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# LETTER FROM THE EDITORS

Campus housing and residence life is, at its core, deeply human work. It is rooted in community, care, advocacy, and the everyday commitment to helping students and colleagues feel seen, supported, and valued. For generations, womxn have played a central role in shaping this work—often serving as architects of belonging, builders of community, and catalysts for change within our institutions.

*The Womxn in Housing Journal*, a special publication of the Association of College and University Housing Officers–International (ACUHO-I), was created to honor the many ways womxn contribute to and shape our field. From residence life professionals and custodial staff to doctoral students and senior leaders, womxn across roles and career stages continue to influence the culture, direction, and humanity of campus housing.

This collection centers the voices of womxn whose stories are too often untold or overlooked. Through reflections on motherhood, racial identity, international perspectives, and intergenerational leadership, the authors explore the complexities of navigating housing work while embodying resilience, self-preservation, and advocacy. These narratives illuminate both the challenges womxn continue to face, particularly in contrast to their male counterparts, and the powerful ways womxn foster belonging, equity, and care within campus communities.

While the articles and research within these pages reflect deeply personal experiences and perspectives, this special publication was created with a broader purpose. It is our hope that every reader finds something here that affirms the many ways womxn contribute to our communities, our institutions, and our field. The stories shared throughout this issue are not isolated reflections; they are part of a larger fabric, threads that help us more fully understand the leadership, insight, and care that womxn bring to this profession every day.

We invite readers to engage with these stories with curiosity rather than comparison. Each author's journey reflects a unique path shaped by different experiences,

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identities, and choices. The intent is not to define a single measure of success or contribution, but rather to illuminate the many ways womxn show up, lead, and create meaningful impact in our field.

As editors of this special issue, we approach this work with both gratitude and humility. We were honored to hold these stories, to sit with the reflections and scholarship of these remarkable authors, researchers, and womxn, and now to share them with you. This responsibility is not one we take lightly. Both of us identify as womxn who have spent our careers working within and alongside this profession, each in our own way striving to make our communities and our field a little better for the womxn who move through them.

We have learned that meaningful change in a profession does not always come from titles, awards, or accolades. Often, it begins in quieter ways: speaking up when something needs to be said, highlighting stories that deserve to be heard, checking in on colleagues who need support, and working to remove barriers wherever we can. The stories within this issue shine a light on just how many ways there are to do this work and how many ways womxn continue to shape the future of housing and residence life.

As editors of this special issue, we would also like to recognize Carmen L. Vance, whose legacy continues to inspire generations of womxn in the housing profession. Carmen served as the founding chair of the ACUHO-I Foundation in 1988, helping to shape a pathway of leadership, service, and advocacy that many have since followed. When we began reflecting on the stories shared in previous special topic issues, we saw an opportunity to focus intentionally on the experiences and contributions of womxn in our field. Carmen's work reminded us of the importance of naming and honoring "firsts"—and, just as importantly, recognizing and celebrating those who follow.

In the pages that follow, readers will encounter a collection of stories and studies that reflect the diversity, complexity, and strength of womxn working within student housing. Together, these contributions offer insight, reflection, and inspiration for the many ways womxn continue to shape the profession.

In their article "Non-Entry Level Women Working in Housing: Challenges and Supports for Motherhood," authors Deborah Taub, Amy Pollock Drake, and Meegan Hunt offer insights to the challenges residence life professionals face, from on-call rotations and managing a balance between work and home to the need to compartmentalize their work.

Authors Paige Hicks and Stephanie Tillman, in their article "Voices Unveiled: Intergenerational Narratives of Black Women in Housing," draw on a narrative analysis of scholarship and lived experiences to examine the intergenerational strategies Black women in housing and student affairs have used to overcome systemic barriers in the field. By bringing these narratives together, the article offers both visibility and practical insight for supporting and sustaining Black women in the profession.

The article by Matea Čaluk and Jorhie Beadle, "Rewriting the Narrative: Women Leaders in Housing Navigating Decision Making," presents stories of women who are doing the work and continue to combat patriarchal norms and expectations in their senior leadership roles.

In "Fostering Belonging and Inclusion: The Role of Women Custodians in Student Housing," Cynthia Cervantes highlights the challenges of Latina custodians as they show care and concern for the students they serve, bringing light to the *familia*-like feeling they bring to work with them each day.

In "Pieces of Us: A Collaborative Critical Autoethnography of Black Women's Experiences and Professional Work Cycle Within Residence Life," Katrina A. Calhoun, Deanna C. Hughes, Syntina Nesbitt, Tiffany L. Bromfield, Kpandi Lumeh, Tasha Roberts, and Quiana M. Stone use collaborative critical autoethnography to center the lived experiences of seven Black women in housing and residence life, illuminating how gendered racism, invisible labor, and institutional barriers shape their professional journeys while highlighting the resilience and community that sustain them in the field.

In "Fueling Resilience with Courage: Perspectives of Women in Housing and Residence Life," Mfon M. Nwabuoku draws on narrative reflections and qualitative insights to show how self-awareness, boundary-setting, advocacy, and community support help women transform challenging professional environments.

"Negotiating Identities Across Borders: A Collaborative Autoethnography of Afro International Women in U.S. Residential Life," co-authored by Abigail Smith and Tobi Olawuni, examines the experiences of two Black international women in housing and residence life, illuminating how cultural identity, institutional expectations, and systemic inequities shape their resilience, sense of belonging, and contributions to the field while calling attention to the need for equity-minded structures that support international staff in thriving.

In an autoethnographic narrative, "Motherhood and the Pursuit of a Doctorate as a Full-Time Housing Professional," Deanna C. Hughes examines how a Black mother

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and first-generation doctoral student working full time in housing and residence life navigates the intersecting demands of family, work, and doctoral study while drawing on resilience, community support, and Black feminist thought to persist and thrive in higher education.

Finally, we extend our deepest gratitude to the authors whose courage, scholarship, and reflection make this publication possible. Sharing personal experiences alongside research and professional insight requires vulnerability, care, and trust. We are deeply thankful for the ways each contributor has expanded our understanding of leadership, community, and what it means to support womxn in our field.

And to you, the reader—thank you for spending time with these stories. We hope they invite reflection, spark conversation, and encourage each of us to continue building spaces where womxn are seen, supported, and celebrated for the many ways they shape our profession. ■

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