



## ***#MeToo: How do we Support Survivors and Leverage this Moment to Create Lasting Change?***

The past month marks a watershed moment, when survivors of sexual violence and harassment have come forward using social media and the hashtag #MeToo to create a community of courage, encouragement, and belief. This moment is not an “upswing” in reporting of sexual violence; it is the result of survivors who have continued to bravely tell their stories and who have together exposed patterns and a culture of violence and harassment.

And yet, we must look critically at whose stories are being brought forward. The “me too” movement was created in 2006 by Tarana Burke, in order to bring together the voices of women and girls of color. As she stated in an article by the Washington Post, “I wanted to find a way to connect with the black and brown girls in the program I ran. But if I am being honest with myself, and you, I often wonder if that sister [working] in the diner has even heard of #MeToo, and if she has, does she know it’s for #UsToo?”<sup>1</sup> As we consider how to move forward, we must believe and center stories and solutions from survivors from poor and marginalized communities. We cannot change the pervasiveness of sexual violence unless we change it for all workplaces, all industries, all pay rates, all neighborhoods, all communities, and all people.

We must ask what true accountability looks like for those who have caused harm, and we must ask survivors what accountability means to them. Accountability may include loss of jobs, loss of stature, and criminal charges. However, our traditional methods of accountability, including our criminal and civil legal systems, have done an insufficient job in holding people accountable and reducing sexual violence. For some survivors, safety and justice may come from their own communities holding those who have caused harm accountable, seeking to stop harmful behaviors and to work toward rehabilitation and healing.

Monika Johnson Hostler, the Executive Director of the NC Coalition Against Sexual Assault, believes that prevention of sexual violence and harassment is possible. “We must begin talking to young people earlier about healthy relationships, boundaries, and sexuality. We must acknowledge that all of us have much learning and un-learning to do about interacting with respect, compassion, and kindness,” Johnson Hostler says. Each of us must commit to interrupting when we see instances of sexism, discrimination,

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<sup>1</sup>Burke, T. (2017, November 9.) #MeToo was started for black and brown women and girls. They’re still being ignored. *The Washington Post*. Retrieved from <https://www.washingtonpost.com>



sexual harassment, and sexual violence. In the workplace specifically, sexual harassment trainings have too often been motivated by addressing corporate liability. Real prevention of workplace sexual harassment will require truly valuing all workers and all people.

Today, NCCASA, along with rape crisis centers and partners across NC, are standing up to say that sexual violence and harassment no longer needs to be the cost that women and people from marginalized communities face for going to work or walking down the street. We resist the narrative that sexual violence is something new or something that will end with a few people getting fired. We commit to building a world without violence by challenging the systems and social conditions that enable sexual violence to exist, and we invite you to join us in that work.