

June 10, 2020

To the National Organization for Women National Board,

First, we understand that some of you may be upset that NOW has come under scrutiny for racist behavior exemplified by our current sitting president. We understand you may think that this divides the feminist movement. But if we are truly committed, as an organization, to being anti-racist and uplifting the voices of those most marginalized in this organization, then we must step back from our anger and disappointment and assess the facts.

Toni Van Pelt, the current president, has allowed the Communications Manager, Kim Sontag to maintain her Online Digital Manager position. Kim Sontag posted racist accusations against a black man on Facebook and has not faced any repercussions although multiple State Presidents have inquired as to any action taken.

There is a current lawsuit against Toni by her former Vice President, Gilda Yazzie, a Native American woman. There is The Daily Beast article which outlines the continuous tokenizing of the current Vice President, Christian Nunes, a Black woman. We also have a letter signed by 15 former National Action Center Staff members that was sent to the board in 2018 to call out the current sitting president's problematic and racist behavior.

The former staff had nothing to gain from writing and submitting that letter. Their only hope was to preserve the reputation NOW has built for over 50 years.

We are also shocked and disappointed to learn that the Board hired an investigator who did not conduct a thorough investigation and did not provide a written report of their investigation. The staff who wrote the letter were not contacted or interviewed and the investigator did not speak with former Vice President Gilda Yazzie.

The letter from the NAC Staff members referenced that Toni's erratic and racist behavior lost not only well-respected staff members but also severed partnerships with external partners and organizations. And since the first article was released on Saturday, we have received several messages and emails from individuals who have worked with the national organization. There are also additional messages in the comment section online. All of the messages were the same: they had first person accounts of how terrible it was to work with the NOW president, and that they would never work with NOW again if Toni were still president and they were glad that NOW members were finally doing something about it. Four National Action Center staff have resigned since January and all four confirmed to the state presidents that racial issues were one of the many reasons they left the organization.

If we do not address the problems in our organization and with our leadership, there will no longer be a NOW. This is our opportunity, as an organization in one collective voice, to put our principles into practice. Our requests address the accusations of racism against our current president and how we can ensure that diversity, equity, and inclusion are a top priority at NOW.

Many NOW State Presidents, from every region of the country, have called for the National President to resign and for the Board to begin a strategic examination of the structural racism and other inequities at all levels throughout the National Organization. This is about more than one person who has clearly demonstrated poor decision-making and communication skills that have put our organization at risk, possibly including liable legal and financial malfeasance. This

is about walking our talk to stand for racial justice and to combat all injustices in every level of our organization. Anti-racism is a core issue and foundation of NOW and we must fight to create an inclusive organization.

As NOW's Board of Directors, we call on you to lead, govern, oversee, supervise, and ultimately take responsibility for the actions of NOW's President at this point in time. We have sufficient facts and lived testimony from current members that must not be discounted. We anticipate more information will continue to come to light as former members, staff, and board members feel empowered to speak their truth. Our Membership, Leaders, endorsed Candidates, allied organizations, the Public, the trust, and the reputation of NOW is at stake!

We the undersigned NOW State Presidents, request the following:

- 1. NOW President Toni Van Pelt accept responsibility for her actions, apologize, and step down.** Toni Van Pelt has lost the confidence from NOW leadership. NOW bylaws provide a process to remove a national officer. It is clear that Toni Van Pelt is not capable of leading an intersectional feminist organization. If she doesn't resign, we ask the board to call for her resignation at the June 21st special meeting.
- 2. Create an Oversight Committee to provide leadership in the transition process and up through the NOW Elections in 2021 and is accountable to the National Board. This would consist of three National Board members, three State Presidents, and one NAC Staff member. The State Presidents should represent all parts of the US and include a representative from the East, Midwest, and West. The Board and State Presidents would, together, choose the individuals to sit on the Oversight Committee (OC).**

The OC would oversee the process of hiring qualified, experienced consultant(s) to strategically analyze NOW's structural racism and other inequities throughout the organization to make recommendations for modernization and full inclusive participation and leadership development. This would include reviewing personnel and other policies, hiring practices, all processes and systems, all finances, diversity/equity/inclusion policies and training, and anything else that the Oversight Committee deems necessary to make sure NOW functions most efficiently and equitably.
- 3. Revise NOW bylaws to limit board terms to 2- two year terms in a NOW member's lifetime.** We believe that the current structure allows board members to stay in the organization for a long time and thus does not encourage new members and leadership development.

In Sisterhood,

State Presidents

Sheila Ogea, Arizona NOW
Kolieka Seigle, California NOW
Cynthia Wolfe Boynton, Connecticut NOW
Monica Weeks, DC NOW
Kim Porteous, Florida NOW
Triana Arnold James, Georgia NOW
Janette Cobb, Indiana NOW
Sandy Bell, Maryland NOW
Sasha Goodfriend, Massachusetts NOW

Nina Muckenthaler, Michigan NOW - added 6/15
Joan Boone, Minnesota NOW
Freda Mckee, Missouri NOW
Jan Strout, Montana NOW
Jeri Burton, Nevada NOW
Sonia Ossorio, New York NOW
Gailya Paliga, North Carolina NOW
Carolyn Casper, Ohio NOW
Samantha Perason, Pennsylvania NOW
Hillary Friedman, Rhode Island NOW
Chavah Le La Cheur, Utah NOW
Terri Lindeke, Washington NOW
Meredith Hartery, West Virginia NOW
Lindsay Lemmer, Wisconsin NOW

Chapters

Arizona NOW - added 6/27
California NOW Executive Committee
DC NOW
Georgia NOW
Indiana NOW
Maryland NOW
Massachusetts NOW
Michigan NOW - added 6/15
Minnesota NOW
Missouri NOW
Montana NOW
Nevada NOW
New York NOW
North Carolina NOW
Pennsylvania NOW
Rhode Island NOW
Utah NOW
Washington NOW
West Virginia NOW

**List updated as of June 12, 2020*

** For Internal Audiences Only*