OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT

Memphis & West Tennessee Central Labor Council

In Partnership with Labor Education - laboreducation.org

Kevin Bradshaw

President, Memphis & West TN Central Labor Council - Founder, LaborEducation.org

TO:

Officers & Business Agents
Affiliated Local Unions - Memphis & West Tennessee

FROM:

Kevin Bradshaw
President, Memphis & West TN Central Labor Council
President, CBTU Memphis Chapter

CC:

CBTU Memphis Executive Board

RE:

Membership drive - Coalition of Black Trade Unionists, Memphis Chapter

DATE:

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Brothers and Sisters,

I am writing to you twice over: as President of the Memphis & West Tennessee Central Labor Council, AFL-CIO, and as President of the Coalition of Black Trade Unionists, Memphis Chapter. The ask in this letter is simple and it costs your local nothing. Please forward it to your members, to your retirees, and to anyone on your rolls who used to carry a card.

Why CBTU, and why it started here

CBTU was founded in 1972 by trade unionists who were tired of being counted on at election time and overlooked everywhere else. One of those founders was Bill Lucy of AFSCME - the man who came up with I AM A MAN - the four words Memphis sanitation workers carried in 1968 - and who went on to lead CBTU for four decades. Memphis is not a footnote in that history. Memphis is the reason the organization exists. Our chapter is the living piece of that legacy, and it belongs to the members of every local in this Council, not to any one union.

Today CBTU has grown to more than seventy chapters across the United States and in Ontario, Canada, and it remains the largest independent voice of Black trade unionists in North America. It is not a union and it does not bargain your contract. It is the place where members from every local sit at the same table and decide how Black workers get represented inside the labor movement, inside their own unions, and in front of elected officials.

Why the national AFL-CIO expects us to support this work

This is not a side project. The AFL-CIO recognizes seven official constituency groups - the A. Philip Randolph Institute, the Asian Pacific American Labor Alliance, the Coalition of Black Trade Unionists, the Coalition of Labor Union Women, the Labor Council for Latin American Advancement, Pride at Work, and the Union Veterans Council. The federation describes them as the bridge between the labor movement and the communities our members come from, and it charges them with building full participation in union leadership.

The federation has been backing that up with structure. Since 2022 the constituency groups have been included in the regular affiliate political director meetings, given access to federation organizing and member-contact tools, and brought into monthly coordination with civil rights directors - that is reported in the Executive Council's report to the 30th Constitutional Convention. Our own international unions have said the same thing for years: AFSCME's standing resolution on support of AFL-CIO constituent organizations directs affiliates to encourage members to join these groups, seek leadership in them, and participate in their caucuses.

And the math says why. Black workers have the highest union membership rate of any group in the country, and they are

concentrated in exactly the public-sector, health care, warehouse and service jobs now under the hardest attack. The movement adopted a five-year agenda at the June 2026 convention that includes organizing two million new members. There is no version of that number that gets reached without Black workers, and no version that gets reached if the institutions built to organize them are left to run on three dues payments and a prayer.

What a member actually gets

- A seat and a vote in the chapter that speaks for Black workers in this city - and a voice in what the chapter takes on next.
- Leadership development and mentoring for younger trade unionists who want to move up in their own local.
- A direct line into voter registration, voter education and turnout work in working-class Memphis.
- Standing to be sent as a delegate to CBTU's regional and international conventions, where Memphis has history to defend and weight to throw.
- The labor-church-community bridge this city has relied on since 1968, kept in working order for the next fight instead of rebuilt in an emergency.

Membership is open to trade unionists of every union and to allies who stand with them. Retirees and former union members are welcome and wanted - not through a retiree committee, directly. A member who carried a card for thirty years still knows things the rest of us need.

The ask

Forward this letter, or the flyer that comes with it, to your members, your retirees and your former members. That is the whole ask. No local funds, no resolution, no committee.

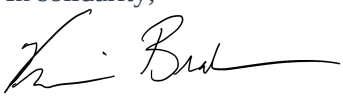
Annual chapter dues are $30 for Rank and File - active union members, and $15 for Rank and File - retired or former union members. Rank and File is the category members select on the national CBTU membership list. That is less than most of us spend on lunch in a week, and it is what keeps a chapter able to show up.

Members can sign up online at laboreducation.org/four-pillars#join-the-legacy, email the chapter at Cbtumemphis@gmail.com, or mail dues by check made payable to Memphis CBTU Chapter at P.O. Box 9086, Memphis, TN 38190. On the national CBTU membership list at action.cbtu.org/memphis, members should select Rank and File and choose Memphis, Tennessee - Region 4, so the membership is credited to this chapter. Meeting dates and locations will be announced to everyone who signs up, so getting on the list is the first step.

If you would rather I come speak to your membership directly, say the word and I will be there. If you want a stack of flyers for the hall, I will bring them.

Bill Lucy built this so Black workers inside the labor movement would never again have to ask permission to be heard. Keeping it strong in the city where he started is on us. Thank you for carrying this to your members.

In solidarity,



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