

## Twitter Thread by Dr. Sealy-Jefferson



**Dr. Sealy-Jefferson**

@Dr\_S\_Jefferson



**My mentor/dear friend told me that I speak up AND speak out, and how this is rare.**

**Today, I want to talk what it's like when I see, sense & feel that a more senior Black woman is attempting to sabotage me and assassinate my character. A■ ■**

It all started here. I joined @PublicHealth in 2018 and was elected chair in 2019. As can be seen, I was SO excited that the members of this section believed in my leadership enough to elect me to this position!

<https://t.co/9altVsUtcP>

So, apparently I'm Chair-Elect of the Epidemiology Section of APHA! I'm speechless right now! Thank y'all so much!!

<pic.twitter.com/SiEHj2OTva>

— Dr. Sealy-Jefferson (@Dr\_S\_Jefferson) October 7, 2019

Since I cross paths with very few other Black women epidemiologists in these academic streets, I was looking forward to working with the Black women leaders in this section. <https://t.co/wpQ69nJ9kk>

1st mtg as chair-elect of the Epidemiology section of APHA and I'm \*stunned\* that I was elected b/c I just joined APHA last yr. & people usually work their way up the ranks for 10+ years before taking this role. And our section has 3k people. I'm HONORED! [u2764 pic.twitter.com/GvXtfaXaHv](https://t.co/GvXtfaXaHv)

— Dr. Sealy-Jefferson (@Dr\_S\_Jefferson) December 6, 2019

I started observing that the communication to me was minimal, there was little documentation on processes & procedures, and I was (and felt like) an outsider here. I also felt bad vibes, and tried to set up a mtg to check in on communication & leadership styles. It never happened





Then, our annual meeting happened, & I had been struggling with what I experienced as condescending communication and unwelcoming culture. I was like this can't be right, let me contact @PublicHealth staff for some support.

On Oct 27, 2020, at 6:52 AM, Sealy-Jefferson, Shawnita <[sealy-jefferson.1@osu.edu](mailto:sealy-jefferson.1@osu.edu)> wrote:

Dear all,

In the chat yesterday at the reception, I expressed to Tiffany that I am sure many of the current and past section leaders don't mean to be condescending or infantilizing to me, but that has been my experience. I have felt welcomed as a new leader in the epi section by \*very few people\*. I also expressed that it feels like because I was elected to this position without following the path that has traditionally been taken, there's some backlash/hazing and my experience has been pretty unpleasant, so far. The communication to me has been rather minimal, or passive-aggressive, and I have not felt like a valued part of the leadership team. I understand that every group has a culture, and there seems to be preference for past chairs and leaders and their ways of doing things, with little room for new people, perspectives, ways of communicating, and working. Months ago, I requested a meeting to talk to Tiffany about these things, but I imagine due to the pandemic my request was not able to be filled. I am requesting some remediation from Fran and/or APHA staff, for these reasons.

And then, a couple days after the annual meeting my daddy got covid and was in the hospital for two months before he died. I had a lot of shit going on & was trying to avoid more section drama, and I kept trying to reach out to [@publichealth](#) staff for support

From	Subject	Date
 Sealy-Jefferson, Shawnita	Chair-elect request for support	10/28/2020 8:54:44 AM
 Sealy-Jefferson, Shawnita	Chair-elect request for support	11/10/2020 2:57:00 PM
 Sealy-Jefferson, Shawnita	Meeting request: chair-elect	12/1/2020 6:58:00 PM
 Sealy-Jefferson, Shawnita	Meeting request: chair-elect	1/21/2021 3:15:00 PM

After our leadership meeting 1/21/21, I was asked what my plans are for when I take the chair? Specifically what am I going to do if everyone who has been volunteering in the section quits because nobody knows me? I was shocked. This felt hostile.

I said I would try to engage the new members and those who want to get involved but haven't engaged. I was told this was not a good plan. This meeting motivated my tweet later that afternoon. I also got the attention of other @PublicHealth elected members.

<https://t.co/O1MqJbGZR4>

I have *\*seriously\** considered resigning my position as chair-elect of the epidemiology section of @PublicHealth b/c my experience as a new leader & member has been < great. But, when I take the chair in Oct. 2021, my intention is to blaze trails & do my underdog thing, per usual

— Dr. Sealy-Jefferson (@Dr\_S\_Jefferson) January 22, 2021

The current chair was furious about my tweet. She emailed me and @PublicHealth staff. I'm supposed to talk to them, and NOT post on social media. I heard: Grin and bear it. Stay in my place. Pay my dues. Work my way up. Who do you think you are?

Yesterday morning I got this official letter from @PublicHealth



Date: February 11, 2021

To: Dr. Shawnita Sealy-Jefferson  
Chair-Elect, Epidemiology Section

From: Dr. Rachael N. Reed  
Chair, Intersectional Council

Re: Removal from the Chair-Elect Role

As the Chair of the Intersectional Council, I would like to thank you for your service to the Epidemiology Section of the American Public Health Association. Being a past Chair myself, I know that taking on this role is not an easy task and your decision to run was not taken lightly. I sincerely appreciate your willingness to volunteer your time to the Association. However, I regret to inform you that you have been removed from the role of Chair-Elect for the Epidemiology section effective immediately. Reasons for this removal include but are not limited to:

- Unwillingness to discuss matters related to the section with section leadership
- Unwillingness to build relationships vital to the role
- Subpar task implementation (e.g. Awards Ceremony)
- Lack of discretion and inability to resolve conflict with peers
- Lack of engagement on leadership calls

I spoke up about my experiences and spoke out publicly and there was retaliation. They lied on me. Maligned my character. Conspired to keep the status quo, and dishonored the votes of members of one of the largest sections of APHA, and @PublicHealth allowed it.

I am writing to share the details and decision from our Epidemiology Section Council to remove Shawnita Sealy-Jefferson as Chair-elect of the Epidemiology Section. Unfortunately, due to a series of events, we have serious concerns about Shawnita's ability to handle the responsibilities of a section chair, her unwillingness to communicate to section leaders regarding matters pertaining to the section, and her lack of commitment to engaging section leaders and members as a whole to assure a smooth transition. On January, 25<sup>th</sup>, I called a meeting of the section councilors to discuss actions and the future role of Chair-elect, Shawnita Sealy-Jefferson. All members of the section council voted to remove Shawnita as Chair-elect of the section. We did not enter into this decision lightly and hope that we can handle this matter quickly and efficiently.

I could barely function yesterday. I have a clear commitment to uplifting, mentoring, and supporting Black women. I have never experienced what feels like sabotage and hate from another Black woman. Sharing b/c I suspect others have felt this pain.