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Paul Soglin, Michael Johnson to attend summit addressing violence against African-American males

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Michael Johnson, CEO of the Boys and Girls Club of Dane County. Photo by Mike DeVries - The Capital Times

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Madison Mayor Paul Soglin and **Michael Johnson**, CEO of the Boys and Girls Club of Dane County, will travel to New Orleans this week to attend a meeting of **Cities United**, an initiative dedicated to eliminating violence-related deaths among young African-American men.

The duo will be joined by mayoral aide Astra Iheukumere and Daniel Yancey, an Edgewood College student.

"This is an opportunity to look at what other cities have done," Johnson said. "Even when you think you're doing the right thing, you can always learn from someone else. I've always seen education as a lifelong experience. If there's something we can learn, things we can bring back, I'm going to share it."

The conference is designed to mobilize mayors on the issue of violence-related deaths among African-American men and boys, to help identify steps to take control of the issue and to engage youth in the process, Soglin said.

"You look at all the **racial disparities in our city** — the achievement gap, the employment gap, the incarceration rate," Johnson said. "How do we improve the conditions of those that need adequate services to prevent them from getting in trouble? How do we prevent kids from going down that pipeline? We look at suspension rates, incarceration rates, look at young, African-American, Latino boys going to jail. How do we prevent that? How do we prepare our kids to dream?"

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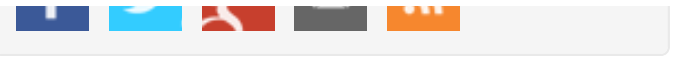
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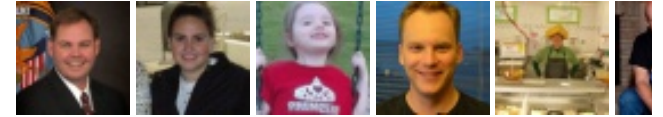
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Mayors and representatives from Milwaukee, New Orleans, Philadelphia, Birmingham, Ala., Oakland, Calif., and other cities will meet to discuss crime data from their cities and compare programs that have been successful in reducing violence.

"The data we have involving Madison indicates that Madison is one of the safest places for young African-American men — just, proportionally, they are more likely to be involved as victims than other demographic groups," Soglin said. "Where

our problems lie are in academic success, and then restorative justice — getting those who have been in trouble with the law into career opportunities."

Other topics that will be discussed include addressing barriers in order to encourage action within broader society, why race matters, how to engage youth and work with philanthropic organizations, building leadership and developing political will.

Attendees will discuss four specific policy areas, as well: education, employment, restorative justice and criminal justice — specifically, getting better legal representation for young men.

"The areas that I want to focus on are going to be engaging the philanthropic movement to fund action plans, and the topical areas that I want to personally focus on are the ones that deal with the criminal justice system and educational opportunity," Soglin said.

Johnson said he's never attended a conference focused solely on African-American males before. He said he thinks one of the most important things about this trip is that Yancey, a student, is able to attend. It's Yancey's first time attending a conference and his first time visiting New Orleans.

Johnson said he's planning on paying close attention to the sessions regarding after-school alliances.

"That's the piece that I really want to take a look at," Johnson said. "A conference on violence on

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African-American males — here in Dane County, we see that almost 50 percent of young African-American men are in jail, probation and parole. I don't want that to become my Boys and Girls Club kids. Whatever we can do to prevent kids from going down that pipeline, I want to see what folks have to offer."

Each city that was invited was given a scholarship to cover some of the costs of attending, Soglin said, adding that he hopes Madison can both implement some ideas that have worked in other places and **contribute its own ideas** to the discussion.

The City of Madison launched a Racial Equity and Social Justice Initiative last summer, through which officials have been **examining whether city policies and initiatives are equitable in practice**.

Cities United was launched in 2011, by Philadelphia Mayor Michael Nutter and New Orleans Mayor Mitch Landrieu.

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