



MIDWIFERY EQUITY COALITION

Fostering Safe Midwifery Spaces for ALL

March 3, 2021

To The Board of Directors of the South Seattle Women's Health Foundation,

We are writing to you as former students, interns, staff, board members, and midwives at Rainier Valley Midwives and Rainier Valley Community Clinic. This letter is a declaration of our shared concerns and grievances, including instances of rampant anti-black racism, transphobia, and harm that students, interns, and staff have endured. As a clinic and midwifery practice, RVCC/RVM is no longer upholding South Seattle Women's Health Foundation's mission which states a commitment "to creating spaces that support midwives and student midwives of color to thrive in their learning and their work."

We, BIPOC, and gender diverse folks sought care, protection, and community at RVCC/RVM. Instead, we were silenced, underpaid, disregarded, and harmed in the name and protection of whiteness and "progress." We were told that if we wanted to be seen and have autonomy as students, staff, and practitioners, we would need to work hard, be quiet, not talk about internal racism, and wait until the leadership team and their allies deemed us worthy of taking up space.

Over the past year, RVCC/RVM has centered power, privilege, and white saviorism instead of the people it is intended to serve: the black, indigenous, and non-black people of color in South Seattle. As a result, there has been an extreme flight of BIPOC students, contractors, and staff from the organization. RVCC/RVM has lost over 8 BIPOC individuals who joined the organization within the last year. Those who dared speak and stand up for themselves and their community were subject to interpersonal violence that includes: negligence, emotional manipulation, gatekeeping, defamation of character and skills, maligning, and slander.

The current leadership team at RVCC/RVM has chosen to align themselves with white supremacy culture and center white "allies." They failed to hear and act on the concerns of BIPOC students, staff, and contractors who were harmed, undermined, and exploited as tokens for labor and marketing purposes. Leadership, including the Executive Director, publicly and privately, participated in gossip that defamed BIPOC community partners and practitioners which only serves to tear down the morale of staff, contractors, and students and divide our community. It is time RVCC/RVM acknowledge and take on the responsibility of repairing the damage and harm it has caused to the people it was meant to protect, uplift, and mentor.

In response to the RVCC/RVM's direct misalignment with their stated mission and vision, we, the Midwifery Equity Coalition, are naming the harm they have caused to community members. We are calling on the Board of the South Seattle Women's Health Foundation to thoroughly investigate and hold the clinic accountable, while also taking swift action to return this organization into the rightful hands of the community.

We Demand the following:

- 1) Tara Lawal, MSM, RN, needs to step down and be removed immediately from the organization.
 - a) The Executive Director's replacement needs to be a person who the organization does not currently employ.
 - i) This demand is based on Tara's unprofessional conduct that resulted in interpersonal harm and violence. The public and private defaming of BIPOC people's character and skill levels to silence the harm they endure and undermine community trust once the individuals were no longer part of the organization.
- 2) The Board needs to be restructured to include the recruitment of at least 3 Black board members and at least 1 community leader position.
- 3) The Leadership Team needs to be restructured.
 - a) Specifically, Jodilyn Owen, LM, CPM, needs to step down from her position as Clinical Director and be replaced by a BIPOC person.
 - i) This demand is based on Jodilyn's negligence as a clinical director due to her lack of supervision of the midwifery practice regarding preceptor/student relationships and her alignment and protection of whiteness in the face of student concerns regarding harm (whether the harm was intentional and/or unintentional or witnessed).
 - b) BIPOC Staff members must be hired to replace white people who hold leadership and managerial positions (i.e., Clinical Director, Director of Programs, CFO, and Program Coordinator).
- 4) As a community practice, Rainier Valley Midwives needs to return to the hands of the community. As such, Jennifer Linstad, LM, CPM, needs to transition out of the role of lead midwife on call and leave the practice and organization once the current census of clients she is responsible for has concluded their care with RVM. Her replacement must be a BIPOC midwife.

- 5) Immediately cease all efforts to recruit Black, Indigenous, Non-Black People of Color, and LGBTQIA+/Transgender, Gender Non-Conforming, Non-Binary members of staff, students, and contractors until the site is deemed culturally safe.
 - a) Commit the entire Board and staff of Rainier Valley Midwives to receive training on Anti-Black Racism, Anti-Racism, and LGBTQIA+/Trans, Gender Non-Conforming, Non-Binary cultural awareness, humility, and equity facilitated by an individual(s) who are compensated for their time and expertise.
 - b) The posting of an Anti-Racism and LGBTQIA+-inclusive non-discrimination policy on the RVM's website, which all community partners must affirm each year.
- 6) Agree to hire community members who embody and uphold the experiences of BIPOC people and other marginalized identities for organizational and leadership positions.
- 7) Complete a financial audit to allocate more resources for student midwife financial support and increase in pay for Doulas at an equitable rate.
- 8) Equitable distribution of clients to Doulas/Contractors
- 9) Develop an HR department
 - a) Hire an HR Professional
 - b) Policies need to be re-written
 - i) Zero Tolerance Policies
 - ii) Racism
 - iii) Transphobia
 - iv) Create and uphold Whistleblower Policy
- 10) Community listening/accountability sessions are to be held on a quarterly basis and are to be facilitated by an independent third party.

If these demands are not upheld, the following statement must be removed from the mission and vision statement, **“we train and mentor the next generation of providers of color to heal our communities from within.”**

We want these grievances to be known because abuse flourishes in silence and because this organization was born out of community needs. We believe in the Mission, Vision, and Values that RVM/RVCC is supposed to uphold, and we know these demands for corrective outcomes have the power to change the lives of BIPOC & LGBTQIA+ Midwifery students, interdisciplinary students, contractors, and staff, but most importantly the clients we serve in the greater Rainier Valley.

We request an initial meeting with the South Seattle Women's Health Foundation to document the harms that current and previous RVM/RVCC staff/contractors/students have witnessed and endured. These demands have the full support of the following previous students, staff, and contractors from RVM/RVCC. A response to this letter is expected by **March 8, 2021, at 5 pm**. We request that a meeting is scheduled by **March 15, 2021**. Because RVM's current culture of erasure and secrecy is rampant, we will be reaching out to community organizations and valued community members from the greater Seattle area for their support and solidarity in this matter to hold RVM/RVCC accountable.

Sincerely,

Latonia Westerfield (she/her)
Former RVM Student Midwife

Marquita Straus (she/her)
Former RVM Social Work Intern

Crystal Ogle LM, CPM (she/her)
Former SSWHF Board President & Former RVCC Midwife

Faisa Farole LM, CPM, CLC (she/her)
Former RVM Midwife

Ceci Cordova CNM, FNP, RN (she/her)
Former RVM Midwife

Terri Chi Lee LM, CPM, MSM (she/her)
Former RVM Doula

dr. jess gee (they/them)
ND, MPH (candidate '21) MSAOM/DAc
(candidate '22) - Former RVM MPH Intern

Tiffany Renee, CD (PALS) (she/her)
Former RVM Executive & Clinical Administrative Assistant

Jazmin Williams (she/her)
Current RVM Doula

CP Harrouh (they/them)
Former RVM Executive Assistant

Kiona Nessenbaum (she/her)
Former Community Outreach Director