

## **“The Time is Now”**

A Statement to the AOC

October 14, 2015

At the absolute core of sexual violence is oppression. Racism and sexism, and the continued tolerance of them, are what enable violence in all its forms to persist. Not only is the rape and abuse of marginalized individuals (particularly women of color) tolerated, but women of color are systematically excluded from efforts to address the violence that they are disproportionately suffering.

We know this, and yet sometimes we become too comfortable, too complacent within the nuances our work to keep this as our focus. If we are to affect meaningful change in our state, we must keep anti-oppression as our focus at all times – more so than the grants that fund our programs, more so than the many projects that consume our time, and more so than our very jobs themselves. Our work is in fact meaningless if we lose sight of the oppression occurring this very moment in every community in Ohio.

A commitment to true equality, to the utmost well-being of all individuals and communities, and to ending sexual violence in our state depends on one thing above all else: **our integrity**. As individuals who bring our own biases, privilege, and experiences to anti-oppression work, it is impossible for each of us to know all things and to do all things. Such is not what we are charged with; rather, we are charged with committing ourselves to knowing more and doing more than we did yesterday. And with that knowledge and forward motion, we are bound together and accountable to one another.

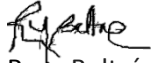
It is **accountability** that must guide our individual and collective work in the Anti-Oppression Committee (AOC). First, we must be willing to hold ourselves personally accountable for our commitment to, and meaningful participation in, the work of the committee. This means prioritizing the scheduled meetings and tasks of the AOC, to include attending all meetings in full and providing timely responses to questions, needs, and agreed-upon tasks. While the work of some committees may be able to succeed despite our casual participation in them, *this is not one of those committees*. The success of the AOC in implementing the agreed-upon State Action Plan depends on the full commitment of every single person on the AOC. Secondly, we must be willing to hold ourselves collectively accountable as a committee. Our goals may at times seem difficult to conceptualize and attain, but that difficulty in no way absolves us of the responsibility we have freely accepted. If anything, the difficulties we encounter are opportunities to strengthen our purpose and reinvigorate our work.

There are survivors in our state who are silenced both by the oppressive violence they've suffered and by the institutionalized oppression they experience daily. There are smart, talented, passionate women of color in our state who can and should be in positions of leadership within rape crisis centers and allied organizations. But they are not in those positions. These realities – these raw, glaring examples of oppression in our midst - are on us individually and collectively to address. Anything less than all of our focus is not enough. We must be committed, and be committed fully.

As co-chairs of the AOC, we likewise hold ourselves accountable to upholding the mission and value of this committee, both personally and professionally. It is our honor to work alongside each of you in beginning to dismantle the systemic oppression that enables sexual violence and the exclusion of women of color leaders to persist in our state. The current focus on sexual violence in Ohio is unprecedented, and we as a committee are uniquely positioned to direct that focus onto the very real

and devastating oppression behind the violence. Now is the time for our sustained, passionate commitment to this work. Now is the time to demonstrate to every person, program, and community in Ohio that the Anti-Oppression Committee is more than a name, more than a group of people. It is – ***we are*** – the voice of truth and the vehicle of change in our state.

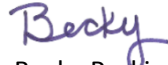
Respectfully,



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