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Personal Statement for REFORMA's ALA Presidential Candidate Endorsement

The National Associations of Librarians of Color (NALCo) have been my professional home and ohana (*family*) since I became a librarian in the middle of the last recession. Unable to find full time work upon graduation, I was recruited into the Asian/Pacific American Librarians Association (APALA) to work on "Talk Story: Sharing Stories, Sharing Culture," part of Camila Alire's ALA Presidential Initiative. This initiative led to successful programs for all of our NALCos, many of which, such as Noche de Cuentos, still exist. It was through this work that I built my confidence and developed my skills as well as gained a deep appreciation and passion for promoting the work of AILA, APALA, BCALA, CALA, JCLC, and of course, REFORMA. The work we do within our associations to recruit, promote and retain librarians and library workers of color is core to everything I do.

As I progressed through APALA leadership and developed strong relationships with our fellow NALCos such as REFORMA, I became inspired by the work our librarians of color have been doing for generations to create truly equitable libraries and a truly inclusive profession. The risks that our leaders have taken over the years on our behalf have made it possible for me to be the first Native Hawaiian candidate for ALA President and, if elected, the second Asian/Pacific American President. Being the first, I know that I carry with me the strength of our associations and the passion, vision, and ideals of our leaders and colegas to get us to this point.

We have come a long way since segregation at conferences and within libraries, but our work to achieve equity, diversity, and inclusion is not complete. One of the privileges of my career was serving on the Steering Committee for the 3rd Joint Conference of Librarians of Color. As Co-Chair of the Programming Committee, I was able to review and get a full assessment for the challenges our librarians of color are facing in the workplace everyday. Toxic work environments, lack of respect and understanding, and burnout are just a few of the challenges facing our communities that our associations work to combat. I see ALA elevating this work and institutionalizing it within its purview, for though the journey is still long, we are committed to this beautiful struggle, as Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. called it.

Continuing the work of our ALA Presidents and leaders of color is an honor. I have brought my experience as APALA Executive Director and Past President as well as the voices of those I met and listened to at JCLC to my work as an ALA Executive Board member and ALA Councilor. This work, while sometimes frustrating, can also be fulfilling when we are able to look back and see the strides we have made together. I am also inspired to know that we are not on this path alone.

On a personal level, REFORMA encouraged me as a newer librarian, inviting me to present a poster for the Orange County Chapter's partnership with the Santa Ana Public Library in the *From Seeds to Trees* mentorship program, connecting with future librarians and being inspired by their enthusiasm for the work they do and planned to do. Although I wasn't a member at the time, the welcoming nature of Reformistas stuck with me and I knew that I had a home there, even if my financial difficulties as a part-time librarian didn't always allow me to formally join.

REFORMA again welcomed me as a member when I was APALA President and I was pleased to finally become a full, official member this past year. REFORMA's focus on the future and directly cultivating new leaders within the profession has been an example for us all and is one I am pleased and very proud to be a part of in this new capacity.

REFORMA in particular has always been a place for strong leadership of all of our NALCos, instituting programs like Children in Crisis, a program which inspired 2015-2016 APALA President Janet Clarke's Presidential program, focusing on library services to refugees. As Program Chair for that program, I saw the connections between our associations and our communities as often invisible populations. My goal for that program was to help bring awareness to the great work REFORMA members were doing and continue to do at the border, and to garner increased support from ALA and its round tables, with the International Relations Round Table as a co-sponsor of the program.

My work for the NALCos and within ALA has always been one of collective empowerment, highlighting the work of each unique member affiliate. Using our community expertise and joint collaboration, NALCo leaders have been able to encourage ALA to see the wisdom of the changes that are needed to effectively serve communities of color. As a member of this leadership contingent, I have been proud to see the needle moving towards including our expertise and insights to continue the progress of those who came before us and to continue this important work.

As Chair of the ALA Steering Committee on Organizational Effectiveness (SCOE), I was able to listen to and hear from thousands of ALA members who share the concerns of our NALCos. I heard, among those members, many from our associations of color express their frustrations with ALA, their hopes for ALA, and am inspired and motivated by the many innovative solutions they have suggested to strengthen ALA for a new generation of librarians. I have heard many call for an inclusion of indigenous ways of thinking and sustainable library practices, building on the successes of ALA and its affiliates, and I will make sure these voices are heard by others.

As ALA President, I will draw upon my experiences within and with the National Associations of Librarians of Color to focus on advocacy and organizational excellence through connection and collaboration. I will celebrate our successes and accomplishments, both as library workers and as organizations, including REFORMA's upcoming 50th Anniversary. I have and will continue to seek, listen to, and act on the varied perspectives and experiences of our members to move ALA through known and unknown challenges. I will work to ensure representation at all levels of leadership and bring interest in libraries to new communities.

ALA is in a great period of transition. The association faces great financial struggles, changing expectations for membership engagement, and a call to become an anti-racist institution. I believe I can be the bridge the association needs to the future. Using the past to build upon and to inform us moving forward, I see an association that works closely with its affiliates, listens to its members, and maintains an open dialogue for ongoing improvement. REFORMA and our members are an important component of this vision.

REFORMA members have taught me so much and continue to inspire and inform not only my work as an ALA member and a member of all the NALCos, but as a librarian of color. It would be a privilege to carry REFORMA's endorsement with me through this campaign.