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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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\$30,000 lawsuit settlement donated A Safe Place for victims of domestic violence

Michigan teacher fired for talking about oppression after Presidential election

LAKE COUNTY, IL – A fifth grade Michigan charter school teacher fired in December 2016 for discussing tolerance at a middle school assembly after last year’s Presidential election, donated the proceeds of the \$30,000 settlement she received to A Safe Place on behalf of families of domestic violence.

“I will share with you my darkness so you feel safe to share your darkness with me, such that we can vanquish the darkness together,” said Mika Yamamoto in her talk to middle schoolers at Renaissance Public School Academy in Michigan. As she shared her own hardships and social concerns, as a woman and domestic violence survivor, she encouraged the students to stand up for equality, be brave, and share their stories honestly.

After that day, Yamamoto had many students coming to her confiding about experiences and fears they were having, including racism and safety at home. After taking these stories to the principal, she was discouraged by administration from reporting anything to Children’s Protective Services.

After a larger discussion the following day, she was told to go home for two days. When she appealed to the administrators to be reinstated, she was terminated. “They said that the community we were in was not ready for me. I was being discriminated against. They were violating my first amendment rights.”

“If teachers are afraid to advocate for student safety, or are fired for discussing oppression, what happens to our society?”

After relocating to Chicago, Yamamoto was introduced to A Safe Place while speaking at a domestic violence panel by the Illinois Council Against Handgun Violence. A domestic violence survivor herself, she is an advocate for programs and services for victims and the underserved, and is the public assistant guide and a writer for ESME online magazine, a community publication for single mothers.

After learning about A Safe Place’s multi-faceted approach to assisting victims of domestic violence in transforming their lives, she made the decision to donate her entire legal settlement to A Safe Place in recognition of her students at Renaissance Public School Academy. Her attorney, Julie Gafkay, also generously donated her fees to Underground Railroad, a domestic violence shelter in Saginaw, Michigan.

“This donation of \$30,000 is especially impactful because it comes at a time when violence and oppression are at the forefront of social issues in our country,” said Executive Director of A Safe Place Pat Davenport. “Our families are grateful to Mika for standing up for freedom, safety, and the right to have an equal voice.”

A Safe Place is Lake County’s sole provider of services exclusively addressing domestic violence, serving individuals throughout the Chicagoland area including Cook, McHenry, and Kenosha counties. The organization’s lifesaving programs and services include crisis support, housing, legal advocacy, counseling, community outreach, and education to prevent future abuse. With ten locations, A Safe Place served over 14,000 individuals last year.

Since moving to Chicago, Yamamoto has become one of A Safe Place’s most outspoken supporters. While she is settling comfortably in her new home city, she fondly remembers her students. “I miss my students terribly, every day, and I’m heartbroken because nothing will put me back in their classroom again. But we will always be able to find a way back to each other, and together we can vanquish this unspeakable night befalling us.”

For more information about A Safe Place and domestic violence awareness, visit www.asafeplaceforhelp.org or call (847) 731-7165. Or call the 24-hour Help Line at 1-800-600-SAFE or (847) 249-4450.

Photo 1:

5th grade charter school teacher Mika Yamamoto recently donated her \$30,000 lawsuit settlement to A Safe Place.



Photo 2:
Posters made by 5th grade students put up all over the Renaissance Public School Academy in Mt. Pleasant, MI, in support of their teacher Mika Yamamoto, who was fired for speaking out.



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Founded in 1978, A Safe Place is the leading advocate for eliminating domestic violence in northern Illinois, and is Lake County, Illinois' only provider of services exclusively for victims of domestic violence. A Safe Place provides emergency shelter, permanent housing, a 24-hour crisis line (847-249-4450), court and non-legal advocacy, individual, group, and children's counseling, art therapy, family visitation services, batterer intervention services; and community outreach, prevention education, and professional training. Our service area includes Lake, McHenry, and northern Cook counties in Illinois; however, our clients come to us from across the state, region, and country. For more information about A Safe Place, visit www.asafeplaceforhelp.org, [Facebook](#), and [Twitter](#).