

Statement in response to the events on April 8, 2021, at the Iowa State Capitol

DES MOINES – April 14, 2021 – As advocates for social change, we know that all forms of violence and oppression are interconnected and directly impact the ability of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) to be safe.

We cannot ignore the event that occurred on April 8, 2021, when a Norwalk high school student was arrested at the Iowa State Capitol as she exercised her right to speak out against numerous pieces of oppressive legislation designed to suppress and inhibit the right to free speech, enhance penalties for peaceful protestors, and extend immunity protections for law enforcement.

Video and eye-witness accounts to the arrest of the young high school student once again put a spotlight on the excessive response BIPOC receive when they gather together – even with a permit AND permission – to protest. Here in Iowa and across the country, we have seen a pattern of violence aimed at silencing BIPOC protestors that has been re-traumatizing for so many who have experienced systemic violence and inequality their entire lives. What kind of message does this send to young people about their right to speak out and have their voices heard? Are the rights of individuals to speak freely and assemble only guaranteed for certain words and certain people?

We represent the collective experience of people who dedicate their lives to serving victims of violent crime. Violence is not a single-issue problem. Systemic, cultural, and generational inequalities are root causes of violence, as well as barriers to safety and self-determination that disproportionately harm BIPOC communities. If we want to end and prevent violence, we must prioritize systems change that is rooted in equity, racial, social, and transformative justice.

We will continue to do our part to interrupt and work towards eradicating all forms of violence, including excessive force against anyone exercising their freedoms, liberties and right to demonstration. Now more than ever, it is imperative that we use our collective strength to come together and create a world where people thrive and voices are heard.

In Solidarity,

Luana Nelson-Brown, executive director, Iowa Coalition for Collective Change

Dr. Maria Corona, executive director, Iowa Coalition Against Domestic Violence

Elizabeth Barnhill, executive director, Iowa Coalition Against Sexual Assault and National Resource Sharing Project