As I watched the video of the #AssaultAtSpringValleyHigh and learned that the assaulted young woman was in foster care I remembered my own story of going into foster care at 7-years old, due to my family’s homelessness. When my grandmother took me into her home through kinship foster care I began school in East New York, Brooklyn one of the 7 communities in New York that sends the most people to New York’s prisons. During my first month in the third grade I was distracted and traumatized due to being removed from my family and due to this I was not performing as well I could in class, but instead of punishing me my teacher called a meeting with my grandmother who shared my story and after that the teacher gave me the guidance I needed to be academically successful, as a woman of color she knew what I needed was education not a path to incarceration. Unfortunately for the millions of Black girls in foster care like the young sister at Spring Valley High their story does not end like mine and I know only for the Grace of God go I.

Our Black women and girls whether in foster care or not are under attack. According to research data from the Office for Civil Rights at the US Department of Education, black girls in public elementary and secondary schools nationwide were suspended at a rate of 12% compared with a rate of just 2% for white girls and more than girls of any race or ethnicity. Research also shows that within minority groups darker-skinned girls are disciplined more harshly than their light-skinned counterparts (Schools’ Discipline for Girls Differs by Race and Hue by Tanzia Vega, New York Times). In July 2015 five African-American women died in police custody. During the holiday season as we gather to celebrate the son born to an poor girl of color it is only fitting that we take this time to stand with Black Women and Girls. Women make up over half of those attending our faith institutions and the average Christian in the world today is a woman of African ancestry.

Standing with Black Women and Girls is not an option – it is an obligation and sacred opportunity. In the spirit of Shirley Chisolm, as people of faith we should resolve to be unbought, unbossed, and undefeated in the face of sexism, stigmatization, workplace exploitation, intimate partner abuse, and the manifold forms of opposition that confront sisters of color. Standing with black women and girls is not only a priority for the sisters: it is a community priority, a human rights issue, a litmus test of the theological integrity of our faith institutions. Upon witnessing the traumatic #AssaultAtSpringValleyHigh and discussing it with his wife and fellow sojourner for justice, Gabby-Cudjoe Wilkes, my friend and clergy partner at Faith in New York Rev. Andrew Wilkes, convened a few friends to determine how we might best mobilize faith communities to prioritize the needs, concerns, and existing advocacy/organizing strategies of women of color.
We realized that at this Kairos moment we could not be content with prayer breakfasts and rapid-response statements alone. Congregations can offer Black women more than women’s season, special luncheons, and peripheral moments of foregrounding within an otherwise male-dominated setting. The #StandwithBWG convening presents this toolkit as an action guide and educational resource to aid congregations in continuing or commencing the urgently needed work of standing with black women and girls.

The Stand with Black Women and Girls toolkit is subdivided into four sections: 1) Liturgical Resources; 2) Policy Options & Public Actions; 3) Social Media Campaign; and 4) Video Resources. Starting Friday, December 11th, the #StandwithBWG campaign will continue until Sunday, January 17th, 2016. To join the campaign or request further information, please email standwithbwg@gmail.com

Too often solidarity for racial justice underscores the plight of men and plays down the pain and power of women of color. With your energy and engagement, we can co-construct a more equitable solidarity, a greater sense of working together with women and girls are valued in all of their multi-dimensionality.

This October PICO launched A Women’s Theology of Liberation in Washington, DC to bring a gender lens to our organizing work and now I am calling on all of us to take action for Black women and girls. My sister Tamisha Torres, Live Free and Safe Return Project Organizer at CCISCO is a formerly incarcerated Afro-Latina that inspires me to stand up for the lives of Black women and girls who are incarcerated. As a formerly incarcerated woman she has taught me that we fail our sisters when we are silent concerning how mass incarceration impacts them. In 2016 Live Free will be providing more opportunities to stand with Black women and girls facing mass incarceration and police brutality.

The time is now to stop failing Black women and girls and to stand with them.

In Partnership,

Onleilove Alston,
Executive Director Faith in NY
Member of the #StandwithBWG Planning Team

The Stand with Black Women and Girls Planning Team

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Convener & Policy Options/ Public Actions Director, #StandwithBWG, and Faith in New York Clergy Partner

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**Kercena Dozier**
Digital Campaign Director, #StandwithBWG
Faith in New York Partner
Realizing that PICO is an multi-faith network and that the #StandWithBWG toolkit was developed for particularly those of the Christian tradition, below are some ideas for non-Christian faith communities that want to stand with Black Women & Girls.

Also, we greatly value your input. Please email any multi-faith ideas or further resources to onleilove@faithinnewyork.org.

IDEAS FOR MUSLIM COMMUNITIES
For Muslim communities Haajar the Egyptian Mother of Ismaa’eeel is a powerful example of Allah providing justice for an oppressed African woman. Having a discussion group focused on the story of Haajar and how it relates to the stories of Black mothers who have to stand by their sons who face injustice would be a great way for a Muslim to Stand with Black Women and Girls.

IDEAS FOR JEWISH COMMUNITIES
For Jewish Communities Zipporah the Ethiopian wife of Moses is a powerful example of the contributions Black women make to liberation movements. Zipporah saves the life of Moses when she circumcised their son, in what ways have Black women saved the lives of those in our communities? Having a Black Women and Girls Shabbat service focused on Zipporah is a great way for a Jewish community to Stand with Black Women and Girls.

IDEAS FOR BUDDHIST COMMUNITIES
For Buddhist communities the writings of Black Buddhist feminist Rebecca Walker provide great resources concerning the intersection of Buddhism, gender and race. Utilizing these writings in your communities would be a powerful way to raise the issues of Black women and girls. For more information visit Rebecca Walker’s website: http://www.rebeccawalker.com/black-buddha.

IDEAS FOR HINDU COMMUNITIES
For Hindu communities the Goddess Kali provides a powerful example of the leadership of dark-skinned women. Holding a gathering focused on the example of Kali and the powerful leadership of dark-skinned women in our communities would be a great way to Stand with Black Women and Girls and combat the colorism that sends many dark-skinned women to prison longer than their lighter counterparts.