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GBCVB Executive Vice President Hilina D. Ajakaiye Pioneering New Models for Growth and Inclusion in Boston's Travel & Tourism Industry

Greater Boston Convention & Visitors Bureau (GBCVB) Executive Vice President Hilina D. Ajakaiye is participating in important conversations this week. On October 26, Ajakaiye will join a [PRSA Boston panel](#) with executives from the *All Inclusive Boston* campaign. The discussion will provide an inside look at the City of Boston's first ever tourism marketing campaign, which aimed to reach a more diverse demographic of consumers. And on October 27, as part of the City's [Women Entrepreneurs Boston](#) program, she will moderate a panel comprised of Black female entrepreneurs.

This is nothing new for Ajakaiye. As the first woman of color to take on an executive role with the GBCVB, her voice and vision have been integral. Working alongside GBCVB CEO Martha J. Sheridan, she pursues the organizational goals laid out by the GBCVB Board of Directors through partnership, discourse, innovation, and community engagement.

"The visitor economy is a critical driver of Boston's vitality," said Ajakaiye. "It needs to be equitable and inclusive. Many areas of the city have not been marketed as they should be - their voice has been missing, as has their market share of visitor spending. We are here to shift that paradigm. That is a main priority envisioned by Martha Sheridan and our Board."

Ajakaiye joined the GBCVB in March of 2020, just as the global travel economy was on the brink of an unprecedented disruption. The timing of her arrival was fortuitous, not just for the survival of the GBCVB but for the overall enhancement of how the Bureau positions itself to prospective partners. While navigating the pandemic with Sheridan, their joint focus on an equitable recovery, authentic partnerships, and intentional marketing initiatives created a new strategic direction for the GBCVB.

"Hilina started in her role essentially at the same moment that the global pandemic hit," said GBCVB President & CEO Martha J. Sheridan. "Ultimately, the timing could not have been better for us. It might not have seemed it at the time, but the crisis really afforded her a unique moment to evaluate our processes and improve them. She hit the ground

running and has enhanced the value proposition of the GBCVB within the Greater Boston community, which has led to dozens of new member companies joining our organization.”

In many ways, the pandemic afforded destination marketing organizations a chance to reassess how they share their cultural ethos out to a broader community. Ajakaiye embraced the moment. When the City of Boston disseminated an RFP to shift the narrative around Boston’s reputation with communities of color, the *All Inclusive Boston* campaign was born. The Bureau collaborated with two esteemed agencies to execute a brilliant campaign that is now in its second phase. While Sheridan was the architect of the GBCVB’s role, it was Ajakaiye who oversaw the logistical management of the GBCVB’s main deliverables – developing a microsite and leading digital marketing and social media partnerships.

Ajakaiye’s focus on procurement models within the All Inclusive campaign reflects her and Sheridan’s larger goal to bring more equity to the industry. The GBCVB leadership team is also determined to build a more diverse workforce pipeline for upper management and executive level positions throughout the tourism and hospitality industry. Working with partners from Destinations International, Searchwide Global, and Tourism Diversity Matters, Ajakaiye is leading efforts to realize new training modules and pipeline programs.

Hilina Ajakaiye and Martha Sheridan are creating new language around how destination marketing strategies are developed and deployed. Ajakaiye’s work with the Bureau’s Multicultural Committee, and her engagement with entities such as King Boston, Boston While Black, and the Boston Black Hospitality Coalition, has repositioned the Bureau’s role in Greater Boston. She is also collaborating with the City of Boston Main Streets to convene a Focus Group that will take an honest look at Bureau membership so that the GBCVB can understand where it has work to do and how it can be done in an inclusive and genuine manner.

“Hilina has been a revelation. She joined the GBCVB leadership team of Martha Sheridan and Beth Stehley and together they have kept the GBVCB and our industry afloat during a period of tremendous adversity” said Dan Donahue, President of Saunders Hotel Group and Chair of the GBCVB Board of Directors. “Her dedication to broaden the lens, share more stories, and involve more voices – all in an intentional and authentic manner – has reshaped how the GBCVB does business and pursues partnership. We are all eager to see what she can accomplish in a post-pandemic world.”