



ABFE Award for Philanthropic Leadership

Remarks by Lori Bezahler, President, Edward Hazen Foundation

April 6, 2013

I am honored to be here tonight to accept this award on behalf of the Edward Hazen Foundation board, staff and grantees. I want to thank ABFE for recognizing Hazen's work to support social change efforts in Black communities. This work is central to the Foundation's core values and mission and so we are grateful for this acknowledgement from the ABFE Board and membership. I want to acknowledge the Hazen trustees who are here to day—Sonia Jarvis, our chair, Charles Fields, Lori Villarosa, and Jenny Arwade.

It seems particularly fitting to be accepting this award in Chicago as work that Hazen has been supporting in Black communities here is taking on local and national prominence on issues that are having a disproportionate impact on communities of color.

In December I was at the United States Senate, listening to young African American man from Chicago testify before the Senate Committee on the Judiciary on "Ending the School to Prison Pipeline" .

Edward Ward, a youth leader with the Voices of Youth in Chicago Education, told of his experiences as an honors student at Orr Academy High School here in Chicago, where despite his own success, he saw many of his friends being repeatedly suspended from school and ultimately giving up and not coming back, having internalized the message that they were not wanted.

Earlier in the week I met with Jitu Brown, an organizer with the Kenwood Oakland Community Organization in Chicago, who told us how his community was getting the message that they are no longer wanted here either as their neighborhood is stripped of fundamental institutions, libraries shuttered, public housing bulldozed, and schools closed. His work and the work of his organization is to battle that by building power among his neighbors to fight against the dismantlement of their community and for strengthened systems to serve them.

It was not the first time I had heard stories such as Edward's. I remember a high school student in Los Angeles explaining to me years ago "There are four tracks in our school. College track, and we're not on that, military track, low wage work track, and penitentiary track." Those words stopped me cold. I knew that my daughter would never be expected to settle for those options. And so this work is deeply personal for me as well.

At Hazen we understand that in order to bring about sustained policy change that actually interrupts the dynamics of structural oppression, we need to name race as a root cause of disparities. It is not an accident that the lowest performing schools, the communities with the greatest burden of environmental degradation, the families with the least access to economic opportunity are in communities of color. Our work supporting youth organizing shows that young people know this as well. If given the opportunity to develop an analysis of the conditions in their communities, they understand that it is insufficient to create a program that will allow some number of them to escape negative circumstances. Instead, they look to build on the knowledge, social capital, and capacity in their communities to bring about sustained change that will improve circumstances for themselves, their families and communities. And they are not afraid to name race.

With a board that understands the critical importance of developing powerful leadership in Black communities, Hazen has spent decades investing in the people whose lives are most impacted by issues such as education, community violence, juvenile justice, environmental justice, and more. The Foundation has developed an analysis of policy issues that recognizes the pernicious effects of structural racism and understands that change will require a complex set of capacities, and is committed to ensuring that change is led by those most affected by the issue.

It was thrilling to be in the Senate to hear Edward's compelling testimony. But I know that he was not there alone. And he understood that he was speaking for young people all across the country who have been organizing for decades, raising the issue, building power and demanding to be heard.

I compliment Hazen's board for the wisdom of their choices. For their willingness to stay with a strategy of long term investment – well beyond the traditional three year grant cycle – for leading with values and commitment to the tough problems, not simply those that can be measured and solved between board meetings. There is no question in my mind that this institution holds such an

unusual perspective because of the emphasis on diversity and inclusiveness at all levels – and so I serve a board that is remarkably diverse among foundations in terms of race, ethnicity, gender, and sexual orientation.

And so, I would particularly like to thank the James Joseph Lecturer of 1996, Jean Fairfax. Ms. Fairfax holds a well-deserved place in the pantheon of great Black philanthropists. She was elected to the board of the Hazen Foundation in 1973, making her the first African American woman to serve on the board of a national foundation. As I understand our history, she can be thanked for setting the Foundation on the path that led to this award today. She took a strong stand on inclusiveness and self-determination and always asked the staff about the boards and leadership of the organizations proposed for funding which resulted in the Foundation's first attempts to gather diversity data on all of our prospective grantees and an emphasis on funding organizations led by people of color and are from the communities being served.

Jean Fairfax asked much of the Hazen Foundation during her tenure as a trustee. I hope that we continue to meet her challenge and the charge that you give us with this award – to strive for full and powerful inclusion, not just diversity, to

challenge the dynamics of power that are rooted in our nation's history of racial injustice, and to understanding that Black Americans must not be relegated to the role of charitable beneficiary, but rather must be the architects of change.