

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Omaha, Nebraska ----- August 23, 2020

CALL TO ACTION TEAM AT WOMEN'S CENTER FOR ADVANCEMENT TAKES ACTION

In May of 2020 a group of dedicated staff from the Women's Center for Advancement (WCA) began meeting to discuss diversity, inclusion and equity issues that were present in the WCA culture. Our team is diverse, and is made up of members from nearly every WCA department. We called ourselves the Call to Action Team. On May 29th we presented a Call to Action Plan to the Executive Team of the WCA. It was a multi-page document that included specific action steps in several areas. Some of the major ones were:

1. Educate and discuss white privilege, race, and inequality on an organizational-wide basis and make this mandatory for leadership.
2. Use intentional and informed language to create systems that promote inclusion and equity.
3. Add a position to the Executive Team with responsibility for diversity, inclusion and equity issues and fill this position with a person who has lived experience.
4. Change the decision-making process at the WCA from one that is hierarchical to one that is circular and includes diverse minds and experiences.
5. Reach out to Black and Brown community organizations, acknowledge our past failure to do so, and seek to become part of their solutions, celebrations, and promotions.
6. Value lived experience in the same way educational level is valued by adjusting job descriptions and hiring practices to include lived experience and professional experience as consideration for applicants without a degree. At the same time, create opportunities for staff to have access to higher education.
7. Use marketing and social media platforms to educate about inequities and support just causes.
8. Actively seek out and collaborate with diverse and inclusive organizations and business, including the procurement of goods and services.

We understood many of the action items in our Call to Action involved some time to implement. On June 8, 2020 we subsequently provided the Executive Team with a "Mini Call to Action". This included steps that could be taken more immediately: 1) adding a lived experience quotient to be used in place of a degree; 2) read and reflect on documents regarding oppression and white privilege; 3) amend the social media plan to share perspective of employees with lived experience regarding racial injustice, violence and white privilege; and 4) schedule a weekly recap meeting to discuss progress on all of the Call to Action steps. Amy Richardson provided a response to the "Mini Call to Action" on June 12, 2020. This was the last date of correspondence from Amy Richardson to the Call to Action team, and the last time the document was mentioned within the agency.

Over the ensuing twelve weeks the Call to Action team continued to apply pressure to the Executive Team and the Board of Directors through emails and letters requesting action. In addition, many staff individually sent letters and emails to the Board of Directors.

July 17, 2020- Due to inaction and active attempts to discredit the Call to Action team, the Call to Action team reached out to the WCA Board of Directors for support, providing a formal Grievance Complaint. (excerpt from email) *We are writing you today to raise concerns about the behavior and*

actions of members of the WCA Executive Team. Members of the executive team have not upheld the values, mission, or standards of conduct the agency is built upon and have violated multiple of such governing policies. Please read the attached "Grievance Complaint" which details specific instances of these violations.

July 21, 2020, Board of Directors Executive Committee reports receipt of Grievance Complaint.

(excerpt from email) *On behalf of the Board of Directors, the Executive Committee acknowledges receipt of your email and attachment of Ethical Grievances with supporting documentation. We appreciate the efforts for all those who participated to come forward. We want to assure you that there will be no retribution based on anyone's participation.*

July 27, 2020 Call to Action contacted the Board to report retaliatory actions by Amy Richardson.

(excerpt from email) *We, as the Call to Action team, appreciate your response of receipt to our Ethical Grievance complaint submitted to the WCA Board. We look forward to your formal response by August 3, 2020.As a member of the Call to Action team would like extend our gratitude to you for taking this seriously and acting on it urgently. Since sending this document to you, there have been some actions that seem retributory from our CEO against me.*

I bring this incident to your attention to not only highlight the retribution tactics that are being used, but also to give an example of the environment many of us are having to work under since the Call to Action document was submitted. We are constantly reminded that we now have a target on our back, and that any behavior or inconsistency within our documentation can be used against us and our future employment at the agency. These kinds of actions are often use to keep employees within the WCA "in line" when we attempt to speak out against the toxic work environment. I value the mission of our agency and want to ensure all staff who are passionate about serving our community are empowered to speak out against injustices within our community and this agency without fear of losing their employment.

Again, we appreciate the seriousness you see in this and look forward to your response by August 3rd.

August 3, 2020- Executive Committee member replies (excerpt from email) *Thank you for the additional information. We will add this to the file and it will be included in the investigation.*

At some point between July 17, 2020-August 3, 2020 all documents and communication regarding the Grievance Complaint were turned over to Amy Richardson by an Executive Committee member, despite the Call to Action team being informed there would be an official investigation conducted.

Between the dates of June 12, 2020 and August 14, 2020 Amy Richardson targeted the only Black male staff in the organization

One of the most disturbing forms of retaliation that Amy Richardson used involved going to the Executive Committee of the board of directors and constructing a destructive narrative portraying the only Black man that works at the Women's Center for Advancement as a bully and tormentor to her sensibilities. Amy Richardson stated that she thought this individual had an alias or a different name that he used. In addition, she convinced the board that he was loud, possibly dangerous, and aggressive to her physical and mental wellbeing. Amy Richardson targeted him specifically and insinuated to the board that he was a threat to her physical safety and she did not feel safe at home because of his former

law enforcement background. This situation continues to be dangerous for him because of this false narrative, and that someone could possibly do harm to him and his family for the speaking the truth.

August 12, 2020- Call to Action team member publicly shared to all staff members the ongoing racist, stonewalling, and retaliatory actions that had occurred between June 12, 2020 and August 12, 2020.

(excerpt from Outlook Teams All Chat) I am shook by the words of many of my co-workers. There is divisiveness running through our organization. This tension and quite honestly nastiness is damaging to the health and wellness of our employees and a distraction to the work many of us are here to do. This divisiveness is not rooted in national politics, a difference of opinion, or in a freedom of speech debate but is divisiveness in the way we define humanity, equity, safety, and justice. It is shocking and disappointing but also worrisome when thinking about where we go from here and how this behavior impacts our clients.

As pressure has mounted over the last months- WCA employees and staff have said and done things that are so damaging, racist, and without regard to our mission, our clients, and the wellness of our staff. These words and behaviors have not been called out, denounced, or discussed. The inaction and stonewalling behavior by agency leaders presents like an approval of this bad behavior.

(Trigger warning: following quotes will be hard to read and potentially cause a range of emotions- from anger, resentment, sadness, betrayal, and pain).

"I think the WCA has power and control issues but none of this has anything to do with race." "Black people are only 13% of the population, why are we doing all this?" "I am sorry I am white!" "Asians are to blame for bringing COVID here." "BLM is a cult group." Maybe the above quotes are not yours but maybe you are part of creating a narrative that: The Call to Action (C2A) is a group that is dangerous or violent and formed only to unseat current leadership; People critical of leadership are personally attacking you, intent on following you or harming you; People who speak of the agency dysfunction and dynamics of power and control are hoping that it creates a level of personal stress for you- leading to disruption in your sleep or eating habits.

August 14, 2020 – Call to Action requested the Board immediately remove Amy Richardson as President and CEO of the WCA and asked for the resignation of any Board member who cannot support the Call to Action. The following concerns were reported: (excerpt from email)

We advise that this inaction is due to not only the personal values and beliefs of Amy Richardson, but further reveals her close relationship with the staff members who have made and publicly admitted to making these statements.

The following are items of concern:

- The inaction to resolve the concerns presented to the Executive Team on May 28th, 2020.*
- The protection and willful approval of racist actions and words by WCA staff members.*
- The unwillingness to collaborate and communicate with the Call to Action group.*
- The retaliatory and targeting behavior displayed by members of the Executive Team and the Finance Team.*

· The length of time the Executive Team and Call to Action investigative team took to respond to the complaints, concerns and grievances provided on July 17th, 2020.

· The impact of this dysfunctional, harmful behavior on our clients.

We recommend the immediate removal of Amy Richardson from her position as President and CEO and an immediate investigation into the racist remarks she has refused to address.

On August 14th we were informed our President and CEO, Amy Richardson was placed on leave. The Call to Action Team has asked the Board of Directors to terminate the employment of Amy Richardson. We have also asked that all board members who cannot and will not support the Call to Action agenda to resign. It is the team's belief that without these actions, the staff of the WCA are obstructed in being able to provide the high quality of services to survivors of domestic violence, sexual assault, stalking and human trafficking that our community both needs and deserves.

FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT: C2ATeamOmaha@gmail.com