



October 29, 2019

Dear midwives,

I am writing to you today as a call to action against racism in midwifery.

Racism takes many forms. Some are obvious and overt, others are implicit and may go unnoticed by white midwives, although their impacts are profound. We know (mostly through health data from the US – Canada is behind on analyzing the impact of racism on health outcomes) that overt and implicit racism negatively impacts perinatal and other health outcomes. It also has a compounding impact on bullying and power imbalances in midwifery.

Many of you attended the webinar **Experiences of Racism among Ontario BIPOC Midwives and Students** on October 16, 2019, in which researchers and AOM staff members Feben Aseffa RM and Lwam Mehari (MPH) shared the troubling findings of their research study: *Experiences of Racism among Ontario BIPOC Midwives and Students in Midwifery Education and Profession*. The study includes a survey and interviews with IBPOC (Indigenous, Black and People of Colour) midwives and gives voice to their experiences. Feben and Lwam attended the September AOM Board of Directors meeting to communicate the research findings directly with the Board. The Board understands that the findings validate the experiences of many IBPOC midwives and students who have been silenced and subjected to systemic and interpersonal racism within midwifery and beyond. We commit to acting on the recommendations of the research participants and researchers, putting into motion a range of activities to combat historical, systemic and interpersonal racism in midwifery.

At the AGM in May 2019, the member resolution calling for the resurrection of the AOM's Diversity Work Group was an invitation to white midwives to reflect on our roles in oppression. Your Board and I apologize for failing our IBPOC colleagues by not taking a stand against proposed amendments that removed race and racism from the resolution. By removing explicit mention of race from the resolution, we deeply impacted and disappointed our IBPOC colleagues, silenced their voices, and degraded their desires and needs. The Board acknowledges the harm this has caused and commits to acting on the original direction of this resolution.

Historically and to this day, we have too often silenced the experiences of our IBPOC colleagues, minimized their contributions and failed to protect space for their voices. As a white midwife and leader, I personally acknowledge my responsibility and the role I have played in not publicly recognizing, calling attention to and actively acting to dismantle racism in our profession. Now is the time to take anti-racist action.

We are taking several immediate actions to deconstruct white supremacy and racism in midwifery. We are creating a protected forum for IBPOC midwives to directly influence AOM strategic priorities, governance processes, and work. The Board and AOM staff will be engaging in ongoing anti-racism training which all midwives are also encouraged to do. We are engaging with other key midwifery organizations about the impacts of historical and present racism. We strive to amplify the voices of IBPOC midwives and students and increase their visibility and representation in midwifery leadership.

I strongly encourage all midwives, especially white midwives, to attend the second offering of the webinar, **Experiences of Racism among Ontario BIPOC Midwives and Students**. The webinar will take place on **November 22, 2019 from 12-1 pm EST**. I invite you to hear about the experiences of our IBPOC colleagues, in their own words, and how we can all contribute to abolishing racism in the profession. I call on white midwives to take responsibility and ownership in this important work, while taking direction and leadership from our IBPOC colleagues.

The Board and I commit to doing better, to continue to learn about the history and impacts of racism within and outside of midwifery, and to work together towards an equitable and just profession for all IBPOC midwives.

Yours truly,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Elizabeth Brandeis".

Elizabeth Brandeis, RM

AOM President