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February 2021

## Celebrating Black History Month



Dear Friends:

Happy Black History Month!

During February, our community and nation take time to reflect on more than 400 years of Black history and heritage, to uplift historic moments of Black achievements and milestones, and to focus on Black representation, identity, and our responsibility in addressing and undoing anti-black racism.

As I think about the history of our country, we have made progress in so many areas because of the contributions and sacrifices of African Americans.

When I think about emancipation, I think of Harriet Tubman and the thousands of Black soldiers who sacrificed their lives during the Civil War. When I think of the civil rights movement, I think of Dr. King, Rosa Parks, Ella Baker, John Lewis, and so many more Black leaders and activists. When I think of the struggle for LGBTQ rights, I think of Marsha P. Johnson and the Black activists of the Stonewall uprising.

More recently, Alicia Garza, Opal Tometi, and Patrisse Cullors, created the Black Lives Matter movement, calling us all to address the systematic devaluation and destruction of Black lives.

While our nation's founding fathers conceived the vision for a free and democratic country, it is African Americans — whose ancestors were kidnapped and coerced into servitude — who have continually led our country's efforts to perfect our democracy and civil rights. This is not to say that other Americans have not contributed to the successes and progress of our country. It is to say that time and time again African Americans have been at the forefront of transformation, civil rights, and justice. We are the nation we are today because of the struggles and sacrifices of African Americans.

Despite this, and for far too long, our nation and our organization have not

recognized the lingering and ongoing effects of centuries of systemic racism. We must recognize that Black people's lives have been and continue to be undervalued in our country.

Ultimately, we will create a culture that values all lives when we create a society that values Black lives. For this transformation to truly occur, Black people can't do this on their own. We — people of all races, genders, sexual orientations, religions, and identities — must work together, because our success and well-being are all connected.

The Port is no exception to any of this, which is why our organization has chosen to prioritize racial equity in our practices, policies, services, and culture. We are working to create a Port where race is not an indicator of a person's success and access to resources and opportunities. We aspire to create a workplace and an organization where all people — employees and community members — feel included, respected, and welcome. Below you will find some updates from the past month, and I look forward to sharing more about our progress in the coming months.

In Unity,



**Bookda Gheisar**

Senior Director, Office of Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion

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## Centering Equity and Taking Action

- The Port of Seattle is [investing more than \\$1 million in South King County](#) to assist with economic recovery in near-airport communities that have been hit hardest by the pandemic.

Most of the funding is granted to organizations serving communities of color and low-income communities. The [South King County Fund Environmental Grants Program](#) is investing in 14 organizations that are conducting community-led environmental improvements in the near-airport cities, while the [Economic Recovery Grants Program](#) is investing in 10 organizations conducting projects in workforce development, job creation, and economic recovery solutions in Port-related industries.

- The Port recently received a question from a community member asking, “Why is equity important for a port authority?” Thank you to this individual for this thoughtful question and the chance to communicate about our commitment to racial equity. Check out our response — [short answer](#) and longer, [in-depth answer](#).
- On February 17, in celebration of Black History Month, OEDI partnered with the Port's chapter of [Blacks in Government](#) to host a virtual event entitled Structural Racism and COVID-19. The event featured a panel of accomplished, Black women leaders — State Representative Debra Entenman, Michelle Merriweather (President of Urban League of Metropolitan Seattle), and Michele Storms (Executive Director of ACLU-WA). Check out the [recording of the event](#) to hear the panelists discuss

strategies and efforts for equitable recovery and the resiliency of the Black community.

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