

February 25, 2021

An Open Letter to the People of Hartford and the Citizens of Vermont from the Town of Hartford School District

The first step in dealing with a problem is realizing that there is a problem. And we, the citizens of Vermont, have a problem we must address. We have repeatedly permitted the forces of bigotry, hatred, and racial prejudice to silence the voices of BIPOC (Black, Indigenous and People of Color) women of color who have had the courage to attempt to participate in the civic life of our communities.

In 2018, the state's only Black woman legislator, Kiah Morris, (D, Bennington) was stalked and harassed by a white supremacist until she declined, despite her popularity in her district, to run again. In September of 2020, Tabitha Moore, head of the local chapter of the NAACP in the Rutland area, announced she was moving from Rutland County because of vandalism, racial harassment, and social media comments targeting both her and her daughter. And, in January 2021, Hartford Select Board member Alicia Barrow stepped down from her position, citing safety concerns and "blatant bigotry."

Not only is the racially-based harassment, coercion, and intimidation which these women (and others like them) have been subjected to morally repugnant, it must be viewed as a fundamental threat to the democratic principles upon which our nation is based.

When it is directed toward elected officials, those running for elected office, or those citizens who are exercising their 1st amendment rights by raising their voices on such subjects as the systematic racial injustice endemic in our society, the threat of violence and other forms of harassment, coercion, and intimidation are not just crimes against individuals: they are a direct assault upon our democratic system of self-governance.

Accordingly, we who have signed below, call upon those in law enforcement at the local, state, and federal levels to make the investigation of such crimes a top priority. We ask that all levels of law enforcement take such crimes seriously and that they work diligently to identify and prosecute all who would attempt to subvert and interfere with the political process by means of violence, threats of violence, or by other forms of harassment, coercion, and intimidation.

We also call upon all those who serve as elected officials in Vermont to raise their voices in condemnation of all such attempts to silence speech by violence. And we ask them to proactively use the power of their positions as board members, legislators, and government officials to ensure those who would use such tactics are never allowed to succeed in silencing the voices of any members of our community.

In addition, this governing body specifically denounces such behavior and pledges its full support to the administration and employees of the District in their efforts to combat these unconscionable actions and to fully support all individuals who are targets of such harassment. This support shall include both policy and budgetary support and prioritization of efforts to address racial inequities as part of the District's operating activities.

Signed,

Kevin B. Christie, Chair Russell North, Clerk Michelle Boleski

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