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August 2, 2024

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Founder of BIPOC-Centered Community Garden Launches Re-Location Campaign Amidst Legal Proceedings Against Neighbor

(Ithaca, NY) – Amanda David, an herbal medicine educator, has launched a [fundraiser](#) to help relocate her work and her family’s home. David’s decision to move comes after facing persistent racial and sex-based harassment and intimidation by her next-door neighbor for more than two years. She is attempting this new approach while several legal avenues she has pursued to protect her family have yet to help improve their safety.

David, who is African American, moved into her home southeast of Ithaca in 2020. She is the creator of Rootwork Herbals and The People’s Medicine School – both dedicated to providing herbal medicine education and access to Black, Indigenous, and other people of color (“BIPOC”) individuals. David purchased the property not only as a home for her family, but also as space to create a community garden where BIPOC individuals could build community connections while growing both food and medicinal plants. The relocation fundraiser has a goal of \$200,000, to cover expenses including property acquisition, animal relocation, and security measures at a new home.

“My children and I should be able to feel safe and secure in our own home, but we don’t,” David said. “[Our neighbor’s] persistent and horrendously racist and sexist intimidation and harassment has made that impossible.”

Multiple ways that David has sought an end to her neighbor’s harassment through legal mechanisms have yet to effectively address the situation. In June, CNY Fair Housing filed a federal housing discrimination lawsuit on behalf of David, a Tompkins County resident, based on the evidence of her neighbor’s harassment. As alleged in a pending lawsuit, the Davids’ neighbor, Robert Whittaker, Jr., who is white, has repeatedly hurled racist and sexist slurs and insults at David as she tends her garden and performs other chores around her home. Whittaker has also harassed and threatened David’s children. Whittaker has called David and her children the n-slur and “handouts” on many occasions and even threatened to attack one of David’s sons with a stick. As further alleged in the complaint, Whittaker has vandalized the Davids’ car twice, both by spray painting it with expletives and by forcing an object through the front grill and causing mechanical damage.

“Fair housing laws guarantee a right to every family to choose and enjoy their home free from discrimination,” said CNY Fair Housing’s Executive Director, Sally Santangelo. “The racial and sex-based harassment perpetrated against the David family by their

neighbor is not just morally abhorrent, it's also a flagrant violation of both federal and state law. CNY Fair Housing will do everything within its power to ensure that the David family's rights are not violated further and that they can enjoy their home without living in constant fear of being harassed because of their sex or the color of their skin."

At times David has also turned to the criminal justice system. Whittaker has been arrested, criminally charged, and subject to a court order directing him to refrain from any and all contact with the David family. Despite many reports from the Davids and community members of Whittaker continuing his harassment frequently after this court order, only after he shot out a security light on the Davids' property with a pellet gun was Whittaker arrested again and charged with additional criminal violations.

Under these circumstances, many community members are questioning how this case has been handled by local authorities. "I've been in touch with Amanda through countless incidents, seeing over time all the documentation and escalation in Bob's behavior," said Erica Frenay, a friend and neighbor of David's, and a member of Neighbor Solidarity Network. "Several times I've shown up and personally witnessed the way individual officers have failed to pursue justice, and how the legal system has failed to keep Amanda's family safe – it makes me wonder how it would have been handled if the races of those involved were reversed," Frenay added.

The harassment David has faced, as well as the failures of the local justice system to address her safety, is a stark reminder of a long history of systemic racism against Black farmers that has taken many forms over time. A statement in support of David by Melanie Allen & Olivia Watkins, Co-Executive Directors of Black Farmer Fund, said, "The USDA Census indicates that over the last 5 years, the U.S. lost 7% of all farms, while Black folks lost nearly 13%, the highest decline among all racial groups. This is a direct result of the systemic racism Black farmers have faced for generations, encompassing everything from discriminatory lending practices to community violence and intimidation. . . . Amanda represents a generation of Black land stewards who have long battled against both systemic and physical violence, impeding their ability to thrive and contribute to our food system."

David emphasized that even locally she is not alone in feeling the impacts of this harassment. "His discriminatory behavior hasn't just harmed my family, it has also harmed the entire community of BIPOC gardeners and herbal medicine practitioners that I work with." stated David. She added, "There are already so many barriers to the fields of agriculture and horticulture for people of color, and it makes me both discouraged and deeply sad that Mr. Whittaker's harassment is yet another obstacle that I and the community I'm part of have to confront in our efforts to engage in this work."

Allen & Watkins indicated that David's experience is all the more evidence of the need for her work. "Amanda and her family have endured continuous racial threats and violence, underscoring the urgent need for a safe environment where Rootwork Herbs, the People's Medicine School, and Jane Minor BIPOC medicine garden can continue serving as a sanctuary for BIPOC and LGBTQIA+ communities to connect with the land, their cultural heritage, and healing practices."

Friends of David who are supporting the fundraiser say the relocation efforts offer an opportunity for anyone to support Black land stewards to thrive. While those organizing are grateful for all donations, some have lifted up the possibility for white people who have inherited intergenerational wealth to significantly redistribute the finances that could help enable David and her family to escape the racist harms they are facing.

"Access to wealth can look like a lot of different things, not just a bank account or a trust fund. It can look like support for accessing food stamps or medicaid. ... It can look like getting a ticket for a lesser traffic violation rather than a speeding ticket, when you were actually speeding. ... It can look like access to college, and the ability to take on debt. Consider that if you were born white in the US you have access to generational wealth, even if you were born or are poor," said Katie Church, a supporter of David's fundraiser who also helps organize a local campaign called "Redistributing White Wealth" through Tompkins County Showing Up for Racial Justice.

"So far several folks have donated at least a thousand dollars, and there are certainly people who have the ability to redistribute even tens of thousands of dollars," Church said. "This fundraiser is one opportunity for white folks who may have significant intergenerational wealth, such as inherited houses or many thousands of dollars, to act to shift the historic patterns they are part of, and to directly address white supremacy in our local community so that Amanda's family can be safe and have their basic rights respected, and Amanda can continue the incredible healing work she does."

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Neighbor Solidarity Network is a grassroots group of loving, anti-racist community members in the Ithaca area showing up in solidarity with the David family and The People's Medicine School for both urgent rapid response to safety concerns, and strategizing efforts towards longer term safety in the face of this grave injustice in our community.