring legislation that equalizes the playing field and provides more opportunities for families to succeed and thrive.

### *What is the best way for members of the Caribbean community to engage with your office?*

The best way for members of the Caribbean community to engage with my office is to contact me at [regina.boyce@house.state.md.us](mailto:regina.boyce@house.state.md.us) or call me at 410-841-3476.

### *When you first ran for office, what were your reasons for wanting to serve?*

This is my first time running for office. Working in adult education and my prior work in the community and in Baltimore City government, I ran on strengthening our families so that our city and state are strengthened. The best way for me to do this was to work in the Maryland General Assembly where I can work with a body that creates policies that would help strengthen families physically, emotionally, financially, economically and educationally.

### *What do you find most challenging about your job?*

What I find most challenging about my job is assuring that I have collected and included all perspective before making a final decision or casting a vote.

### *Why should the Caribbean community care about the decisions that are made in your office? How are we directly impacted?*

The Caribbean community should care about the decisions that are made in my office because I make it a point to make good decisions that benefit and support people, families and businesses so that they are stable and thriving.

### *How can we in the Caribbean community help you to be more effective in your position?*

The Caribbean community can help me be more effective in my position by keep me abreast of updates, issues, concerns, celebrations and events relating to the Caribbean community. I would love a standing meeting to keep lines of communication open and to build a strong and lasting relationship with C-PAC.

### *Will you actively seek our support, as a distinct group, during the next election campaign?*

I hope to seek support from all those who supported me during the 2018 election year, and of course those who I've come to know and have built relationships during my four-year term, that includes C-PAC.

### *What is the Caribbean saying or motto that you live by?*

"Out of Many, One People"

### *What is your island(s) of origin?*

My mother is from St. Elizabeth Jamaica and my father was from Boscobelle Barbados.



### DELEGATE

**Joseline Peña-Melnyk**

*As a local government official, how, and how often, do you interact with the Caribbean community?*

My district in Prince George's County and Anne Arundel County Maryland (District 21) is very diverse, with about 40% white, 31% African American, 17% Latino, and 10% Asian. The Latino population has its roots mainly in Central America, but you can find people from all backgrounds, races, religions and cultures – including Caribbean's in our district. I regularly talk about current events on Spanish language radio and often meet with community groups of all backgrounds – from students to seniors. I am Dominican-American and continue to be connected to other Dominican-Americans in our community.

### *How is your work in the Maryland legislature relevant to this group?*

My work matters to the Caribbean-American community in many ways including improving education, ensuring access to affordable health-care, addressing gun violence and expanding economic opportunity. Each year we must pass a budget for the State and it includes substantial funding for school construction and teachers. We work hard to make that funding fair so that children in poorer districts have a better chance to succeed. As Vice Chair of the Health and Government Operations Committee I have fought to make drugs affordable and to protect Maryland families' access to affordable health insurance – something we cannot take

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## CARIBBEAN-AMERICAN LEADERS IN THE MARYLAND GENERAL ASSEMBLY (con't)

for granted as Congress has dismantled the Affordable Care Act and placed more burdens on individuals and the states. Wide access to guns has made our communities less safe and we have passed several laws prohibiting assault weapons and keeping guns out of the hands of the mentally ill and people that have been red flagged for domestic abuse. Lastly, we have expanded economic opportunity by passing a \$15 minimum wage law, promoting training in apprenticeship programs and technical education, and ensuring that licensing requirements in professions such as nursing don't impose unnecessary obstacles to working in Maryland.

### *What is the best way for members of the Caribbean community to engage with your office?*

I have tremendous staff that helps me to address problems and concerns from the community and many times constituents just call me on my cell phone. My staff and I take our role of being a voice for ordinary people seriously and we respond to every inquiry. Often, we have heard of an issue before and we can connect a person in need of help with the right state or local resources. I also welcome input from the public on legislation. You may have had an experience that demonstrates the need for a law or an improvement to how government works. On numerous occasions I have asked members of the public to testify on a bill because their experience illustrates a problem that we have the power to address.

### *When you first ran for office, what were your reasons for wanting to serve?*

I first ran to be a member of the College Park City Council. It was a proposal by the university to build a highway through our community that woke me

up and got me talking with neighbors and organizing our community in opposition. From that moment I saw the power of speaking up I became more involved.

### *What do you find most challenging about your job?*

The job is really part social worker, part community organizer, and part legislator. Juggling these three roles is the challenge. In one day I can be at a hospital helping a constituent find a bed for their child's mental health treatment, then editing an op-ed article for a local newspaper about gun violence as a public health issue, and finally meeting with colleagues in Annapolis to help decide who should be the next Speaker of the House of Delegates. All are important parts of the job. You cannot represent your community effectively if you don't know what struggles are affecting your neighbors and if you are not in tune with what works with our society and government and what doesn't work.

### *Why should the Caribbean community care about the decisions that are made in your office? How are we directly impacted?*

The decisions made in my office and in the offices of other Senators and Delegates in Annapolis are about our values as Marylanders and the actions we will take as a state that reflect those values. So, for example, if you have a child in school you should care whether your leaders care enough about educating the next generation and whether our leaders are willing to demonstrate that concern by taking part of your tax dollars and investing them into teacher salaries and modern schools. As another example, you might care whether communities of color suffer worse health in measurable

ways like childbirth complications, diabetes and asthma. In my committee in Annapolis we are also concerned with these problems and we are working to improve the health of our community and lessen the disparities. I am also proud of a recent accomplishment – the adoption of HB 307 into law – a bill that I shepherded through the House as lead sponsor. We created the nation's first statewide commission empowered to investigate lynchings and address the legacy of racial terror. We know that at least 40 African Americans were lynched in Maryland between 1854 and 1933 by white mobs. There continue to be racial divisions in our society today and we need to understand and acknowledge our history if we are to move beyond it to a better place.

### *How can we in the Caribbean community help you to be more effective in your position?*

Pay attention, vote, run for office. The two major political parties are not the same in their values and who they fight for. And within those parties there are leaders that are effective, stand up for ordinary people and take us forward. I need your engagement because when we are organized and loud – and when we VOTE - we cannot be ignored.

### *Will you actively seek our support, as a distinct group, during the next election campaign?*

Yes, I would be glad to meet with members of the Caribbean-American community to learn about their concerns and to hear their ideas about making Maryland better.

### *What is the Caribbean saying or motto that you live by?*

That's a tough one! My kids will tell you that I always say "You get more with honey than you do with vinegar"

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## CARIBBEAN-AMERICAN LEADERS IN THE MARYLAND GENERAL ASSEMBLY (con't)

so maybe it's not Caribbean but that's the one I really live by. To me that saying means that you should meet people where they are, try to understand them and build consensus. That's how I try to get things done.

### *What is your island of origin?*

I was born on Hispaniola in the Dominican Republic and I still have a lot of primos and tias there!



### **DELEGATE**

**Jheanelle Wilkins**

*As a local government official, how, and how often, do you interact with the Caribbean community?*

I interact with the Caribbean community often. From close friends who are first- or second-generation Caribbean immigrants, to the breadth of the Diaspora living in the area, and the increasing number of elected officials who hail from the Caribbean, I interact often with our community. It's important that I receive input and feedback from every resident and ensure our community is at the table.

### *How is your work in the Maryland legislature relevant to this group?*

The Maryland General Assembly sets the laws for the entire state. Our state policies can do great harm or can be of great benefit to our community. It's important to have the right people in positions of power to craft policy and set the agenda. Our work is relevant to every Caribbean, and I make it a priority to engage residents in the policy process and ensure all voices are heard.

### *What is the best way for members of the Caribbean community to engage with your office?*

The Caribbean community can follow me on social media for updates (Facebook: /JheanelleWilkins and Twitter: @JheanelleW). They can also visit my website ([www.jheanellewilkins.com](http://www.jheanellewilkins.com)) to subscribe to my email updates. I share important information, upcoming events, legislative information, etc. on my social media and by email.

### *When you first ran for office, what were your reasons for wanting to serve?*

When I first ran for office, I was an advocate for social justice policies for a decade. After pushing for policy changes throughout my career, I was ready to have a seat at the table and make a direct impact as a lawmaker. My reason for running for office and serving the public is to make a difference in people's lives.

### *What do you find most challenging about your job?*

Since the legislature is part time, one of the most challenging aspects of this role is balancing my full-time job with my legislative efforts. I work in Downtown D.C. during the week and participate in events and meetings before and after work. I am blessed to have a full-time job that is supportive of my legislative efforts, including the leave of absence I take for the 90-day legislative session.

### *Why should the Caribbean community care about the decisions that are made in your office? How are we directly impacted?*

From racial profiling to maternal health, immigrant rights, and educational equity, the legislation I sponsor, and champion truly impacts

our community. These issues have a disproportionate impact on Black immigrants. I have also championed immigrant rights issues such as legislation to reduce state and law enforcement participation in ICE arrests and detainment. Other impactful bills I have supported include: raising the minimum wage, criminal justice reform, health insurance access, and a grant programs to support teachers. The Caribbean community should care about the decisions that are made and get involved because they are directly impacted.

### *How can we in the Caribbean community help you to be more effective in your position?*

The Caribbean community can sign up for my various communications channels (newsletter, social media, etc.) to stay up to date on my legislation and events. They can help spread the word about the work I'm doing. Members can also make a donation to my campaign ([www.jheanellewilkins.com](http://www.jheanellewilkins.com)) to support me and help me to continue to work on issues that matter.

### *Will you actively seek our support, as a distinct group, during the next election campaign?*

Yes, I will. I hope to have your full support.

### *What is the Caribbean saying or motto that you live by?*

Yes, yes. "neva carry man ova mountain" is one of my favorite sayings. It means that words are not enough. Actions and plans make a difference.

### *What is your island(s) of origin?*

I was born in Kingston, Jamaica.

## MEMBERSHIP

C-PAC is built on a strong foundation. We have developed a solid and efficient organizational structure. It gives us the ability to move beyond the administration of the organization as we continue to build a dynamic program. As a membership organization, C-PAC continues to work on maintaining an accurate database of our members and supporters. We encourage you to spread the word about C-PAC; renew your annual membership and become vested in the organization. Visit <http://www.caribbeanpac.org/about.php>

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## NEWS You Can Use!!!

The Inaugural Caribbean Ecumenical Service in Acknowledgement of the Year 1619 and in Celebration of Caribbean-American Heritage Month: **Sunday June 30, 2019 at 10:00 AM at Peoples Congregational United Church of Christ, 4704 13th Street, NW, Washington, DC 20011.**

C-PAC Annual Founding Patrons' Luncheon: **Saturday, October 12, 2019, from 12:00-3:00 PM at the DoubleTree by Hilton in Silver Spring, MD.**

C-PAC Annual General Meeting: **November 9, 2019 from 11:00 AM – 1:00 PM. Details to follow.**

### WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU!

Here are some of the ways you can support C-PAC (a) stay engaged, and (b) invite Caribbean-Americans and friends of the Caribbean across the metropolitan area to get involved.

Know someone who needs to become a member of C-PAC? [Download our membership application form](#) and get folks plugged in! General membership is \$50.00 and \$25.00 for students and those over 65 years.

[Follow C-PAC on Twitter @CPAC\\_DMV.](#)  
We follow back. Are you on Facebook?  
[Like our page](#) and invite your friends to like us too!

### ALREADY A MEMBER?

Join a committee! Do you want to serve in Membership, Fundraising, Political Advisory, Communications, or Outreach? Take your pick, bring your ideas and be ready to serve.

### KEEP IN TOUCH

Have an idea? Want to help plan or host a community forum? We're only an email away! Send us a message at [cpac.dmv@gmail.com](mailto:cpac.dmv@gmail.com).

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