

Columbia Mayor Steve Benjamin visits D.C. to promote My Brother's Keeper initiative

July 22, 2014 By [Kelly Petty](#)

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Columbia Mayor Steve Benjamin joined leaders from across the nation in Washington, D.C., for a round-table with President Barack Obama to discuss the My Brother's Keeper initiative.

Obama [announced Monday](#) that 60 major urban school districts under the Council of Great City Schools signed on to his initiative to invest in early childhood education, mentoring programs and expanded academic courses to improve educational outcomes for black and Latino boys.

"I and many like me have lived the American Dream because of the men and women who gave their all to give us opportunities they could never have dreamed of," Benjamin said. "This initiative is our chance not only to honor their sacrifice, but to preserve their spirit by standing up for a generation of children who are facing some very serious challenges."

Obama announced in February the \$200 million initiative that would be funded through a combination of private and corporate donations.

Other major commitments include \$18 million in funding from AT&T to for mentoring programs, with \$350 million set aside to focus on workforce readiness for high school students through the development of its Aspire Mentoring Academy Corps.

Silicon Valley-based social justice organization Emerson Collective will invest \$50 million to focus on high school redevelopment initiatives that incorporate new technology and learning methods in classrooms.

And the Citi Foundation plans to make a three-year, \$10 million commitment to create ServiceWorks, a national program using volunteer services to help 25,000 people in ten cities nationwide to prepare for college and career.

"If someone's putting time into you, you've got to show appreciation for it and try your hardest to succeed," Obama said in a town hall discussion Monday.

Benjamin lauded his own efforts in January to improve the plight of inner-city boys in the Columbia area by announcing his goal to establish a Center of Excellence for Black Male Achievement. Through partnerships with nonprofits, faith institutions, business leaders and academia, Benjamin hopes the center can be a model for how to develop solutions to enhance the lives of the city's youth.

The Center of Excellence for Black Male Achievement is Columbia's step toward fulfilling the goals of Obama's My Brother's Keeper initiative.

"Right now our children are struggling and if we don't do everything we can to engage them, challenge them and protect them then we're going to lose them," Benjamin said. "This is our chance to do more to develop new strategies and solutions that put children who may fail on the path to success and children who already succeed on the path to being superstars enriching this great city and nation for generations to come."

Benjamin recently was [honored with a Triumph Award](#) from the National Action Network in New York City for his efforts to curb youth violence by launching the [city's youth sports initiative](#), hosting the [End of School Bash](#) and the working with local anti-gang violence groups to put on a [basketball classic](#), which pitted Columbia police officers in a friendly game against young men from around the Midlands.