

November 20, 2019

Good afternoon Chair Williamson, Chair Prozanski and members of the committee,

My name is Antoinette Edwards. I am retired as former Director for the City of Portland's Office of Youth Violence Prevention. In that role and as a member of my community, I've sat with countless families and individuals in the aftermath of violence. As a community, we are not getting the help we need.

Two years ago, I was approached by Partnership for Safety and Justice to help collaborate on an idea they had. They told me they wanted to better understand the traumatic experiences of the people in my community and other communities of color. She wanted to know if I would be willing to help guide a process with other leaders of color who were both system-based and community-based who work directly with people impacted by violence. No one had ever asked me this before.

So I said yes because I knew how deeply my community needed this and I trusted PSJ as a strong partner, aligned in values and mission. And I'm here today to ask you all to help us deliver solutions by funding us as the experts that we are at our own healing. I'm hopeful that maybe some part of this work we've done will bring to light our experiences in a way that is different than the usual play. The play that casts us first as people who commit crime and not people who are hurt by crime.

I knew too many people just in my own community that had their own story of pain from being hurt, either by people they love, or by strangers, or even by the system that they thought was meant to help them. For me, because of my role in the community, I'm blessed to get to watch the beautiful transformation that can happen sometimes after community violence. Individuals can change and so can communities when help is available. And I see what's possible when we come together to help our most vulnerable people. I've seen the power of really collective impact, when city, county and community work together creatively to develop and share resources. And still, there is so much need.

I also know what happens when we experience the trauma of separation from each other- the kind of separation that happens when a family member is killed, or when our fathers and brothers and sons are over-criminalized and leave behind the women to raise the children while they go to prison. We are reminded in our bodies of a much older separation that happened when we came to this country against our will. So we've learned to keep it close and rely on each other. Black folks have understood this for a long, long time. Because of all that and so much more, we know how to take care of each other in a way that nobody else could unless you understand our history and share our lived experiences and our culture.

When PSJ asked me to help them do this, I knew we'd be exposing a lot of pain. But we created a safe space to trust so that women AND men could be vulnerable to their wounds, vulnerable to let in healing and all with respect for culture. A lot of black and brown people don't even

identify with the words “victim” or “survivor.” Especially the men. And so because we’re so overexposed to trauma that we don’t even recognize our own victimization, we also don’t access funding to get healing because the money sits in the same system that has hurt and betrayed us.

In the process of these interviews and focus groups, we wanted to elevate people with dignity and deliver a different kind of justice for what they have experienced for generations, having NEVER told their stories. Because nobody ever asked them. For many of the participants, this was truly their first time ever sharing what had happened to them. When we don’t get to share our stories and experience empathy and validation, it’s hard to see ourselves as full humans, deserving of help. I want Oregon to ask people of color all over the state what has happened to us. And to learn our story.

There are so many solutions right in our communities ready to end violence and begin the healing. They’re living and breathing in churches and barber shops, at Aunties’ houses and in schools and at barbeques. They’re sitting on this panel. We know the possibilities, but we don’t have what we need to make that real. We need funding to deliver solutions and we need information to deliver funding. Today I’m asking you to invest in research that helps everyone understand the experiences of Black and brown survivors in Oregon. And then I want you to invest in culturally specific programs and services that are staffed by us. And we need to institutionalize that in solution and in funds to make it real.

Thank you so much for hearing us today.

Antoinette Edwards