



HISTORY OF

AFRAM

AFRICAN AMERICAN CAUCUS

The journey to establishing SEIU AFRAM was decades in the making, rooted in the fight for full participation and equity within SEIU. In the 1970s and 1980s, Black SEIU leaders, including Ophelia McFadden, Peter Otley, Will Smith, and Herman Lewis, led efforts to create the SEIU Civil & Human Rights Department and a dedicated International Executive Board (E-Board) committee. These initiatives laid the foundation for regional Civil & Human Rights Conferences and Committees, strengthening Black leadership and advocacy within SEIU.

In the early 1990s, under the leadership of Patricia A. Ford and others, a resolution was introduced at the 1992 SEIU International Convention to establish official caucuses within SEIU. While the Western Conference African American Caucus (WCAAC) was successfully formed, leaders in other regions faced resistance, sparking the push for a National African American Caucus.

A pivotal moment came in February 1996, when over 300 SEIU members gathered in Atlanta for the first SEIU African American Leadership Conference. Delegates adopted the African American Agenda and passed resolutions, including one calling for a National African American Caucus. The conference featured key workshops on leadership, organizing, political empowerment, and guest speakers such as Congresswoman Cynthia McKinney, Congressman John Lewis, and SEIU President Richard Cordtz.



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Following the conference, the African American Steering Committee endorsed Andy Stern's "New Voices" slate for SEIU leadership, securing increased representation for Black leaders. By the 1996 SEIU International Convention, a historic number of African Americans were elected or appointed to leadership roles, including Patricia Ann Ford as SEIU Executive Vice President. A resolution was also passed formally authorizing National Caucuses within SEIU.

In March 1997, at the Founding Convention in New Orleans, AFRAM officially took shape as The International Caucus for People of African Descent (AFRAM) SEIU. A constitution was adopted, and the first officers were elected, including Marchel Smiley as AFRAM's first President.

