

This Women's History Month, We Choose to Challenge Gender Inequality

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March 5, 2021



This statement comes from Dan Pippenger, chief operating officer at the Port of Portland and executive sponsor of the W+DN Employee Resource Group

A year ago, nurses around the country were suddenly flooded with patients who were sick and dying of a new virus. As we sought answers, they showed up every day to do their jobs amidst unspeakable grief.

ICU nurse Julianne Viviano shared a **powerful, first-hand account** of her experience in a hard-hit New York City hospital last April: “Now that I’ve seen this grief for what feels like the thousandth time since the first week of March as a nurse in a Covid ICU in New York City, it’s time you heard our side. This is devastating. This is our reality. This is our grief.”

About 90% of ER nurses are women. The same is true for our country’s senior care workforce, a population hit hardest by COVID-19.

We wrote a lot of history in 2020, and women were at the center of these moments. Healthcare workers, caregivers, community organizers and leaders stood at the front lines to combat the pandemic. Millions more women have sacrificed their work to be home with their

children as they traded backpacks for laptops on dining room tables. With many schools remaining virtual last fall, four times as many women as men dropped out of the labor force in September.

Certainly, you've read the stories already. Many of you have lived them. This crisis has highlighted both the incredible contributions women are making in our communities – saving countless lives – and the disproportionate burdens they carry in our society, including the pervasive pay inequity that women face when compared to men for the same work.

As we enter Women's History Month and reflect on all that has happened in the last year, we have a choice. We can choose to continue the status quo and fail the women who have and continue to give so much of themselves and are treated as unequal. Or we can choose to create an inclusive and more gender-equal world and honor women for their critical contribution to our world and our society.

At the Port of Portland, we join the call from **International Women's Day** to #ChooseToChallenge gender bias and inequality. Throughout the month, our **W+DN Employee Resource Group** will be hosting activities and events that encourage colleagues to challenge gender bias, become allies and advocates for women, and get inspired by the women in our community who are making history.

We're also choosing to challenge a history of writing women's contributions out of history – and in particular, trans women and women of color – by hosting trainings and book discussions. And we're excited to highlight the contributions of our own Port women throughout the month.

When I reflect on the impact of women in my life, I feel a debt of gratitude for their lessons in leadership, kindness, and sacrifice. I only hope that I can live up to their examples that I witnessed.

Now is the time to ask ourselves how we can build a more gender-equal and inclusive world. I'm especially asking the men who read this to reflect on the inequities and unbalanced expectations put on women and be an active part of this change. I'm proud of our W+DN Employee Resource Group for pushing our organization to lean into this work.