

April 25, 2019

Jackson Travel and Tourism Board
200 S Willow Street
Jackson, WY 83001

Dear Jackson Travel and Tourism Board,

I am writing this letter to you because I understand that the Jackson Travel and Tourism Board (TTB) is the largest sponsor of the Center for Jackson Hole/SHIFT/Emerging Leaders Program (ELP). SHIFT is a program that has caused me and other people of color irreparable trauma and harm. Despite launching the #WeWontTakeSHIFTanymore campaign, which has been viewed by thousands of people on Medium.com and social media, Executive Director Christian Beckwith and what remains of the SHIFT Board of Directors, refuse to take accountability for the racism that we have experienced while under SHIFT's leadership. The Teton County Board of County Commissioners and Jackson Town Council have tasked you, among other things, with the responsibility of funding programs that will encourage people to bring their families to Jackson Hole, Wyoming.

I was one of those people. I came to Jackson Hole, Wyoming in October of 2018 and this is what I witnessed while under the care of a program that TTB funds and sponsors.

During the 2018 SHIFT Emerging Leaders Program, I watched helplessly as my roommate contemplated **suicide** after enduring days of racism and relentless micro-aggressions. I witnessed a Black woman two chairs down from me **struggle to breathe** and **hyperventilate** after Christian Beckwith berated her during breakfast. I listened as multiple people of color described the **loss of appetite, constipation, and sleep loss** that they endured from the racism that they experienced at SHIFT and in Jackson. These are examples of the **severe trauma responses** that many of us experienced under Mr. Beckwith's leadership at SHIFT. These are the experiences that TTB has helped sponsor and the images that I'll remember when I think about my time in Jackson Hole, Wyoming. I won't remember the Tetons or the fresh air—the food or entertainment. The landscape I'll remember the most is the racism and violence we experienced at SHIFT.

I'll remember the time that Mr. Beckwith told Sarah Shimazaki, a fellow ELP participant, that he wanted a group of people of color to perform their traumas in front of wealthy funders for the SHIFT Festival Story Slam. I remember when he told her that he didn't want a single "dry eye in the room". I remember how I felt when I discovered that Mr. Beckwith wanted me to re-live the traumas I've experienced so that the wealthy sponsors in the audience would sign a bigger check. I remember experiencing this level of tokenization, extraction, and re-traumatization over and over again at SHIFT and in Jackson.

I remember crying to Jose Gonzalez and Len Necefer, members of the SHIFT Board of Directors and two of my former heroes, explaining to them how physically unsafe and violated I felt at SHIFT. I remember both of them promising to contact me after they got to the bottom of it. I remember how abandoned I felt when NONE of the SHIFT Board of Directors contacted me again.

I remember feeling so physically threatened and in danger at SHIFT and consequently in Jackson that me and

several other people of color decided to only travel in pairs. Since SHIFT, we have continued to deal with the effects of the trauma we experienced like a never-ending nightmare. Since the launch of the campaign, I have woken up every single day covered in sweat and short of breath. Since I attended SHIFT five months ago, my health has been compromised as I continue to be affected.

Since our letters and social media posts have been viewed over 20,000 times, SHIFT's leadership has cleverly tried to paint me and my friends as "disruptors". They have disingenuously tried to make the conversation about the hollow actions they are taking since SHIFT's racism has become public knowledge. Both of these strategies fail to take accountability for the fact that we almost lost a life at SHIFT to **suicide**.

Since launching the campaign, hundreds of people have expressed their support for the victims affected by SHIFT's racism on social media. Over 100 hundred people have asked for the resignation of Mr. Beckwith in SHIFT's own Instagram post titled "A Letter from Our Board". Dozens of people have sent SHIFT letters and posted statements of support on our Medium page: <https://medium.com/wont-take-shift-anymore>. Three SHIFT board members have reported being rushed and misled by Board Chair, Len Necefer and have since resigned from their positions on the SHIFT Board of Directors. The Teton Science School, upon the conclusion of their own independent investigation, have decided not to renew their lease with SHIFT. They have released a statement saying, ""We apologize for the trauma that was inflicted by the Emerging Leaders Program. TSS is committed to centering and amplifying the voices of leaders of marginalized identities as they address issues of social and environmental justice." They also stated, "Through that monthslong process we recognized that the relationship structure with the **Center for Jackson Hole did not support this inclusive and productive learning environment** that's our commitment to our students,".

If SHIFT and Jackson Hole, Wyoming are ever to rebuild trust with the communities that have been hurt by SHIFT, we ask that Jackson Travel and Tourism Board divest from and stop funding SHIFT. Thousands of people, who are considering their own visit to Jackson, are watching and we urge you to send them clear message that **racism is bad for the health of our communities—that racism is bad for business and the future of Jackson**.

Conversely, if SHIFT continues to be funded, the message that this sends to the entire outdoor and travel industry is that the fiscal survival of one white-led organization that is built on tokenization, racism, and racial trauma is more valuable than the SAFETY and HEALTH of 17 victims, largely women and queer people of color. It lets us know loud and clear that Jackson Hole, Wyoming is not a safe place for us to recreate in, travel to, and spend our money in.

This message is dangerous and in 2018 it **almost cost us a life**.

We sincerely hope, instead, that **accountability** is what the Jackson Travel and Tourism Board will be remembered for.

Best,

Bam Mendiola
2018 SHIFT Emerging Leaders Program Participant