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Burlington, VT
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RE: RJA Health Bill Testimony

See Something, Say something.

Sound Familiar?

Happy Black History Month Brave Little State Legislators!

I am here today to testify in support of the Racial Justice Alliance's HealthCare bill H210.

I have lived in VT since 1974 when I was a child. I survived the Burlington School System.

I began standing up for racial justice in Burlington when I was about 16 years old in 1982 at a rally on City Hall steps to protest the KKK's plans to hold a gathering in Southern Vermont.

I was afraid. In 2021, I am even more afraid. I don't feel safe in VT. I am often asked, "where are you from?" or "what brings you to VT?" **Translation:** you don't belong here.

We all witnessed what happened to Kiah Morris and to Tabitha Moore. It is frightening. Our Attorney General called hate speech and racial harassment of a family with children, "freedom of speech".

He failed to protect Kiah and her family. I have been leading the RJA's Wellness Working Group for about 6 months. We have worked hard. Thank you Representative Cina for your work.

This is a personal matter for me that has to be dealt with in a business forum. I took time out of my day today as I have done many, many times to help you do your job.

Rather than bearing my soul to feed the white appetite for trauma tourism that plagues VT "Social Justice" spaces where people have good intentions

but no real will to make change, I have a few questions for you.

Answer them on your own time as part of your internal process.

Q-What have you done to learn about the unmet Physical and Mental Health needs of Black and Brown Vermonters?

Q-Do you understand the phrase **policy violence**?

Q-Are you equipped to look at existing policy or policy you create through a racial justice lense?

Just like all Americans, you have not only been taught and brainwashed, you have consciously bought into the **myth** of white supremacy because it benefits you politically, economically,

culturally and genetically. Vermont, just like the rest of the world, is browning.

I understand that not supporting this legislation or whitewashing it benefits you. I understand that doing nothing benefits you and the status quo is your comfort zone.

Taking risks that may compromise your political aspirations with your base impacts your decisions.

I know it is fear that prevents you from doing the **new right thing** instead of the **old white thing**. I also know decisions made out of fear are based in cowardice, selfishness and are sadly predictable in VT.

Trump is a symptom of a deeper problem that has come to light.

I believe there is a little Trump in all of you and I know many of you have Trump-type relatives.

All it took was a phone call to police over a \$20 bill by a racist store owner to spur the televised murder of George Floyd at the hands of police to put systemic racism into the national conversation.

The resulting BLM **peaceful** protests, national organizing of millions of people, and a deadly mob of mainly white, racist Trump supporters attacking the capital to force many whites to take a look at the reality we suffer from every day of our lives. How long will that last?

If you acknowledge the existence of systemic racism anywhere, you are acknowledging that it exists everywhere. I am not talking about implicit bias, unconscious prejudice, or other whitewashed words and excuses for individual behaviors used to justify the individual role you play in perpetuating systems that benefit you.

As a woman of color, I can't afford to care how you feel about me on an individual level. Thankfully, I don't need your approval or affirmation to exist or tell the truth.

I do care that you as elected officials have a history of being complicit through your inaction and poor stewardship over your power.

There is an urgent and real need to change 401 year old systems that are by design causing harm to a specific group of people right now! Some people have 30 year plans because they see dollar signs.

We don't!

Black and brown descendants of slaves are an unprotected, vulnerable population. Look at our police, court, incarceration, land, wealth and home ownership data if you haven't already.

It tells an undisputable story. Your numbers don't lie, do they?

Finally, I ask you to consider what I am going to tell you as I finish. It is something to help you examine more deeply the intricacies of the construct of systemic racism.

If you embrace the truth in what I am about to say, it will at least enhance and at best transform your limited understanding of the harmful role of racist beliefs. It is the collection of these beliefs

that underpin the oppressive caste system we call American society that tells us we should just pull ourselves up by our bootstraps. This moment is hopefully a teachable one.

When we were developing the language of this bill, we had to face the reality that all the other groups have to be included in order for it to pass.

Black American people can't demand progress without carrying other groups along the way. It reminds me of slaves preparing food for their owners before they could eat the left over crap of their owners and their families.

Why is that true?

Is being black a disability?

Is being black a lifestyle choice or sexual preference?

Is being black a crime?

What the hell is a BIPOC?

Is being black a lifetime sentence of poverty wages to feed Vermont's dairy industry and keep Ben and Jerry's in business?

Why do so many other groups enjoy your support economically, politically and why are they so easily afforded space to stand alone with a singular group identity?

Why do (New Americans, LGBT, Disability Community, Migrant Workers) hesitate to stand with us and as they establish themselves, eventually distance themselves from us?

As white, privileged people, you don't ever have to give these caste system dynamics any thought. They have been designed by your people for you.

Sex Offenders with Developmental Disabilities have a law that protects them. - Act 248, enacted in 1987 and we all know about all the state funds that have been invested in COSA programs.

Indigenous People, many of whom acculturated into whiteness and owned slaves have land grants and political power because politically, it works. Why is that?

Do European Immigrants in America need your help? Why not?

Why is it an "either or" conversation instead of an "and" proposition?

If the newly formed Reparations Task Force in Burlington makes recommendations a year from now and it will, where will you stand on that?

What political or economic power do Black and brown descendants of American slaves have? The descendants of American slaves are still expected to take whatever crumbs fall off the masters table while immigrants, so called "new americans" and every other non white able bodied group enjoy a preferred minority status. Why?

The descendants of slaves are the people who's lives, labor, culture, roots in civilization, music, art, wombs, resilience & existence have been the key ingredients (aside from white greed)

that makes America a "Super Power" with economic and political superiority in the global scene. VT never actually abolished slavery. Read PR2 if you don't understand.

Why is there so much resistance to us establishing our own singular identity and political agenda? Why is that?

Do you have the mental bandwidth and moral courage to examine and recognize these things? Am I making you uncomfortable?

Even though there are not a lot of us in the State of VT, our lives, our medical needs, our wellness MATTERS.

If anything I have said disturbs or better yet disrupts your comfort zone, I have done my job. When I see something, I will say something.

You are public servants. Do your job.

