

Jazmyne Childs Personal Statement:

My name is Jazmyne Childs and I am 27 years old

In January of 2017, I was incredibly excited to have been offered a job with the North Carolina NAACP as the State Youth and College Director. My work was not just work, it was my dream job — an opportunity to inspire young people to play their role in voting and making our democracy work. I had long admired the NAACP, and its women fighters. I wanted to be just like them. I finally had my chance.

Shortly after I began my dream work, a long long nightmare began. On February 8, 2017, I was out of work with the flu sitting on my couch covered with a blanket when my cell phone rang. My co-worker Tyler Swanson said that a supervisor had asked him for my cell phone number. Tyler refused to give it to him. Tyler said he watched him open a filing cabinet, pull out a folder with my name and look at my resume.

About thirty minutes later, my phone rang with a number I did not recognize. I thought it may be someone from a branch or college so I answered the call. I heard the voice of the supervisor. I was confused. I thought I had done something wrong. But in a seductive low voice, he said he was calling to check on me and to let him know if I needed anything, anything at all, he would be there for me. I tried to end the call politely because at the time I was a temporary employee and I wanted a contract position. I felt violated and scared. In fact Tyler and another co-worker had warned me in my first week at the NAACP, never to be alone with this man because he had sexually harassed interns and other young women. After I hung up the phone, I understood what they meant.

Then, on May 2, 2017, the staff in the office were setting up for my co-worker's Laurel Ashton's surprise going away party. We left the lights off in the room, hoping she would not see what we were doing. I was unpacking the food and setting it up on the table when I felt someone's breath on my neck and then I felt him press his penis against my buttocks. I turned around quickly and saw the same supervisor. I yelled loudly, "Why are you hovering over me. That's gross. Move." He claimed he was looking for a receipt, and then he stormed out. I stood there feeling violated, ashamed and scared after he sexually assaulted me.

Concerned about my safety and that he would get more aggressive, I reported the incidents and filed a sexual harassment complaint.

Once Reverend Barber learned about it, he ordered an independent lawyer to conduct a thorough investigation, which took 5 months. The supervisor found out about my complaint and tried to intimidate me by barging into my office. I had to shut and lock my door to keep him out. I felt like a hostage. He resigned during the investigation but he repeatedly showed up at NAACP events and would stare me down. This too made me feel violated.

At the conclusion of the five-month investigation, the attorney/law professor gave her determination in a report. She concluded that I had been sexually harassed those two times and several others. Reverend Barber sent the report to the National NAACP with a request that he be expelled as a member, which only the National body can do.

However, Nationals advised the NC NAACP to file a cease and desist order banning him from coming to any more NAACP events. They did. But he defied the order and appeared any way and stared me down.

I left my job at the NAACP. I became aware he was running to be the State's NAACP President so I wrote an open letter to National President Derrick Johnson asking that he use his power to stop it because he would endanger many women. He failed to respond to me. Instead I was told to file an Article 10, the process used to have a branch member removed. I did that and got the requisite 42 signatures of NC NAACP members from across the state. I have yet to hear from National.

A different Article 10 was filed for expulsion of the same man who sexually harassed me for his protest in front of Alamance County Commissioners meeting and with television evidence, the National NAACP dismissed it. Moreover, not only does the perpetrator still have a close relationship with the executive committee members of the NC NAACP, but as I said, he is now running for president of the North Carolina NAACP. As President, the predator will have access to many women, locally and nationally.

Standing here today doing this was the last thing I wanted to do. But I have come forward today for two reasons: First, to name the predator who violated me: His name is Reverend Curtis Everette Gatewood.

I am also coming forward to demand that the National NAACP stop violating me and its women members and expel Reverend Gatewood and establish a sexual harassment policy. I want to be included in the process of developing the policy.

These past two and a half years have been very traumatic for me. This has been the most difficult thing I have ever had to deal with. First, I was violated by Reverend Curtis Gatewood and then violated by the National NAACP.

I had to get professional counseling. I have wept many times. It continues to haunt and hurt me. Seeing him flaunt himself on facebook as a champion of young people and him running for President traumatize me further. Moreover people in the NC NAACP have castigated the elder women who support me without knowing all the information.

The challenge of fighting institutionalized sexual harassment is that it requires so much from the victim. This is especially true when institutions like the NAACP do not have a clear process/policy for addressing sexual harassment and instead violate victims and cause them more trauma by sending them through a complicated bureaucratic maze. It is sexist. They cannot fight racism and practice sexism. It is wrong.

With the support of family, friends and the elder women of the NAACP, I stand here today against sexual harassment and the patriarchy in this society that allows it to continue in open without sanction. I also stand here to demand the National NAACP expel Reverend Gatewood for the proven sexual harassment and sexual assault.

To the many other victims of Reverend Curtis Gatewood's sexual violence, who are scared to come forward, I stand here for you today and I am sorry for all of the pain he has caused you.

I will not be silent any more. I will not stop. We must protect other women.