



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
October 12, 2017

Contact: Jenny Waldmann
202.778.1055
jwaldmann@apcoworldwide.com

Industry Veteran Julie Coker Graham to Co-Chair Meetings Mean Business Coalition

Washington, DC – The [Meetings Mean Business Coalition](#) (MMBC) has appointed Julie Coker Graham, president and chief executive officer of the [Philadelphia Convention & Visitors Bureau](#) (PHLCVB), as its next co-chair. Coker Graham will join Paul Van Deventer, president and chief executive officer of [Meeting Professionals International](#) (MPI), in leading the coalition and promoting the value of face-to-face meetings, conferences, conventions, incentive travel, trade shows and exhibitions.

“We are very excited to have Julie be the first CEO of a convention and visitors bureau to co-chair MMBC,” said Van Deventer. “Her insights, experience and passion for our industry will be invaluable assets to the coalition, as we expand our reach among frontline industry professionals and destination leaders.”

Coker Graham is the first woman to lead the PHLCVB and the only African American woman to lead a destination marketing organization in a top U.S. market. Under her direction, MMBC will continue to advocate the industry’s value story among a diverse group of stakeholders, including meeting professionals, business leaders and elected officials. The coalition will also continue to reinforce the economic impact of face-to-face meetings in cities such as Philadelphia, where in 2016, meetings and conventions booked by the PHLCVB generated an estimated \$989 million in economic impact.

“I am looking forward to serving alongside Paul Van Deventer and the entire MMBC team as we advocate for the meetings and convention industry,” said Coker Graham. “You cannot deny the value of face-to-face meetings – they are the foundation for generating positive results across all industries while also creating economic benefits for local communities across the country.”



Coker Graham will assume the leadership position previously held by Richard Harper, executive vice president at [HelmsBriscoe](#). Harper has co-led MMBC since 2016 and has been an ardent supporter of the coalition since its inception. Under his leadership, MMBC has highlighted the role of face-to-face in an election year through its [Worth Meeting About](#) campaign; illustrated the stories of third party validators and C-suite executives through its [Business Leader video series](#); rallied the industry for the second annual [Global Meetings Industry Day](#) (GMID); and expanded engagement with grassroots industry professionals through the [MMBC Ambassador](#) network. With his guidance and support, MMBC has grown to house more than [60 members](#) and continues to shape discussions around some of the meetings and events industry's most critical issues.

"I want to thank Richard for his passion and dedication to MMBC since its inception. His contributions over the last two years as co-chair have helped grow the coalition's reach and impact," said Van Deventer.

Coker Graham will begin her term on January 1, 2018. As president and chief executive officer of the PHLCVB, she will continue to oversee all of the organization's departments and operational duties. Prior to her current role, Coker Graham served as the senior vice president of convention sales at the PHLCVB and managed a staff of 25 sales and services professionals responsible for selling the Pennsylvania Convention Center and Philadelphia's hotel package to customers across the country. Of note, Coker Graham was named chair of Mayor Jim Kenney's transition team as Philadelphia prepared to host the 2016 Democratic National Convention.

###

About Meetings Mean Business

Meetings Mean Business is an industry-wide coalition to showcase the undeniable value that business meetings, trade shows, incentive travel, exhibitions, conferences and conventions bring to people, businesses and communities. By rallying industry advocates, working with stakeholders, conducting original research, engaging with outside voices and more, the coalition brings the industry together to emphasize its importance. Comprised of over 60 members, the coalition unites the meetings industry with one strong and powerful voice. For more information, visit www.MeetingsMeanBusiness.com.

