

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**August 1, 2018**

Press Availability:

**WHEN:** Wednesday, August 1, 2018  
**WHERE:** 1188 S. High St., Columbus, OH 43206  
**TIME:** 11:30 a.m.

## **Same-Sex Couple File Federal Discrimination Lawsuits Against The Columbus Urban League As National Members Gather In Ohio's Capital City To Celebrate The Historic Civil Rights Organization's 100th Year**

Columbus, Ohio – Today two women fired by the Columbus Urban League filed lawsuits alleging the Columbus, Ohio Chapter of the Historic National Urban League and its President/CEO Stephanie Hightower, terminated their employment based solely on the women's sexual orientation.

The Columbus Urban League and Hightower fired Joselyn Parker in May 2017, only three weeks after the couple disclosed to President/CEO Hightower that they had begun a romantic dating relationship. Hightower first suspended Mitchell without pay the same day she fired Parker and eventually fired Mitchell in August 2017.

Mitchell, who in three short years worked her way up from a part-time employee to the nonprofit's Associate Vice President, Strategic Projects & Investor Relations, and Parker hired in January 2017 as its Director of Education and Youth Services, say they were "stunned" by Hightower's harsh homophobic reaction to their workplace relationship.

Parker and Mitchell expressed deep disappointment in The Columbus Urban League's treatment of them, especially considering the storied civil rights organization's professed mission of empowering "African Americans and disenfranchised groups through economic, educational and social progress."

"The Columbus Urban League really hurt me, devastated me," Parker said. Mitchell added, "Other couples dated at CUL without a problem; no one, not Ms. Hightower or anyone else, said a word to them. The only difference between their office romances and ours – we were two females."

Black, Out, & Proud, Inc., a Columbus-based collective representing Black LGBTQ+ individuals, insists these allegations, if proven true, are extremely troubling. As noteworthy, is the alleged misuse of public funds. Representatives speaking collectively for the group said: "It is unfortunate, that in a city so progressive, we are having these conversations; that sexual orientation can put employees at risk of termination from a large, nonprofit agency. We hope that due diligence is taken on these matters, and that justice is served for these women."

Mitchell and Parker filed their complaints in the United States District Court for the Southern District of Ohio. They are represented by The Law Office of Spater & Davis-Williams, LLC and Michelle E. Lanham, Attorney At Law, LLC

###