



DSS acting in 'good faith;' minority vendors disagree

Howard Manly

In what can only be described as a patronizing letter, state Department of Social Services (DSS) Commissioner Angelo McClain disputed claims made by minority social workers and published in the Bay State Banner that they were being unfairly excluded from the agency's vendor referral list to help troubled families.

In the letter, dated Sept. 18, the recently appointed McClain wrote that his office has "acted in good faith" with the Black Mental Health Alliance "and will continue to do so."

As evidence of that "good faith," McClain wrote that in fiscal year 2006, DSS purchased nearly \$2 million in services from two members of the Black Mental Health Alliance — \$1,513,333 from The Osiris Group and another \$423,480 from Pyramid Builders Association.

"In fact, DSS contracts for [the two groups] ... together were 27 percent of the total dollars expended statewide for their model of service, with 39 other providers sharing the remaining 73 percent," McClain explained in the letter. "Clearly, these numbers dispel the claim that they are not receiving any business from DSS."

But the numbers offered by McClain only tell part of the story. His letter fails to provide any details on the much larger pool of money available for other types of family services that Osiris, Pyramid Builders and other black vendors would be qualified to provide, but are not given the opportunity to do so. Nor does the letter break down the amounts of money awarded to large nonprofit companies acting as lead agencies that determine which families are referred to which vendors.

Nor does the letter address the central focus of the Banner's Sept. 13 article — that social workers are being told to limit referrals to black-owned vendors.

Osiris Group Founder and Chief Executive Officer Larry Higginbottom readily admits that he received a little more than \$1.5 million from DSS in fiscal year 2006.

"But based on our quality of work and the reputation that we have earned in our industry, that number should be between \$4 million and \$5 million," Higginbottom said. "No one wants to address the issue of the DSS and some of their lead agencies telling parents and social workers not to give us business."

The point, Higginbottom explains, is that quality should dictate who gets the business — not what he and others have described as an "old boy

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Stevie Wonder performs during the final show of his summer tour at the Bank of America Pavilion, Thursday, Sept. 20, 2007. Alternating between piano and keyboards, the 57-year-old Grammy Award-winner wooed the crowd of 5,000 strong with Wonder staples like "Signed, Sealed, Delivered (I'm Yours)" and "I Was Made to Love Her." (Lolita Parker Jr. photo)

Thousands rally for Jena Six teenagers in Louisiana

Mary Foster

JENA, La. — It had many of the signs of the early civil rights protests — militant slogans, upraised clenched fists and multitudes of police — but none of the hate and fear-drenched campaigns in Little Rock, Ark., or the Alabama towns of Selma and Montgomery.

Thousands of protesters stormed this tiny central Louisiana town last Thursday, rallying against what they see as a double standard of justice for blacks and whites.

But unlike the protests that became landmarks for civil rights when fire hoses and police dogs greeted demonstrators, the rally to support six black teenagers charged in a school fight had a festive yet laid-back air.

"It was a great day," said campaigner Denise Broussard. "I really felt a sense of purpose and commitment, but it was also a lot of fun. I met great people and made some good friends."

The plight of the so-called Jena Six, a group of black teens initially charged with attempted murder in the beating of a white classmate, became a flashpoint for one of the biggest civil rights demonstrations in years.

Old-guard lions like the Revs. Jesse Jackson and Al Sharpton joined scores of college students bussed in from across the nation who said they wanted to make a stand for racial equality just as their parents did in the 1950s and '60s.

But while those early protest-



Protesters march to Jena High School Thursday, Sept. 20, 2007 in Jena, La. Thousands of chanting demonstrators filled the streets of this little Louisiana town in support of six black teenagers initially charged with attempted murder in the beating of a white classmate. The rally was overwhelmingly peaceful, much unlike the civil rights demonstrations of the 1960s, where protestors were often greeted by fire hoses and police dogs. (AP photo/Frank Franklin II)

ers dodged police batons and were insulted by the white population, demonstrators petted police horses, chatted with officers and posed by the Jena Police Department sign.

"It was a big event for us," said

Donna Clark, who traveled from Atlanta with her husband and four young daughters. "We got matching T-shirts and drove all night. It's exciting and I think the girls can say later

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Stevie gives Boston a wonderful evening

Bridgit Brown and Howard Manly

Stevie Wonder had a secret to share.

It was about his mother, Lula Mae Hardaway.

She died a little more than a year ago at the age of 76, and she did more than simply give birth to him.

Back in the day, when he was known as "Lil' Stevie," she negotiated his first contract with Motown.

She co-wrote "Signed, Sealed, Delivered (I'm Yours)" and "I Was Made to Love Her."

And she was on Stevie's mind when he walked on stage last Thursday night before a sold-out,

gently graying crowd at the Bank of America Pavilion. His daughter Aisha Morris — the subject of yet another Stevie hit, "Isn't She Lovely" — accompanied him.

Before he got down to business, Wonder had a few words of caution about his striking daughter. It was something about being a blind man with a shotgun.

The laughter subsided when Stevie began talking about the secret.

"I never mentioned this to anybody before," Wonder said. "My mother died last year and when it happened, I cancelled all of my shows. That was my way of grieving."

"It was devastating," Stevie said, choking on his words. "... Then one night, I dreamed that my mother called me on the phone and I said to her in the dream, 'Ma? How is this happening? I thought you died.' My mother then asked me in the dream how I was doing and I told her that I had cancelled my shows and wasn't doing too well at all."

"Then she said to me, in her voice, 'Boy, you better get out there and do what you do.'" And that is what Stevie does. Even at the relatively young age of 57, even after performing and working the business for nearly five decades and earning 25 Grammy Awards, Stevie still does what he does. He talks about love. He talks about caring. He talks about making an impact.

It took less than three hours for last Thursday's show to sell out, and

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