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GOVERNOR'S BUDGET INCLUDES FUNDING FOR ADIRONDACK DIVERSITY INITIATIVE

SARANAC LAKE, N.Y. — Leaders of several Adirondack not-for-profit organizations today thanked Gov. Andrew Cuomo for adopting the Adirondack Diversity Initiative (ADI) by including \$250,000 in state funding for the program in his Executive Budget proposal to the NYS Legislature.

The Adirondack Diversity Initiative began as a grass-roots effort, functioning on volunteer leadership for more than five years. It has now been transformed into a professionally directed entity via funding from the Legislature and Gov. Andrew Cuomo.

This new Adirondack Diversity Initiative was created last spring when members of the Legislature added the program and \$250,000 in funding to the state's Environmental Protection Fund. This funding was allocated to the Adirondack North Country Association (ANCA) to implement and manage the program.

The Diversity Initiative was formerly an all-volunteer effort, led by local non-profits. Under ANCA's leadership, several members of the Diversity Initiative core team and ANCA worked together to find and hire a director last fall. Nicole Hylton-Patterson of the Bronx started on Dec. 2 in ANCA's office in Saranac Lake.

As Diversity Director, Hylton-Patterson will work closely with partners, driven by two guiding principles: that the Adirondack region should be welcoming and inclusive to everyone; and that the region should be relevant to and supported by an increasingly diverse state and national population.

"By placing this new program into his own budget proposal, the Governor is saying he thinks the Diversity Initiative is an important program and he won't debate whether it needs the money," said William C. Janeway, Executive Director for the Adirondack Council. "He has essentially adopted it as his own. That's a big step toward long-term stability for this program."

"It means the Legislature won't have to bargain with the Governor to keep funding this program," said Cali Brooks, Executive Director of the Adirondack Foundation. "It won't have to find a new way to win its approval every year. The new director can spend her time working with local businesses, visitors and residents and not worrying about how to keep the lights on and the rent paid."

"I am honored to have sponsored an initial \$250,000 State investment from the Environmental Protection Fund in 2019 to make this program possible." said Sen. Jose Serrano, D-Manhattan/Bronx. "I'm very pleased that the Adirondack Diversity Initiative has already demonstrated its value in promoting an inclusive Adirondack Park and that the Governor has provided continued programmatic support in his Executive Budget Proposal. I look forward to working with my State and local partners toward a more inclusive Adirondack Park, ensuring that this national treasure is accessible and welcoming to all New Yorkers."

"Long term, the park's economy depends on its ability to attract and maintain support from a wide range of people," said Kate Fish, Executive Director of ANCA. "Diversity, Inclusion and equity are central to the region's ability to attract new people, new ideas and new investments to our rural communities as well as to create a more level playing field for populations who are already here."

"The Adirondacks are a national treasure, and a place where we hope all citizens feel welcome," said Paul Hai of the SUNY College of Environmental Science and Forestry in Newcomb. "To do that, we must provide the means to engage with and educate one another. The Diversity Initiative means we are prepared to offer this kind of assistance both to local folks and to visitors."

"Fostering greater harmony and understanding of one another has been a goal of our organization since it was founded," said Martha Swan of John Brown Lives! "We are very pleased to see the state establish a secure source of funding for this effort."

"So far, I have spoken with 145 persons on my listening tour of the region and received numerous requests for diversity training and cultural competency development," said Hylton-Patterson. "The findings from my listening tour show that the need is great, much more than we have the capacity for at the moment. But the work is critical for the long term sustainability of the park, attracting more people to the region, and including those who are already here in greater economic opportunity."

Hylton-Patterson describes herself as an activist scholar. As a scholar, she has designed and instructed courses on critical race, class, gender and sexuality theories, as well as African-American and Justice Studies at Arizona State University and Syracuse University. Her activism led her to coordinate programs in Elmira and Syracuse, NY, and Bloomington, Indiana that focus on social justice.

Hylton-Patterson brings a unique cultural perspective to the position. She was born in Jamaica and spent her formative years in northern Norway as part of a gifted-child program. She has over 20 years of experience leading activities and programs geared toward advancing diversity, equity and inclusion. In addition to her prior role as acting director of the Mary T. Clark Center for Religion and Social Justice at Manhattanville College, she served as program coordinator for the college's Center for Inclusion. She has also instructed and coordinated programs in Arizona, Syracuse Elmira, N.Y. that focus on race and gender studies, justice, diversity and advocacy.

Hylton-Patterson will work closely with Diversity Initiative partners.

Established in 2015, the Adirondack Diversity Initiative is a collaboration of organizations and individuals who develop and promote strategies to help the Adirondack Park become more welcoming and inclusive to all New Yorkers, including visitors, seasonal residents and permanent residents. In May 2019, New York State announced that \$250,000 of its 2020 budget would go to the ADI as part of the \$300 million Environmental Protection Fund. The new grant funding allows ANCA to hire a director and expand the Initiative's outreach and programming.

The entire ADI team thanked Senator Serrano, who chairs the Committee on Cultural Affairs, Tourism, Parks and Recreation, for his leadership in securing the funding for the initiative. The ADI also thank Environmental Conservation Committee Chairs Assemblyman Steven Englebright, D-Setauket, and Sen. Todd Kaminsky, D-Long Beach, as well as Sen. Elizabeth O'C. Little, R-Queensbury, Assemblymen William Jones, D-Chateaugay, and Daniel Stec, R-Queensbury, for their support. ADI also recognized the legislative and executive staff, who understood the need to build a welcoming inclusive Adirondack Park.

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