

Nowhere to Turn: NW Network Statement on the Killing of Charleena Lyles and the Harms of State Violence

Charleena Lyles was killed in her home by Seattle Police officers on Sunday, June 18th. Three of Charleena's children were in her home when she was shot. Our hearts go out to her children and family. We are so sorry for their loss and pray that her memory can be redeemed for a blessing. We join in the demands for police accountability and we recognize the urgent need for change across service systems.

Charleena was a victim of domestic violence. Charleena's family said that her mental health deteriorated dramatically in the past year after she was reported to Child Protective Services on suspicion of neglect. As reported in the New York Times, she spent the last year desperately working to prove to a judge that her children were in good care and were only at risk from her abusive ex-boyfriend. Her family says that her physical and mental health suffered greatly.

Charleena's struggle to survive state intervention is a familiar story to NW Network advocates.

Everyday people who have the moral and ethical responsibility to help domestic violence survivors, to be involved in the most intimate aspects of our lives—people like social workers, advocates, teachers and therapists—make reports against domestic violence survivors to CPS and law enforcement. Even when they do not believe the report will make a child safer. Even when they know from the best research data and their own experience that the report will actually do more harm than good.

These reports have devastating consequences for domestic violence survivors' ability to seek help.

People will dismiss Charleena's experience. People will say it was her fault. That her deterioration under the crucible of state intervention proves that she was not fit. We protest these ideas.

Last year, we conducted a study with the National Domestic Violence Hotline on the impact of mandatory reporting on help seeking behaviors. Charleena's experience resonates with what we heard from survivors over and over. Mandated reports—reports made because helping professionals believe they "have to" make a report, not because they necessarily believe the report will result in greater safety or stability—do not help. In fact, overwhelmingly, they make things worse. In fact, 50% said that they made things "much worse". Many survivors said that they delayed seeking help or changed the help they asked for because of fear of a harmful report being made against them. As one survivor said, ["There's no one I can trust."](#)

For over a decade, the NW Network has demanded changes to how CPS reports are required and made.

We call on any person who has a job of helping others—any teacher or therapist or social worker or advocate—to resist this practice of harmful reporting.

We call on every helper who believes that Black Lives Matter, or that institutional racism is real, or that survivors' self-determination matters, or that poverty is real, or that state violence is real to resist harmful reports to CPS and law enforcement.

Charleena's experience highlights so many ways in which our communities and our efforts at "helping" failed her and her children. We recognize that state involvement was only one piece of Charleena's life and the ongoing efforts she made to protect herself and her children. But it is a piece that the NW Network, and organizations like us, have an obligation to address. The NW Network is more committed than ever to show up for the most marginalized survivors, to recognize the harms caused by the anti-violence movement that has entangled itself in state civil and criminal legal responses that do not serve survivors or their families.

We say Charleena Lyles' name to honor her life and to confirm our resolve to end the complex of state violence that took her life.