

# MERCEDES PHELAN

BY MERCEDES PHELAN

## WHAT IS YOUR BACKGROUND IN ACTIVISM

I can't pinpoint when exactly i really started to consider myself an activist. Honestly i still contemplate if that's what i would consider myself. I have always had a deep passion for helping others and standing up for what is right.

But as far as being a part of an activist organization i would say it started about 4 years ago. After my daughter was born i got involved with the Rochester Chapter of the National Organization for Women. After a year and a half i became there community outreach chair. I enjoyed my time there and i learned a lot especially about myself and my views on feminism and the importance of intersectionality which the group lacked. Even though i am not a part of the organization anymore there are still a few of the women who i hold close to my heart. My current job title is the Education Organizer for

Metro Justice and The Alliance for Quality Education. I am also on the Board for 540 W Main another local non profit. My job as the education organizer is to build a grass roots parent/community member powered group that advocates to ensure that all children receive a fair and proper education regardless of there zip code. The problem with Rochester City Schools is the lack of funding and lack of support for students socially and emotionally. To fix these issues we need to address and change the issue of equity. It is proven that students who live in poverty need more dollars per a child in order

to succeed. In order for there to be equity the state would need to give rochester city schools the 12 million dollars it is owed in foundation aid and then some. To address the issue of lack of social and emotional support we need services in place. Schools would need more social workers and psychologist.. There would also need to be a culturally relevant curriculum so that students can learn about there culture and see reflections of themselves in there textbooks and other readings. There is also the need for restorative practices

men tend to not appreciate that and will say your being bossy or rude. I am also young and the person who had the position before me was a male so when i started working with my committee it took them a little while to take me seriously. I have also been in situations where men have tried to assert dominance and i had to shut that down.

Yes i was recently arrested for "trespassing". I had been organizing around the issue at the homeless encampment on the south ave 490 ramp. They have been on that land for over 2 years. Spectrum bought the land about a year ago and sense october has been trying to kick them out. We have a big homeless issue in the city of rochester and oppose to it being addressed the city government just looks for ways to hide it. To make a long story short i was called to come down to the encampment by one of the gentleman that live there.

When i arrived some men from spectrum were telling the gentlemen they had

to leave. I told them they were not going to and there was nowhere for them to go. They proceeded to call the police. When the police arrived they talked to men from spectrum then came over to talk to us. They said we needed to leave i explained there is nowhere to go. He told me that i could leave that the situation was under control. I refused so he handcuffed me. I spent approximately 3 hours downtown at monroe county jail. I was searched and had my mugshot taken. I was eventually released on bail of 100 dollars but told I had to appear in court the next day.



in every school. This is type of communication and dialogue between students and teachers to address there feelings in a productive way. It is good for parents as well. The district would also need to hire more teachers of color. Studies have shown that students do much better academically when they have teachers of color.

I definitely think that my experience as a women activist differ from those of my male counterparts. I consider myself an intersectional feminist so i tend to pick up on gender related issues. As an organizer you have to be assertive and some

Or Else  
#Black  
Lives  
Matter

RESPECT

EXISTENCE

OR  
EXPECTATION

RESISTANCE

#BlackDiversity





When i appeared in front of the judge all charges were dropped.

It's really hard to explain the range of emotions i was having during my arrest and my time spent downtown. I think at first i was in shock and pissed. I felt like i was not doing anything wrong. Not anything that should land me being arrested. When i got there and they were doing the search and the mug shot i felt violated. And during my time waiting to be bailed out i was mostly pissed of because the cops that were working were ignorant to put in nicely. It did not improve the negative view i already have of the police department and the criminal justice system in general. The thing that pisses me off is i was fortunate to have someone to bail me out but not everyone has that privilege. So if i did not have it i would have had to sit there overnight and wait till i appeared in front of a judge in the morning to get released. Honestly

in a way being arrested felt liberating. Because i know that i stood up for what i believe in even with the understanding that my actions could have consequences

Balancing my life and my schedule has been slightly difficult and i am still working out the kinks. Before this job i was use to working a normal 9-5. So adjusting to working at night and on the weekends has been a process. But it's all about managing my time, setting boundaries and making sure that i take time for myself as well as time for my daughter. And there are plenty of times when she has the opportunity to come with me.

I would tell them that is important to stand up for others. Nothing in life is promised and the situation that they are in now could be you tomorrow. And if it was you you would want someone standing there with you. We only

have a short time on this planet and everyone should do there best to leave it better then they entered it. And don't ever think that you are to young to get involved. Ruby Bridges was very young when she marched through a crowd of angry protesters to go to a school she knew she was not welcome in because she knew that she deserved the same opportunity at an education as everyone else.

There are plenty of ways people can get involved. Metro Justice is always looking for people to volunteer for our campaigns. We are also always accepting membership donations or donations in general. Even if you can't physically be involved financial donations is how we continue to do the work we do. It keeps the lights on and helps us pay for the small amount of resources that we use.