

Reproaction

November 13, 2019

To Whom It May Concern:

I'm writing to express my outrage over the unethical and cruel behavior of Dr. Randall Williams, director of the Missouri Department of Health and Senior Services (DHSS). I am a proud Missourian, a Black woman who has been organizing to advance reproductive justice nationally and in my home state for over 15 years, and I have never been so disturbed by a state appointee's abuse of power to monitor, shame, and punish people who seek abortion care.

In Missouri, Black women are 3 to 4 times more likely to die as a result of pregnancy complications and Black infants are 4 times more likely to die before they reach their first birthday. It is important to note that Missouri ranks toward the bottom of states in a country that ranks last in the developed world. Reproaction, a national organization I co-founded that leads bold direct action to increase access to abortion and advance reproductive justice, is now in our third year organizing a public education campaign on infant and maternal mortality in Missouri. We know all too well that for Black women in Missouri, being able to plan and space pregnancies and having access to abortion is all too often a matter of life and death.

As director of Missouri's DHSS and an OB/GYN, Dr. Williams is in a unique position to address racial health disparities. Williams is responsible for the management of the department and the administration of its programs and services, including minority health programs. Dr. Williams could have spent his tenure providing much needed leadership while supporting community health providers, like Planned Parenthood, that are on the front lines addressing our indefensible Black maternal and infant death rates. Instead, Dr. Williams chose to enforce state mandated assault of people seeking abortion care through medically unnecessary and invasive pelvic exams, requested and maintained a spreadsheet to monitor Planned Parenthood patients' menstrual cycles, all while weaponizing the license process in an obvious attempt to shut down Missouri's only abortion provider. This is why Reproaction has called on Dr. Williams to resign immediately.

I would like to thank the House Committee on Oversight and Reform for calling attention to the outrageous lengths the Missouri director of the Department of Health and Senior Services has gone to in his effort to shame and humiliate people seeking abortion care and shut down the state's only provider.

Sincerely,



Pamela Merritt
Co-Founder and Co-Director, Reproaction

Reproaction
P.O. Box 7435
Arlington, VA 22207