



# NATIONAL COUNCIL *of* ELDERS

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“...the issues of race and class and culture and gender and sexual identity  
– all those isms are connected.”

Mandy Carter, co-founder of Southerners on New Ground, SONG, and the National  
Black Justice Coalition; National Council of Elders

“Working together, crossing barriers and borders together,  
we will build a movement that makes real our dream  
of justice, equality, and freedom.”

Suzanne Pharr, co-founder of Southerners on New Ground, SONG; author of  
*Transformation: Toward a People's Democracy*; National Council of Elders

“I know enough about history and our struggle  
to know that when people come together,  
they can do what seems impossible.”

Barbara Smith, author, *The Truth That Never Hurts: Writings on Race, Gender and  
Freedom*; editor, *Home Girls: A Black Feminist Anthology*; National Council of Elders

“In time such as the present, when dominant cruel, vile  
systems of oppression seem almost invincible,  
I remember the words of Isaiah 43:9,  
‘Behold, I am about to do a new thing...  
Now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?’  
...It points out that we need to do something  
in order to usher in the new possibility.  
It is not inevitable.

Second, it says that imagination, wonder  
and amazement are necessary for this newness.”

Dorsey Blake, Presiding Minister,  
Church for the Fellowship of All People, National Council of Elders

**We are veterans of a long struggle** for social justice in our nation and peace in the world. We are the National Council of Elders and we stand alongside legions of elders who work to resist oppression and build a just world.

**As young organizers**, nurtured by our elders and the generations before us, we found ways to resist this culture of violence. We believed another world was possible. We formed movements and organizations, challenging racism, militarism, and materialism. We organized to end the wars in Viet Nam, Cambodia, and Laos. With the practice of nonviolence, we dismantled legal segregation, expanded voting rights, and intensified the demand for self-determination in all our communities. We called for the creation of a public life that fully embraced women, people of color, people with disabilities, people of all religious backgrounds, lesbian, gay, two-spirited, transgender and gender non-conforming people. We offered sanctuary to those whose lives were deemed illegal, as we challenged xenophobia and militarism.

**We support** the work and lives of young activists and leaders who work amidst 21<sup>st</sup> century chaos to build a world where everyone experiences peace, justice, and safety.

**We are concerned** with the rightwing attacks on the freedom of our minds and bodies, especially those of the young. Since the 1970s we have watched a carefully planned and executed long slow build of a culture of violence centering on race and gender. For over 40 years there has been an effort to use misinformation/disinformation to

persuade people in their places of worship and their homes to believe falsely that the disintegration of US life is brought about by societal recognition of the value, worth, and freedom of people of color, women, and LGBTQ+ people.

**We are calling** attention to this threat. We are witnessing a vicious, rapidly spreading campaign to convince parents that their children are being misled and damaged by what they learn from teachers in schools and from books in libraries. It calls for children to be denied education about sexuality and authentic education about US racial history. It calls for banning books and restricting academic commitment to historical fact. With the loss of freedom in public education and libraries, we face the loss of critical thinking—the first rail of defense against authoritarianism and fascism.

**We witness the harm to Transgender and LGBQ+ children in particular.** At the time that children are beginning to develop their gender and sexual identities, information that would help them understand themselves is withheld. Throughout the US, laws are being put in place to restrict the rights to their bodies and identities. They are vulnerable targets. In a time when Transgender people are four times more likely to experience violence than cisgender people, this restriction of information and rights increases the danger to their lives. People who are trans, especially minors, their parents, and medical providers are being criminalized. In legislatures and school boards and churches we are seeing the step by step expansion and strengthening of this culture of violence, discrimination and exclusion.

The National Council of Elders continues to build and sustain a culture of peace rooted in justice, nurturing and strengthening communities that assure the worth, sacred identity, of all people.

**We challenge elders of all ages** to join us – and the young organizers across this nation - in standing with children and families on the frontline of bodily and intellectual freedom. Find out what is going on in your community. Show up at your local school board meetings and libraries. Support teachers and librarians who are working to provide truth-telling education. Read the books that have been banned and host community readings. Support and become a part of local organizations that are listening to, working in partnership with, organizers in gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, gender non-conforming communities. Write and talk with your state legislators and local council members. Show up at anti-gay/trans demonstrations to stand with those who embody beloved community in defiance of the threats, offering support and protection.

We urge you to visit our website, <https://nationalcouncilofelders.org/>, and join us as we together build a culture of peace rooted in justice.