

Hello OLA Members,

As executive officers of your association, we would like to share with you the following statement made by OLA President Star Khan at the OLA Board meeting on February 17, 2023.

***President's Update to OLA Board, February 17, 2023.***

*"I have been pretty busy with the Joint Council of Librarians of Color (JCLC) Conference presentation prep. Deborah Gitlitz and I presented on the Libros for Oregon program to a really receptive crowd that seemed eager to model our work in their States.*

*Got a nice little nod at JCLC for being the first person of color to serve as President in OLA's 83 year history. That was pretty cool.*

*I have also been navigating my way through issues regarding library neutrality, censorship, white supremacy and racism. All while having my integrity and decisions questioned at every step. While a certain level of scrutiny is expected as the President, I can't imagine that any of the President's before me have had to deal with scrutiny based on their race. Being told that my race clouds my perspective and keeps me from seeing things fairly, is not ok. Telling me that I cannot be trusted, that I only care about my BIPOC colleagues is not ok. Being accused of purposely excluding my white colleagues is not ok. While we as an organization have chosen to elevate BIPOC voices, and I feel the need to state that this was a decision the Board made long before I was chosen to lead it, I am here to serve everyone. To insinuate otherwise is hurtful, disrespectful and quite frankly, racist.*

*I ask you all as our OLA leaders to please LISTEN to these words and reflect on how you can help.*

*If someone tells you that you are being harmful, you do not get to decide that you aren't. Even if it wasn't your intention. If someone tells you that you are being harmful, you need to take a step back and LISTEN. A few months ago, someone politely pointed out that I had used some language that could be hurtful in the last Board video that Brittany and I made. At first, I was a little bent about being called out because there is no way that I meant to be harmful. But even though that wasn't my intent, I don't get to decide how others feel about it. So I took some time to educate myself and reflect. Now I make a conscious effort everyday not to use the same language because I truly do not want to cause any harm.*

*If someone tells you that you need to back off, please do. Don't continue aggressively pushing your point of view because you feel you are in the right. I am absolutely disheartened by the level of aggressiveness and bullying I have seen go down between OLA members.*

*When our white colleagues turn to each other for support, that's ok. When BIPOC do it, we are accused of holding secret meetings to conspire against our white colleagues. We BIPOC also deserve to reach out to people we feel are safe for support.*

*It really pains me to say that white supremacy and racism are thriving within OLA. And it hurts me that BIPOC are still the ones that are not only carrying the burden of doing this work, but are being beat down and silenced at every step. So many of our BIPOC colleagues suffer in silence. They do not feel safe in their workplaces. They do not feel safe amongst their colleagues. We cannot allow this to continue.*

*At the end of the day, BIPOC do not need more allies. We need accomplices. We need accomplices in actions, not in just words. Those that will stand with us and are prepared to take the repercussions of doing this work. Those that will stay with us when things get tough or are willing to reflect and learn when they are told that they are causing harm. We do not need people to be angry/upset/hurt for us, we need you to be those things with us. As the leaders of this organization I call on you all to confirm your commitment to equity, diversity, inclusivity and anti-racism by doing the following:*

- **Committing** to personally learning about racism, reconciliation, accessibility, equity and inclusion, and fostering a safe, positive environment where these conversations are encouraged throughout our profession and workplaces
- **Combatting** all forms of racism, discrimination and other barriers to inclusion in our profession by taking action on what we have learned, empowering employees to speak up about bias and oppression
- **Including** voices from diverse backgrounds in the identification of systemic racism, discrimination and barriers to inclusion, and creating a process of actions to take in order to address them

*If our organization is truly committed to EDIA, then that needs to be reflected in our guidelines, our policies. And this work does not need to fall on BIPOC, we carry enough. We need to feel safe, respected and valued. We deserve no less. I am calling on all OLA leaders to take a clear, strong stance on where we stand. WE MUST DO BETTER. WE HAVE TO DO BETTER.”*

We are deeply saddened by our colleague Star's need to make this statement. As leaders who have not experienced the same level of remonstrance for our decisions, we want to draw your attention to the real, lived experience of our BIPOC members as they volunteer their time and leadership to our association.

We want to reiterate that OLA's efforts to center BIPOC voices and work towards becoming an anti-racist organization has been part of the association's strategic direction since 2020. We, along with OLA's Executive Board, recognize that we need to work harder to make sure that OLA is a safe environment for our BIPOC colleagues and we are not placing undue burden on them to move us in this direction. To that end, we will be leading an OLA Board effort to examine OLA's bylaws, statements, and policies with the intent to ensure that our equity, diversity, inclusion and anti-racism values are reflected in all areas. We hope that removes any doubt about OLA's tolerance for poor treatment of our BIPOC colleagues.

We thank Star for her bravery in sharing her experience. We are committed to her call to do better and are willing to do the work necessary to be accomplices rather than allies. If you would like to join us, please reach out to us at [olavp@olaweb.org](mailto:olavp@olaweb.org) and/or [olapastpresident@olaweb.org](mailto:olapastpresident@olaweb.org).

Sincerely,  
Brittany Young, OLA Vice President/President-Elect  
Arlene Weible, OLA Past President