Statement on behalf of Black communities/organizations/ Individuals and allies to addressing anti-racist work in Ontario

There is an organized and active campaign to villanize and undermine anti-racism work in this province.

We, a coalition of Black community representatives in Ontario, are united today to address the increasing attack on anti-racism work. As community leaders, organizers, advocates, equity leads, and professionals we have faced antagonistic resistence over anti-racism work for as long as history can remember.

However, we are disturbed by the recent push-back we have seen and the targeted attempts to halt and dismantle anti-racism work through a calculated and intentional attempt to link the tragicloss of life of a TDSB principal to equity training that occurred **2.5 years ago in 2021.**

Firstly, we would like to express our deep sadness at the tragic loss of life of the former TDSB principal, Richard Bilkszto.

It is clear to us that his death is being used as a rallying point for right-wing opponents to dismantle necessary and imperative anti-racism work.

It is immoral and unethical to attempt to link this loss of life to anti-racism education training that took place 2 years ago. It is disingenuous and fallacious.

It is vital to recognize that an attack on anti-racism work in our province is not just an attack on our efforts to combat anti-Black racism; it is an attack on all racialized and intersecting communities. It is an attack against anti-Semitism, anti-Islamophobia, and the fight against anti-Asian hate to name a few.

As well, we recognize that this push-back against anti-racism work is an attack on a Black woman who has stood for our community and championed and pushed forward equity work and initiatives within the province of Ontario for decades. As a diverse and intersecting community, we all stand resolutely with Kike Ojo-Thompson and the Kojo Institute's principles, approach and mandate.

We will not allow her to be lynched or chastised for leading the community ground-work that keeps our children and youth's wellbeing accounted for. The pervasive labeling of Black women as intimidating and aggressive and threatening to white bodies is a deeply concerning trajectory. We are committed to ensuring that no Black woman or person feels unprotected or unsupported or is scapegoated.

There is no doubt that racism exists and permeates Ontario's education system and that our Black children, youth and Black educators experience racism and the adverse effects of anti-Black racism everyday within the education system. Many Black students literally and figuratively attempt to scratch the

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Black off their skin before they even get to the third grade because the system makes them feel so invalidated.

Our Black educators face the burden of navigating systemic racism while trying to create a safe space for their students. These disparities have existed for decades.

Ontario's Minister of Education has recognized these disparities and has made public commitments to addressing these barriers, vowing to take bold action to address racism and inequities in schools. It is irresponsible and disappointing for him to now acquiesce to a harmful attempt to stop progress for our children and families.

We will not allow this to happen.

Moreover, we question why in the calls for a review and reform of training in Ontario schools, the focus is only on anti-racism work and not equity training as a whole.

We are reminding the government of Ontario that they must be held accountable to their own legislation such as the Better Schools and Outcome Act and the Education Act that requires competency from principals and educators in equity. This is a human right.

Any attempt to remove or restrict anti-racism education in this province will have severe and detrimental consequences, perpetuating inequities and hindering the progress we have collectively made in fostering an inclusive and compassionate learning environment. Any attempt to remove and restrict anti-racism education in this province based on the death of one individual is an intentional appropriation of that death for political gains. This will not happen under our watch.

We demand the following:

1. Publicly affirm the province's commitment to anti-racist work in Ontario, denounce any attempts to undermine or halt these efforts and work to hold school boards accountable for enacting the government's own legislation within the Education Act and the Better Schools and Outcomes Act that expects competency from principals and educators in equity and Human Rights.
2. Meet with representatives from Black communities and anti-racist organizations to discuss strategies for enhancing and strengthening the fight against systemic racism and oppression.
3. Develop and implement a comprehensive plan to address the root causes of disparities in education and other systems and launch an OHRC inquiry into anti-Black racism within the education system.
4. Release a public statement reaffirming a commitment to anti-racism work, to ensure that organizations like Ontario's School Boards, the Ontario Principals Council, Ontario Public School

Boards' Association, Ontario Teachers Federation, CUPE and all Catholic counterparts, understand that equity, advocacy and anti-racism work are critical mandates within all aspects of the education system.

5. Provide transparency on the scope and purpose of the review on the TDSB's 2021 training, and expand this to an equity review of all school boards with proven track record of equity, anti-oppression, and anti-racism work.
6. Pass Bill 16, the Racial Equity in the Education System Act, 2022
7. Allocate increased resources to support the implementation of anti-racism initiatives and programs in educational institutions and other sectors.
8. Publicly denounce the scapegoating of the Kojo Institute.

Disparities continue to persist within our education and other systems, a reality that has been acknowledged by the Ontario Human Rights Commission (OHRC), Ontario's Anti-Racism Directorate, and multiple Ministries within the Ontario Government, including the Ministry of Education.

This work is critical, and without it there will be more harm, and more violence at the expense of children and youth and those who are most vulnerable.

We cannot and will not let this happen.

We will not allow the wheels to be turned back.

Enough is Enough.

As Black Communities we stand in solidarity!

<u>COLLECTIVE ORGANIZATIONS</u>
Advocacy Peel
ANCHOR
Black Girls Ink
Centre for Intergrative Anti-Racism Studies (CIARS)
Delta Family Resource Centre
For Youth Initiative
Halton Black Voices
HM Youth Foundation
Idris Orughu
Kathy Mcdonald
Midaynta Community Services
Network for the Advancement of Black Communities (NABC)
Ontario Alliance of Black School Educators (ONABSE)

Parents of Black Children

Parents Against Racism Simcoe (PARSC)
Parents of Black Children
Peel Black Collective
Policing Free Schools
ResQ Youth Intentional
We Rise
Women's Healthh In Women's Hands
Wonuola Yomi-Odedeyi

CIARS
CENTRE FOR INTEGRATIVE ANTI-RACISM STUDIES

HALTON BLACK VOICES

PEEL BLACK COLLECTIVE

Parents Against RACISM SIMCOE COUNTY
LET'S MAKE CHANGE
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@letsmakechange @parents_against_racism_simcoe

MIDAYNTA BUILDING COMMUNITIES

Dr. Wonuola Yomi-Odedeyi

DELTA FAMILY RESOURCE CENTER

Network for the Advancement of Black Communities
Réseau pour l'avancement des communautés noires

ANCHOR
African Canadian National Coalition against Hate, Oppression and Racism

Parents of Black Children

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- David Bosveld