



Men & Women In Prison Ministries/TRS
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NEWS

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In Response to the Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority – Historic R3 Awards

At this point in our city, state, and national history it is more critical than ever to invest in the health of Black communities, Black organizations, and Black leadership. As an Executive Director and Founder of a Black community-based organization, I have witnessed the disparities and underfunding of agencies and programs focused on improving the quality of health for Black communities. The investment into our communities can no longer be through subcontracts held by white systems and organizations; this relationship must evolve into a system that allocates funds and resources with equity, to agencies providing culturally competent services.

For over three decades Men & Women in Prison Ministries/Transforming Reentry Services (MWIPM/TRS) has provided services to Chicago Black communities, garnering a reputation as a leader with integrity and investment in uplifting the health and welfare of our community. (To Review our Services please visit our website www.transformingreentry.org) We can no longer effectively work in the existing “partnerships” that continually exploit our work and community. Investing in Black communities, Black organizations, and Black leadership, requires more than providing small subcontract agreements. The current system inadequately funds services and systematically exploits the work of community-based and client focused organizations.

Black agencies with long histories of promoting holistic health and providing access to essential services are minimized, by being situated as subcontractors in underserved and under resourced communities. Underfunding community-based organizations limits their access to resources, resulting in inefficient programs and organization with diminished capacity or voices to advocate for equity. We continue to accept subcontracts that do not provide the level of services needed to achieve optimal community health outcomes.

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Black community-based organizations accept the fiscal scraps, in the form of subcontracts, and are then expected to provide quality services to communities ravished by poverty and violence, that have been neglected and stigmatized by institutional racism. While the community-based organizations are geographically located in the community, they are only used to engage the community as a face of color to collect numbers. The organization is positioned as convenience for the larger directly funded agencies, but they are not provided adequate fiscal resources to effectively engage and service Black communities.

In September of 2020 Governor Pritzker stated, “I will not rest until the state of Illinois and this country treat you with the respect and equality that is your most basic human right.” Respect includes ownership of our own work as well as honoring the decades of work we have done and entering a funding contract that is representative of the words of our elected officials. Sadly, even when money is earmarked to focus on the work of correcting the systemic racism and creating equity, or addressing the injuries done by the school to prison pipeline or improprieties of the judicial system, a large part of funding is still awarded to larger agencies, sometimes with no direct experience serving the targeted community—often based on well-written grants by well-funded grant writers, or advocacy by well-paid lobbyists. I am concerned that the hard work done, and the community relationship nurtured by smaller community-based organizations is not considered nor deemed valuable.

Black leaders have watched White led organization’s come into our community with high paying salaries (due to historically non-equitable funding systems), take data from our community to fulfill their scopes, do the bare minimum needed, and do not invest in addressing or resolving their own internalized or systemic racism. The time has come to redistribute contracts to those organizations, leaders and staff deeply rooted in the Black community, who are invested in the real empowerment of disenfranchised, because they are not only employed to work in the community they live in those same communities.

As a Black woman, founder, and executive director, of a community-based organization providing direct service, I am seeking for organizations like MWIPM/TRS, to be directly funded or funded at a level that allows agencies to serve Black communities efficiently and effectively. Specifically, I am imploring individuals and entities that make funding decisions to consider creating equity by supporting and funding Black led organizations as the lead agency or investing in true partnerships.

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