

African-American Church Leaders Want Hillary Clinton's Attention

If Republican presidential nominee Donald Trump has gained the attention of African-American voters, African-American church leaders are hoping to get Democratic presidential nominee Hillary Clinton's attention, as well.

Monday afternoon, at an event planned to take place at Clinton's campaign headquarters in Brooklyn, New York, Dr. Jacqueline C. Rivers was scheduled to present "An Open Letter to Hillary Clinton Regarding Religious Freedom for Black America." The letter was signed by a number of leading African-American clergy, activists, and intellectuals—many of whom have close ties to the Democratic Party.

The letter requests a meeting with Clinton "to discuss some of the critical issues in the black community." Among these are education, employment, religious freedom, violence and abortion, which Rivers said were "of great importance to the 41 million blacks in the nation" and which have largely been absent from the presidential debates.

The letter also points out Clinton's own statement in an April 2015 speech before the National Organization of Women in which she said "deep-seated cultural codes, religious beliefs and structural biases have to be changed." The letter goes on to say that when political leaders "call for changes in citizens' beliefs," it constitutes "a denial of our religious freedom."

Among the other issues they are concerned about, Rivers noted:

- Church leaders are concerned about unemployment in the black community, especially among young black men who experience rates as high as 33 percent.

- They are deeply troubled by the fact that in 2013 more black babies were aborted in New York City than were born.
- They call for justice in cases of reprehensible behavior of police officers in dealing with unarmed black men as in the Eric Garner case.
- Fundamental to their concerns in all of these issues is their right as religious leaders to minister to their own members and to the black poor, regardless of their religious beliefs, in a manner consistent with their faith convictions.

“As those who have challenged structural and racial injustice for many decades leaders in the black church affirm the centrality of religious faith to their actions,” the letter states. “These leaders insist on their constitutional right to their religious beliefs and on the freedom to act on them in the public square.”

It also calls for a meeting between Clinton and African-American spiritual leaders to discuss how, if she is elected president, her administration will deal with all these issues, and especially how she will ensure that the constitutional freedoms of all Americans are protected.