

Lawmakers push for improvements in communities of color

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Lawmakers and local leaders called for action to close the gaps communities of color face in the state at the first annual "State of Black and Brown Wisconsin Address" this afternoon at the Capitol.

Still, the group also discussed progress -- particularly in certain areas of education -- around Wisconsin, including increasing graduation rates and steps toward making college affordable through the newly announced UW-Madison program to cover four years of tuition for lower income in-state students.

"We are making some progress to help correct some of the wrongs we are seeing in the state, and I think that accounts for something," said Sen. LaTonya Johnson, D-Milwaukee.

Overall though, Johnson and others who spoke called for elected officials to take positive steps by increasing access to jobs, improving economic outcomes for communities of color and doing more to address the high incarceration rates of African-Americans in the state.

Rep. David Crowley, D-Milwaukee, stressed the need for partnerships and other collaborative efforts bridging across the state to reduce these disparities.

"We cannot do this alone as communities of color," Crowley said. "We as African-Americans and Latinos are coming to the state and saying these are the issues."

Meanwhile, the Rev. Alexander Gee, of Madison, said local communities also need to do their part to close the divides and promote and empower activists of color in the state.

"There needs to be collaborative social action by bringing leaders from smaller communities," Gee said. "Bringing heads of systems together will build a community of trust."

Other speakers included Milwaukee Dems Reps. David Bowen, Leon Young, Jocasta Zamarripa and Sen. Lena Taylor.