**AN OPEN LETTER**

**TO ALL WOMEN SEXUALLY VIOLATED BY BILL COSBY**

**As victim advocates, rape survivors and allies against sexual violence, we stand in solidarity with you! We are in awe of your courage, strength and resilience as you STAND UP and SPEAK OUT for yourselves and other women who share you experience. You also give voice to all women who experience rape and sexually violence and are silenced.**

**For those victims who have not come forward publicly, we stand with you as well. We trust the way you deal with your experience is right for you. We honor and celebrate your resilience.**

**WE BELIEVE YOU. Your stories echo the painful truths told by scores of other sexual assault victims. We know that most victims are raped by someone they know and many people who sexually offend use drugs and alcohol to make their targets more vulnerable and easily overcome. We recognize you as victims of a predatory rapist who took advantage of status and power to create the opportunity to sexually assault you.**

**We grieve with you for all that was taken from you, the pain you carried alone and in silence through the days and years of your lives. We believe in and acknowledge your incredible capacity to cope and prevail over the trauma of the crimes inflicted upon you.**

**Rapists make a choice to take advantage of women sexually for no other reason than they want to and they can. No woman does anything to deserve that. Only the rapist is responsible. A society long deaf, blind and mute to the systemic sexual exploitation, abuse and rape of women has tolerated and accommodated these acts, minimized and denied them as criminal behavior and intimidated any woman who comes forward.**

**We are indebted to you for breaking the silence and shattering the erroneous belief that a successful, talented and charming “gentleman” could ever rape a woman. We know that rapists come from all walks of life. They live and work among us. Because of your courage, others are forced to open their eyes to the realities of sexual assault.**

**You give all of us great hope that maybe one day we can live in a society where the rape of even one woman is unthinkable. By so bravely coming forward and sharing your stories, you have inspired the movement of women and men in this country who have worked for decades to expose the epidemic of sexual violence, provide services, seek justice for victims and hold perpetrators accountable. The resonance of your voices gives support and validation to the countless sexual assault victims whose disclosures everyday fall on deaf ears or whose voices are never heard at all. You send a strong, clear message to all: WE ARE NOT ALONE AND WE WILL NO LONGER BE SILENT.**

**We realize that some will still deny that Dr. Huxtable, the Jello-Pudding pitchman, could ever commit such heinous acts. It is difficult to accept, that someone you think you know, someone whom you think shares your values and ideals could commit such a monstrous crime again and again. Yet your collective stories are powerful and will break through the denial of many. Because of you, one day women will no longer have to suffer the trauma of rape alone and in silence.**

**We thank you and honor your courage.**

**Polly Poskin**

**Executive Director**

**Illinois Coalition Against Sexual Assault**