



## **PRESS RELEASE**

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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- Rev. Delman Coates, Mt. Ennon Baptist Church, Clinton, MD.
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## **What Has Changed Since We Filed Our Lawsuit Against a Beverage Industry Giant and What Still Must Be Changed**

*Praxis, Lamar, Coates withdraws complaint filed in the DC Superior Court in 2017 against Coca Cola and the American Beverage Association*

Today, Rev. William H. Lamar IV, the senior pastor at DC's historic Metropolitan African Methodist Episcopal Church in Washington, DC; Rev. Delman Coates, pastor at Maryland's Mt. Ennon Baptist Church in Clinton, MD; and The Praxis Project from Washington, DC; withdrew our complaint filed in the DC Superior Court in 2017 seeking to stop Coca Cola and the American Beverage Association from making deceptive statements about the health risks of consuming sugar sweetened beverages.

The Praxis Project and Pastors Coates and Lamar had united back in 2017 to help stop the confusion and mixed messages our communities were receiving from the soda industry about the healthfulness of their sugary drinks.

The Praxis Project, as a national health organization that mostly works with frontline organizing groups working in areas where chronic diseases—type 2 diabetes, heart disease, stroke, fatty liver and tooth decay—are greatest, and knowing the research that points to sugary drinks as a primary driver of these preventable diseases, was compelled to address this issue in any way we could. Life expectancies in many of the areas where our grassroots partners work are typically lower than average, and oftentimes it is these preventable chronic diseases that drive it down.

Pastor Coates and Lamar, who provide guidance and comfort to mostly African American congregations in the Washington, DC area, have seen first-hand, the pain these preventable chronic diseases bring to families taking care of a loved one. They felt they had delivered too many funeral sermons for grieving families who had lost love ones to diseases linked to sugar-sweetened beverages.

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The good news is that, since we filed our suit, Coca Cola and the American Beverage Association have moved away from claiming that their products have no connection to chronic disease. As advocates who have to deal with the human toll resulting from the consumption of sugary drinks, in the face of so much research pointing to the health dangers, we are happy that we have not recently heard beverage industry executives continue to publicly mislead through statements like [“there is no scientific evidence that connects sugary beverages to obesity.”](#)

However, we still need more action from the beverage industry to improve health in our most vulnerable communities. We need the beverage industry to:

- [Stop “shaking down” state legislatures to pass laws that preempt local soda taxes.](#)
- Stop lobbying ([\\$67M in 2016](#)) against state and local efforts to raise revenues to address the root causes of preventable chronic diseases caused by their products and to warn consumers of the health dangers of sugary drinks.
- [Stop predatory marketing to communities of color.](#)
- Stop funding research and advocacy designed to shift blame for obesity away from sugary drinks.
- Stop trying to influence agencies such as the Center for Disease Control and Prevention and the World Health Organization to minimize attention and blame for chronic diseases away from sugary beverages.

The beverage industry’s manipulation to protect their sales, especially in communities of color and communities with lower incomes, is killing us. Literally. The current Covid-19 pandemic that is extremely lethal in our communities shows that underlying conditions matter. The beverage industry needs to stop hindering our efforts to increase healthy beverage consumption as we seek to decrease the underlying conditions that have made our communities more vulnerable to the Coronavirus.

The work of Pastors Coates and Lamar, and The Praxis Project is centered in a profound love for our communities. It is difficult for us to be innocent bystanders when we have to deal with the consequences of these dangerous beverages.

**The Praxis Project** is a national non-profit organization that works in partnership with national, regional, state, and local partners to achieve health equity and justice for all communities.

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#### **Notes to editor**

For images, more information, or interviews, please contact Diana Lieu, The Praxis Project at [diana@thepraxisproject.org](mailto:diana@thepraxisproject.org), (510) 827-1876.