



MOVEMENT IN OMAHA FOR RACIAL EQUITY

### Board of Directors

Karen Abrams  
Biagio Arobba  
Nick Beaulieu  
A'Jamal Byndon  
Y'Shall Davis  
Lizzie Hudson  
Terrell McKinney  
LaTina Rencher  
LaQuita Willis  
Riley Wilson  
Brea Worthington  
JaQuala Yarbro

February 23, 2021

Dear Anne and others on the Race Equity 2030 Proposal team,

For those in this group who don't know me, I'm Karen Abrams, with Movement in Omaha for Racial Equity (MORE). We are one of the few organizations in Omaha whose mission is dedicated to pursuing racial equity through antiracist strategies. We were invited into the initial conversations for this grant project. While MORE is now excluded as a partner in the project, I'm nonetheless taking this opportunity to provide our critical review of the draft proposal that was forwarded to me by A'Jamal Byndon.

MORE fully supports the pursuit of fair housing through changes to culture, policies, and practices as a critical antiracist strategy necessary to improve lives for people of color. Our foundational critique of this proposal is not that it focuses on housing. Rather, we oppose this project because it was envisioned by white people, will be led by white people (with the exception of Mr. Mui of Singapore), and evaluated by white people.

If our goal is to dismantle racist oppression and increase racial equity with a focus on the majority Black community of North Omaha, how can we move forward when this proposal includes not one Black person in a leadership position? When Black people have been excluded from the design of the project? And, when Black people are excluded from evaluating project outcomes?

The initial list of program partners is equally and overwhelmingly white, in particular when we examine the Nebraska partners who are critical to bringing this project to fruition. With the exception of Inclusive Communities, the Nebraska partners listed are both majority white, and have poor reputations for racial equity (UNO, Creighton University, and Nebraska Children and Families Foundation). Not one of these Nebraska partners—including Inclusive Communities—is Black-led. Not one is located in North Omaha.

MORE's additional critiques of this proposal are laid out in the following bullet points:

- The proposed solution is that the Singapore model of a “transformative approach to housing” will lead to “racial and social equity in our juvenile and criminal justice” systems. A recent research report examining racism in Singapore notes that the absence of racial riots is the measure of successful antiracist policy in Singapore. However, the authors point out that “it is unclear if the absence of racial riots [in Singapore] is due to an effective reduction of prejudice or to the penalties imposed by the laws of Singapore.” The authors add that despite an absence of racial riots, the Singapore model has been “unable to address the protracted racial disparities in education and economic status.”

(Source: <https://www.cambridge.org/core/services/aop-cambridge-core/content/view/7AF69F385DFE2EC470A141E1E7784AB0/S183449091800003Xa.pdf/div-class-title-racism-in-singapore-a-review-and-recommendations-for-future-research-div.pdf>.)

- The “Intended Path to Impact” is based on a criminology/law enforcement approach. As a result, success is envisioned as reduced crime by a dangerous population living in dangerous communities. A criminology/law enforcement lens predisposes this project towards a focus on crime as the problem leading to racial disparities in the justice system. Adopting a public health, a human rights, or a sociological lens might lead to a dramatically different, more antiracist, impact analysis.
- The “plan to partner with cross-national experts in restorative justice and relationship building, to facilitate the racial healing required to envision equitable housing for all” is a strategy based on the premise that problems in individual human relationships are what need to be fixed in order to increase racial equity. That strategy is in conflict with the reality of the systemic racism that underlies both U.S. racial segregation and racial and ethnic disparities among those caught up in our justice systems.
- Another premise of this project is that “low home ownership, high rent, and high eviction neighborhoods” help to “facilitate juvenile crime, poor schools, and gang affiliation, which, in turn, stigmatizes youth and funnels many into the adult criminal justice system.” This ignores the very strong evidence that systemic racism embedded in the culture, policies, and practices of police departments and other city institutions, courts, child welfare systems, social services, and public schools, etc., is what funnels both children and adults of color into our criminal justice systems.

In conclusion, this proposal fails to be antiracist from the inside out, and therefore is incapable of achieving antiracist and racial equity goals from the outside in. This proposal first and foremost fails because it excludes Black people from North Omaha from the envisioning, leadership, partnership, and evaluation processes. While other issues are also problematic, the exclusion of Black people from this project’s formation is why the project fails to be antiracist, why it is incapable of achieving racial equity, and why we oppose it.

Sincerely,



Karen Abrams  
Board of Directors  
Movement in Omaha for Racial Equity

***MORE is an antiracist organization fighting for racial equity in communities through engagement, education, and advocacy.***