

October 27, 2020

Re: Letter in Support of Nomination of Sadiqa Reynolds as a Healthy Kentucky Policy Champion



Kentucky Equal Justice Center
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To Whom It May Concern:

We are writing today to endorse the nomination of Sadiqa Reynolds to be a Healthy Kentucky Policy Champion in 2020. We say specifically “in 2020” because—to state the obvious—this year has been incredibly challenging to the health of Kentuckians. Ms. Reynolds work (and how she has done that work) has been essential in this moment to both broaden and deepen our individual and collective understanding of how our racist history and present-day racist systems continue to negatively impact the health and lives of Black and Brown Kentuckians.

The nomination of Ms. Reynolds provides a comprehensive list of Ms. Reynolds diverse roles, achievements, and service. Certainly, her work to make the Norton Sports Health and Learning Complex a reality alone would qualify her for recognition as a Healthy Kentucky Policy Champion. The project will have a positive impact on the health and success of young people in Louisville for generations.

But, in our eyes, this kind of work is the easy part of the work Ms. Reynolds has assigned to herself in 2020. This is not to diminish the difficulty of attracting \$44 million in investments to a project like the Norton Sports Health and Learning Complex. Rather, it is to speak to the difficulty of the other work she has undertaken in response to

- 1) the disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on people of color in Kentucky,
- 2) the failure of city and state officials to hold Breonna Taylor’s killers accountable for her death, and
- 3) the misguided, deadly responses to anti-racist protests in Louisville this summer.

Through persistent, thoughtful effort, Ms. Reynolds has used her voice and body to articulate the pain, disappointment, anger, exhaustion, and grief people of color are experiencing in this moment. Ms. Reynolds past experience in all levels and various branches of state and local government have given her an insider’s perspective on how power is deployed in the Commonwealth.

One of the things we respect most about Ms. Reynolds is her willingness to use her “insider” status to credibly and clearly articulate the ways policymakers have failed and are failing to protect the health and lives of Black Kentuckians. Insiders are often reluctant to imperil their insider status with hard words for people in power. And, with a sports complex to fund and build, threatening those relationships with people in power might allow someone like Ms. Reynolds to decide to continue to try to influence policymakers “from the inside”, to stay quiet publicly on the failures of people in power.

She has not done that and—for that alone—she deserves to be recognized as a Healthy Kentucky Policy Champion.

She has criticized Louisville's Mayor—her former boss—for his failed handling of the murder of Breonna Taylor and the protests calling for justice:

I am tired of not calling out the contradictions. I have considered the mayor my friend. I honestly have love for him. But a Black woman, who could've been a young me, is dead and I am not satisfied with his response. I'm angry because I always thought if something happened to my daughters, he would be on my side.¹

By speaking up, Ms. Reynolds has provided Louisville with a model of what true leadership looks like during a time of multiple acute crises that exist on top of the generations-long crises we have inflicted upon Black Kentuckians. Her words and actions have been, at times, a balm we don't deserve and, at other times, the hot sword in the gut we probably do.

Ms. Reynolds has forcefully and consistently communicated what we know to be true: racism is a public health crisis. As the Center for Health Equity said, our communities' failure to provide all citizens with "the most basic rights—food, safety, and shelter is the violence we must be most concerned with."² Ms. Reynolds consistently focuses our attention on the root causes of the violence we continue to perpetrate on Black and Brown Kentuckians:

[J]obs, justice, education, health and housing. Lack of access to these things are the root cause of the problems our communities face. Violence is one horrible outcome and increased policing, the answer politicians so willingly invest in, is just one more Band-Aid that fails to address the root cause of the wounds we must treat."³

Black women have been leading the anti-racist protests in Louisville all year long.⁴ And, because the racism in our hearts and in our systems means that Black Kentuckians die more frequently in childbirth, die more often from COVID-19, live sicker and die younger than White Kentuckians, Ms. Reynolds' leadership in fighting the malignant racism in our community has to be recognized as part of the work that makes her a Healthy Kentucky Policy Champion. Ms. Reynolds's leadership cannot be said to be tireless because she (un-

¹ <https://www.courier-journal.com/story/opinion/2020/07/17/sadiqa-reynolds-mayor-greg-fischer-show-us-black-lives-matter/5457788002/>

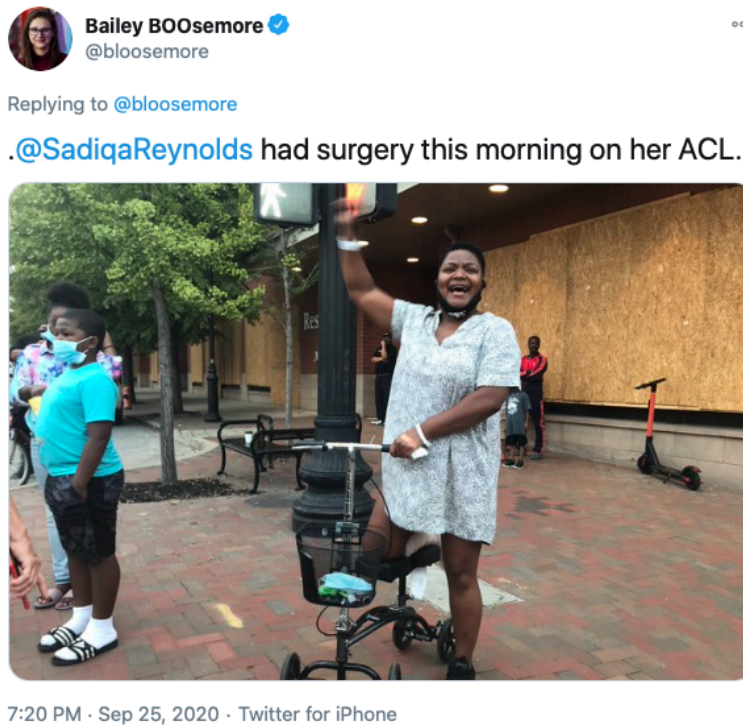
² <https://content.govdelivery.com/accounts/KYLOUISVILLE/bulletins/28e826d?reqfrom=share>

³ <https://www.courier-journal.com/story/opinion/2020/10/07/louisville-must-heal-wounds-afflicting-black-people/3636670001/>

⁴ <https://www.courier-journal.com/in-depth/news/local/2020/07/21/louisville-protests-how-black-women-leading-fight-justice/3284634001/>

derstandably) expresses when she is tired. But, it can be said to be persistent, courageous, visionary.

In conclusion, we want to share with you a tweet from a Courier-Journal reporter⁵ who was following the protests in the wake of the Attorney General's announcement that only Officer Brett Hankison would be charged (and only with wanton endangerment) in connection with the no-knock raid that led to Breonna Taylor's death.



This is what a Kentucky Health Policy Champion looks like.

Sincerely,

Ben Carter and Rich Seckel

⁵ <https://twitter.com/bloosemore/status/1309633912159834112?s=20>