

DC Black Church Initiative

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DC Black Church Initiative Deems Metro “Unsafe”

DCBCI Urges Riders to Take Precautions; Jim Graham’s Leadership Created a Culture of Safety Negligence

Washington DC- The DC Black Church Initiative, a coalition of 800 African American churches in the District, whose mission is to promote health prevention, declares that the DC Metro transit system is unsafe for passengers and its members. The system has been cited for generally poor administration from federal officials over the past 13 years. In the past two years, there have been more than 11 fatalities (2 deaths just 2 days ago) and over 80 serious injuries due to inadequate communication, a lack of following safety procedures, lax oversight, generally poor conditions, a culture of malaise and poor leadership from the director to the chair of the board of Metro. As a result DCBCI argues that Jim Graham is largely responsible for creating an environment that does not emphasize safety, nor an early warning system for the riding public and DCBCI members. Therefore, DCBCI urges all of its members to use extreme caution when riding Metro and when possible, to take other means of transportation.

As an example of what we have cited above, it has been reported in the *Washington Post* that a Metro train nearly hit a team of independent safety inspectors on December 10. The inspectors "experienced a near-miss situation" and "were forced to quickly scramble out of the way to avoid being struck," according to a report by the Tri-State Oversight Committee, which monitors safety at Metro. This clearly points to not only inadequate communication among workers, but to a deeper problem concerning miscommunication even when doing routine operations of trains. After the horrific accident of June 22 where two cars collided and multiple lives were lost and a plethora of other incidents since that date; this is the last straw.

No longer will we stand by and allow Metro staff and officials to work at the bare minimum safety expectations of their jobs while sacrificing innocent lives due to their indolence. As the largest form of mass transportation in the Metropolitan area, one would think Metro officials would have in place a comprehensive preventive safety protocol that would alert them of any problems which

were emerging as a safety issue---- a sensitive early warning system. Now we understand that this was not the case. There has been a “fix-it-when-you-can” attitude and no sense of urgency when dealing with preventative maintenance. The system is now 33 years old, and it should have had in place, from its inception, a Division of Safety with the purpose of checking and systematically updating safety procedures, safety training procedures for all workers, and constant training for operators. Now that the accidents have occurred, former DC Metro General Manager John Catoe, according to a July 15 article of the *Washington Post*, testified in front of a Congressional hearing and “rattled off safety precautions Metro has taken since the crash.” The question is; why were these steps not taken 6 months ago, a year ago, or even 2 years ago? This is clear evidence that the board of directors, under Jim Graham’s leadership (lack of leadership) of Metro, the people we entrust our lives with on a daily basis – not to mention the future operation of this transit system -- have utterly failed us.

The Rev. Anthony Evans, President of DCBCI, states, “My thoughts and my prayers go out to every family that has been affected by Metro’s lack of safety concern. The needless deaths and injuries due to this level of neglect and incompetence are sickening. The church, as a part of its Civil Society Initiative, has worked to strengthen public institutions so that people can have faith in them. But when these institutions systematically fail them and create a culture of safety negligence, leading to innocent deaths, the church must be forceful and righteous to condemn and correct Metro and to alert the general public of their concerns surrounding this institution. This is why we are taking this unprecedented step to declare Metro as a safety hazard. In building a civil society, we must hold persons who are in leadership responsible for such an act. This is why we have cited the many safety failures of Jim Graham as Metro Chairman. His leadership has been deadly.”

The DC Black Church Initiative is also asking Metro to implement and monitor as many procedures and methods to facilitate and secure the ultimate safety of their passengers as possible. However, in their evident failure to do so thus far, the DC Black Church issues a warning to our members and to all of the Metro riding public; take extreme caution in using Metrorail trains, take alternative means of transportation whenever possible and avoid packed trains. In light of a failed culture of safety of Metro, it is prudent and responsible for the church to warn its members as well as the general riding public, that we view riding Metro as a safety hazard. There has been insufficient safety reform to date, and a lack of transparency to the general public concerning the safety mishaps for DCBCI not to issue this serious safety warning.

With the recent resignation of DC Metro General Manager John Catoe, we are glad to see steps are being taken to change the operation of this transit agency, but this sole action does not, in itself, improve Metro safety. Metro’s incompetence continues to flourish as more and more people continue to be injured and even killed. It is more than telling about the aptitude of Metro that just days after new leadership has been appointed there has already been a deadly accident.

This is not a situation where a trial-and-error system cannot be implemented. Metro holds the lives of all their passengers in its hands, and characterizing it as “reckless” would be absolutely merciful. But merciful we refuse to be. When an agency is directly in control of millions of lives, mercy should not and cannot exist. In fact, Metro should not expect any kind of mercy. They should take it upon themselves to engage in every action possible to further increase the security of

their passengers. To preserve what little integrity it has at this point, Metro should hold themselves to the highest of standards. However, it is clear that they have not held these standards to be as vital as necessary and changes must be made immediately.

It is more than discouraging that Metro officials would implement a safety procedure that they are not even sure will be effective, it is simply wrong. Such negligence concerning human life must be noted as the unattended consequences of this laxity continue to be exposed.

In addition to the aforementioned train collisions, there have been multiple Metro workers struck and killed by trains as well as being electrocuted while working on the tracks. As if this is not bad enough there have been multiple recorded suicides over the past two years. For years Metro has done nothing to deal with this continuous problem of individuals committing suicide by jumping in front of a moving train. There have been no publicly adopted procedures to deal with this issue. There have been few if any hearings on this issue. There are no written materials for the public to view concerning this issue. In addition, Metro has lacked a mind of creative, imaginative options like employing safety monitors at high peaks to direct traffic other than when there are special events in town, especially at those stations where people have frequently chosen to commit suicide.

In no way were the maintenance checkups, the automatic controls or the actual train cars used to carry passengers safe by any standard. Unfortunately the changes in safety procedures came too little too late. Is it okay for an agency to allow over 10 deaths before they realize they need a change in their course of action? Each individual life is precious, and the idea that Metro staff and officials took minimal effort to secure these lives is disgraceful and well deserving of public outcry.

We would also request that an immediate and transparent overview of concerns and safety issues from the past 10 years be displayed on the Metro web site. Viewers should not have to take the time to go digging through the web site before they find a minimal and non-detailed report of these issues. These people are valued customers of the Metro transit system, and they do not deserve to be kept in the dark. They are the ones paying for the services, and they are the ones who entrust their wellbeing in the competence of the system itself.

Because Metro has had such a long period without mishap, a systematic neglect for safety led to an inappropriate arrogance resulting in devastating consequences. This arrogance cannot be allowed to continue as it is a long-term systematic problem in a culture of safety negligence.

The DC Metro is lucky they are the primary method of transportation in the DC Metropolitan area, and have not suffered too greatly in customer drop-off, because if there were alternate methods of transportation as convenient, we are sure that there would be a tremendous lack of ridership. To know and understand that they are an essential part of life for DC Metropolitan residents and workers, Metro must not develop any sense of arrogance, but rather appreciate their customer loyalty and show their gratitude by doing all that is necessary and possible to ensure the safety of their customers. We demand this, and nothing less.

About DCBCI

The District of Columbia Black Church Initiative (DCBCI), a coalition of 800 African American and Latino member churches works to eradicate racial disparities in healthcare. NBCI is a faith-based health organization dedicated to providing critical wellness information and preventive health screening to all of its members. The African American community ranks first in eleven different health risk categories. NBCI's purpose is to partner with national health officials to provide health education, reduce racial health disparities, and increase access to quality healthcare.