



SOUTHERN OREGON COALITION FOR RACIAL EQUITY

Thursday, November, 26, 2020

PUBLIC STATEMENT FROM SOEQUITY LEADERSHIP ON THE MURDER OF AIDAN ELLISON

It is with sorrow and solemn duty that we must again make a statement addressing the unjust, violent and deadly treatment of Black lives in this country and in our community. The following statement details the tragic death of Aidan Ellison, please read and share at your own discretion.

In the early hours of Monday, November 23, 2020, a 47-year-old white man escalated a confrontation with Aidan Ellison, a 19-year-old Ashland resident and a young Black man with his entire life ahead of him. This conflict ended with the 47-year-old man, Robert Keegan, shooting Aidan in the chest and killing him. While we do not know all of the details, the Ashland Police Department has stated that the reason this man confronted Aidan in the first place was because he was playing music too loudly.

We must now add playing music to the already-too-long list of things you cannot do while being Black in America.

The Southern Oregon Coalition for Racial Equity was founded as a direct result of a tragic and needless death of a Black man, George Floyd. This past summer, we marched in the streets and demanded our voices be heard—and we were often met with the false idea that violence against Black bodies does not happen in our “sleepy little towns” in Southern Oregon. Now, we have the devastating proof that existing while Black is dangerous here too.

While we could spend the next few paragraphs detailing the ways in which Blackness is ostracized, fetishized, and demonized in Southern Oregon, the leadership of SOEquity is honestly tired of repeating the same things over and over and over again as it too often goes ignored by our white neighbors who smile to our faces and claim to support us until we do something that they do not like—that they cannot control—and then we are insubordinate and aggressive and need to be taught a lesson. And sometimes that lesson is deadly.

Instead, we will focus on action.

Aidan’s murderer has been arrested and his first court hearing is scheduled for Wednesday, December 2 at 4:00pm. SOEquity, in partnership with the SOU Student Activist Coalition, will be hosting a vigil in front of the Jackson County Court House starting at 3:45 pm. We ask that you join us on Wednesday and at every subsequent court hearing for Robert Keegan to remind our community that Aidan will not be forgotten, and that justice must be served.

The following Wednesday, SOEquity has joined the efforts of BASE and SOBLACC to discuss the policing of the Black Community in Southern Oregon. We ask that any Black members who wish to



SOUTHERN OREGON COALITION FOR RACIAL EQUITY

have their voices heard attend and that our allies attend in silent support to witness and help hold the Jackson County Sherriff and Police Chiefs of Medford, Central Point, and Ashland accountable.

Over the next few weeks, we expect resistance to these efforts. We anticipate that those who wish to uphold white supremacy in our community will make statements like *Aidan's murder has nothing to do with race* or *the cops weren't involved with this, why do you care?* or *justice will be served, there is no reason to protest*. We expect to see further stories from our local news outlets focusing on the good deeds of the white murderer. We may also see attempts to attack Aidan's character in some sick attempt to justify his death.

With each of these moments of resistance, we are calling on our community to stand strong and push back against these messages. When your neighbor tries to remove race from this story, remind them and yourself of the ways in which society portrays Black men as inherent threats. When a news outlet focuses on how upstanding of a citizen Robert Keegan is, hold them accountable and ask why the painting a positive picture of a murderer is newsworthy. When our city and county leaders insist that justice will be served, remind them that it will—and that the people will be here every step of the way to ensure that it does.

Our actions moving forward will not bring back Aidan Ellison. It will not heal the devastating hurt his family and loved ones are feeling. But, it may prevent another senseless death from occurring in our community. That is why we persist.

With Love and Power,

SOEquity Leadership

Kayla Wade, Logistics Director

Dominique Toyer, Research Director

Leashelle Talbert, Education Inequity Director

Brenna Hess, Communications Director

Emily Mann, Community Outreach Director