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Ms. Lawson-Muhammad's Refusal to Resign Proves our Point It's Not About Doing What's Right, It's About Her *Privilege*

(Maplewood, New Jersey) – Last night's Board of Education meeting proved only one point – **it is easier to feign outrage than to stand for justice**. In two towns with a combined population of 40,000, the idea that less than a quarter of 1% of the people can alter the truth because they showed up for a Board of Education meeting to applaud ignorance is the height of cognitive dissonance.

Modeling this type of behavior will put the safety of Black youth at-risk if they choose to act in a similar fashion when approached by a police officer. The difference is they won't have the privilege or civic standing to invoke their supposed immunity from being held to the same standards as an average citizen. An apology after you have been exposed is a **survival tactic**, not an indication of leadership or taking responsibility for your behavior.

Students have no reason to comply with a Code of Conduct when a Board of Education member

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faces no consequences for her behavior. Embarrassment is not a consequence. It is a sense of fragility for engaging in knowingly bad behavior. Ms. Lawson-Muhammad's behavior puts at-risk teachers in the classroom, and exposes students to punishment if they act out, because a **double standard** for conduct has now been established by a sitting member of the Board of Education. The Board's failure to hold Ms. Lawson-Muhammad accountable for her behavior, and the Board president's concealing the truth, is a dereliction of duty.

The only 'panic' experienced by Ms. Lawson-Muhammad was the possibility of having to appear in court and risk her standing, as she defined herself as "a leading member of the community." When asked by the officer if she needed assistance because he was concerned she might be experiencing a panic attack, Ms. Lawson-Muhammad responded "No" and "That's a fucking insult." That's not panic. *That's privilege.*

Despite last night's theatre of the absurd, we continue to call for the resignation of Board Member Stephanie Lawson-Muhammad and the removal of Board Member Elizabeth Baker as president of the Board of Education. We will file complaints against Ms. Lawson-Muhammad and Ms. Baker with the New Jersey School Ethics Commission this week. We will also continue to shine a spotlight on this absurdity to the hundreds of people, including parents of law enforcement officers, and news outlets that have reached out to us from across the country. One such message we received is below and we think it speaks to why this is an important moral moment for the communities of South Orange and Maplewood. We cannot be a *community* if we keep running from the truth.

Police officers should be held accountable based on their actions, not their skin color. And perpetrators of crime should be held accountable on the same basis, and treated according to their crimes, not their skin color. I think we'll both agree it's not a perfect world, but it can be a better one.

Again, I appreciated your letter to Ms. Baker, and I wish you the best in your work.

Michael

Michael, we agree.

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