



Birmingham Civil Rights Institute Appoints Deborah V. Bowie as President & CEO, Marking a New Era of Restoration, Community Partnership, and Mission Renewal

BIRMINGHAM, AL — December 16, 2025 — The Birmingham Civil Rights Institute (BCRI) today announced the appointment of **Deborah V. Bowie, MPA**, as its new President and Chief Executive Officer. A nationally respected executive with a distinguished multi-sector career in public administration, higher education, community development, and nonprofit leadership, Bowie assumes leadership at a pivotal moment for both the Institute and the nation.

Bowie is no stranger to Birmingham. Earlier in her career, she served as Chief of Staff to a former Mayor of Birmingham, Vice President at the former Birmingham Regional Chamber of Commerce (now the Birmingham Business Alliance) and worked as a news reporter for multiple media outlets serving the metro region. In the years since, she has led several nationally recognized nonprofits, including the United Way of North Central Florida, the onePulse Foundation, and served as Interim City Manager for the City of Gainesville. Most recently, she oversaw a \$5.8 million federal grants programs portfolio at the University of Central Florida supporting low-income, first-generation, and disabled college students in the Ginsburg Center for Inclusion and Community Engagement.

“We are honored to welcome Deborah Bowie back to Birmingham,” said Board and Search Committee Chair Rosilyn Houston, who also served as the interim CEO during this period of transition for the Institute.

“Deborah’s proven ability to stabilize organizations, strengthen governance, and build trusted relationships makes her arrival especially significant. She understands Birmingham’s civic fabric, its challenges, and its opportunities — and she is uniquely equipped to help reintroduce BCRI as the community-rooted institution it is meant to be.”

Houston noted that Bowie was selected following a highly competitive national search that drew an exceptional pool of candidates, reflecting both the significance of the role and the moment facing the Institute.

“Deborah’s prior experience and knowledge of Birmingham was reassuring to the Board of Directors that she could hit the ground running and be ready to lead the Institute on ‘day 1,’” said Houston, adding that the CEO selection comes after significant shifts in the charitable landscape driven by economic disruption, changing philanthropic priorities, and an increasingly polarized political climate.



“These pressures make BCRI’s mission — and its need for strong, stabilizing leadership — more urgent than ever,” Houston said. “The Board understands the responsibility of this moment, and we are confident in Deborah’s leadership.”

“It is deeply meaningful to return to the city where I once had the privilege of working alongside dedicated civic partners,” said Bowie. “Birmingham’s history as a beacon of change has influenced my work for many years and has remained close to my heart.”

“In a time of significant societal change, BCRI must stand firm as both a guardian of truth and an active convener of community dialogue,” she continued. “I am committed to restoring trust, strengthening partnerships, and ensuring that this institution reflects, elevates, and serves the community it belongs to.”

In her first year, Bowie said she will lead a focused agenda centered on community listening, donor and stakeholder re-engagement, operational stabilization, enhanced educational programming, and renewed collaborations with Birmingham’s neighborhoods, schools, faith communities, and cultural organizations. Her experience leading complex, high-impact organizations equips her to bridge history with contemporary needs and guide the Institute toward a stronger, more sustainable future.

BCRI’s Board will collaborate closely with Bowie on advancing governance reforms, increasing transparency, and expanding community input and participation as core elements of the Institute’s renewal.

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About the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute (BCRI). An affiliate of the Smithsonian Institution and part of the Birmingham Civil Rights National Monument, the BCRI is a cultural and educational research center that promotes a comprehensive understanding for the significance of civil rights developments in Birmingham that changed our world. BCRI reaches up to 150,000 individuals each year through museum visits, group tours, outreach (school and community), award-winning public programs, exhibitions, and extensive archival collections. For more information, visit www.bcri.org.