MEDIA RELEASE

A message from Serving with Pride in relation to recent events at the Toronto Pride parade

Members, colleagues and allies,

Serving with Pride (SWP) was established with the vision of ensuring that every police station across Ontario would be a safe, positive and professional atmosphere for our LGBTQ colleagues. Over the past 10 years, we have had opportunities to network with many community partners including the Ontario Association of Chiefs of Police (OACP), the Police Association of Ontario (PAO), the Association of Black Law Enforcers (ABLE) and Ontario Women in Law Enforcement (OWLE).

In 2006 when like minds sat together at a table and brainstormed the idea of what SWP should become, those minds could have never predicted the fight many of our LGBTQ colleagues and allies continue to face ten years later.

Transgender, Indigenous and racialized members of society face discrimination from within the LGBTQ community, which is supposed to be a place of comfort, and externally from the communities in which they live. As an organization, we cannot deny that there have been incidents of racism, homophobia and transphobia from employees in our law enforcement community not only across the Province, but in Canada and the U.S.A.

We are asking our LGBTQ community and allies to inform yourselves prior to coming to an opinion about the recent actions that Black Lives Matter have taken to remove law enforcement from Pride. There are people who believe that the appearance of the police uniform is one of oppression, which is not hard to imagine when we think back to 1969. It was in those days that police officers stormed an Inn where many LGBTQ people were gathered resulting in what is arguably the beginning of the gay rights movement.

In the minds of our younger LGBTQ population, we have places like Church Street in Toronto, ON where many LGBTQ establishments dot the streets open to all who wish to attend. We forget that not many years ago our lives were lived in secrecy, sneaking down back allies to get in to night clubs, a strong fear of the police who harassed and assaulted these folks and instilled a fear which continues to resonate today.

As we entered into this millennium we began to see a shift in public perception of police and LGBTQ relations. Toronto Police Service began a dialogue with the LGBTQ community, a roll which is filled today by a full time LGBTQ Liaison Officer who devotes countless hours; meeting with members of our community to ensure that a trusted bond is created. This has resulted in highly improved relations and increased reporting for violent crimes and sexual assaults against the LGBTQ community.

Services across Ontario continue to make strides with the implementation of Internal Support Networks, positive spaces and training opportunities to strengthen the knowledge of their front line officers when providing service to our various members of our community. Thousands of dollars have been raised this year alone for LGBTQ youth community groups by police staff who volunteer their time to improve community
relations. School officers attend school board positive space meetings to cultivate relationships with our LGBTQ youth and their allies.

Some claim that police haven’t earned the respect of the community. They believe that the uniform is still a sign of oppression for all LGBTQ people.

Those who focus their efforts on shining the police in a negative light fail to acknowledge that there are hundreds of LGBTQ officers and allies across the Province of Ontario who are working tirelessly to educate and are champions of change within their services.

We wear that uniform.

The uniform, the vest, the belt and the signature black boots are not a sign of oppression for us. The uniform is a sign of forward movement, it’s a sign of being able to be our true selves. The rainbow police patch is a symbol of Pride.

It is our LGBTQ community has played a pivotal role in that forward movement. Movement from within our police services do not strictly come from within, support from our external partners and community drives each and every one of us to push harder to improve our places of employment and relationships with those who we proudly serve.

In closing, we remind you to approach recent events with an open mind. Realize that there are groups who still experience oppression in any form, regardless of where it is coming from.

Police services across Ontario are working diligently to improve policies and procedures, community relations and making their places of work a comfortable place for their employees to work regardless of their sexual orientation, gender expression or gender identity.

Serving with Pride will continue to assist these services and will continue in our resolve to promote diversity, inclusion, integrity, awareness, and acceptance of LGBTQ policing and criminal justice professionals.

Respectfully,

Serving with Pride