



December 18, 2020

Attention: CAP Emerging Leaders Award
American Society for Public Administration
1730 Rhode Island Avenue, NW, Suite 500
Washington, DC 20036

RE: Nomination of Curtis C. Brown for the 2021 CAP Emerging Leaders Award

Dear Awards Committee,

It is my pleasure and honor to support the nomination Curtis C. Brown for the 2021 CAP Emerging Leaders Award. Mr. Brown, who is the State Coordinator for the Virginia Department of Emergency Management and the co-founder of the Institute for Diversity and Inclusion in Emergency Management (IDIEM), is a rising star within the field of public safety whose path-breaking leadership in integrating the values of social equity into virtually every aspect of performance management make him an exceptional candidate for this award.

The reach and impact of his contributions, which represent an historic evolution in the evaluation of disaster response, extends well beyond the Commonwealth of Virginia, are described below.

Path-breaking advocacy

Mr. Brown is the co-founder of the Institute for Diversity and Inclusion in Emergency Management (IDIEM), a data-driven nonprofit dedicated to increasing the diversity of emergency managers and the promotion of practices that improve disaster outcomes among vulnerable communities. Through a range of activities that include mentorship, training, resource sharing, data analytics, and consulting, IDIEM helps disaster response agencies at all levels of government to be results-driven in addressing the disparate impact of disasters on minorities.

IDIEM fills a significant void in the field of disaster management, which within both the public and private sector lacks representation among women and minorities. Over 80% of the nation's emergency management directors are white and 70% are male. At the Department of Homeland Security, one of the most racially and ethnically diverse agencies across the federal government, African Americans make up 30% of the workforce and just 8% of senior leadership roles. Compare that representation with the demography of the 10

U.S. localities deemed “most vulnerable” to disaster by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention — communities that average minority populations of 81% — and the lack of diversity among chief emergency managers is disturbing.

“This is true for both practice and research,” said Brown in a recent interview. “The lack of women and minorities in the professional and their perceived absence in research perpetuates inequities that have long-term, very often lethal consequences that undermine us as a society.”

To tackle the lack of diversity, IDIEM supports mentorships and programs aimed at increasing the representation of women and minorities in leadership positions. The organization also supports research that can be used alternatively to demonstrate the impact of disparities and tracking organizational efficacy in resolving them. As part of that effort, IDIEM has embarked on a series of educational collaborations with a number of partners, including: FEMA, the National Academy of Public Administration and the VCU Wilder School. Last fall, IDIEM sponsored an open forum for students at Savannah State University (SSU) in collaboration with The Grace E. Harris Leadership Institute. SSU is the first and only HBCU to house a bachelor’s degree program in disaster management.

“Our goal as an organization,” said Brown, “is to help integrate the values of social equity into every virtually every aspect of the emergency management.”

A record of service

At 40, Mr. Brown is an accomplished public service professional with more than 15 years of experience at the federal, state and local levels. His career spans operational, policy and advisory roles and includes response support for over 40 disasters, including 5 resulting in Presidential Disaster Declarations. Mr. Brown served as VDEM’s chief deputy state coordinator for nearly four years before assuming the top role at the agency at the height of the Commonwealth’s COVID-19 response in June. He is the first African American to lead the state’s lead disaster response agency. His previous roles included deputy secretary of public safety and homeland security in Governor McAuliffe’s administration, regional emergency management administrator for the Hampton Roads Planning District Commission, and professional staff on the U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Homeland Security.

Recent leadership gains

Since assuming the helm at VDEM, Mr. Brown has been out-front in directing the state’s response to COVID-19, serving as a critical player in the Commonwealth’s COVID-19 Equity Leadership Task Force, an historic equity mechanism designed to ensure adequate resources, outreach and support for the state’s vulnerable, high-risk populations.

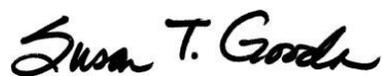
He has also taken significant strides to embed equity within the performance culture of VDEM. His early achievements include the introduction of an official agency DEI statement, an aggressive plan to prioritize at-risk populations across the agency’s programs, and the incorporation of DEI metrics into employee work profiles and evaluations. Additionally, he

has been active in working with localities to leverage new data tools that identify vulnerable populations and integrate this data into situational awareness reports.

Despite a deluge of professional responsibilities, Mr. Brown makes a point of connecting with early-career disaster management professionals. This past spring he taught an undergraduate course, “Homeland Security and Emergency Preparedness and Incident Management.” Additionally, he has shared his response experience, which includes the Charlottesville Unite the Right rally of 2017, the Virginia Tech shootings of 2007, and numerous protests and natural disasters through various school-sponsored panels and programs.

For his efforts to make the provision of disaster response more equitable and inclusive—both within the Commonwealth and beyond, I most wholeheartedly support the nomination of Curtis Brown. Mr. Brown has shown exceptional commitment and innovation in promoting practices that advance equity and performance within the field of emergency preparedness.

Sincerely,



Susan T. Gooden
Dean and Professor
Past-President, American Society for Public Administration
Fellow, National Academy of Public Administration
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