



Unions make the difference for women in the workplace

Sisters and Brothers:

As we observe Women's History Month, let's spend a few minutes reflecting on the difference being a union member makes for women in the workplace.

It's important to point out that out that women make up a majority of CSEA's membership. That's not unusual. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, the percentage of women in the workforce when last measured was over 57 percent. With more women in the work force, how does being in a union make things better?

Overall, union membership helps push women further toward equality, but our work is far from done. Even in 2022, working women are still facing inequality, including with pay, advancement opportunities and discrimination. Women's pay has lagged behind that of white men doing the same job. The most recent figures from the National Committee on Pay Equity show that women are still only earning an average of 82 percent of what men doing the same work earn. The disparity is even greater among women of color. Every spring, we observe Equal Pay Day, the date that symbolizes how far into the year women must work (in addition to their earnings last year) to have earned what men had earned the entire previous year.

The good news is that a union contract can prevent gender-biased salaries by employers. When you get a union job, your contract determines and locks in the rate of pay you'll receive, which can be impacted by seniority and other factors, but not your gender. That's a huge step in the right direction. However, while union women have far more pay equity than nonunion women, we must continue the fight to ensure full equal pay. We have seen far too many examples of undervalued work in jobs more traditionally held by women.

The labor movement has also led the charge on women's issues in the workplace in other areas. Even today, many working women still have fewer opportunities for advancement due to factors such as having to care for a child or other loved one. A union goes a long way toward providing the benefits

and resources that working women need to do their jobs and care for their loved ones, including maternity leave, affordable and available child care and family medical leave. Unions have also had a leading role on helping enact stronger policies to end discrimination in the workplace, including sexual harassment.

Every time we can use our collective power to make positive changes, either legislatively or in the contracts we negotiate, we make strides against marginalizing women. We still have a long way to go, but as a union, we show our strength and power as working people.

Being part of their union also allows women opportunities to take on leadership roles outside of their work. I'm proud that our union encourages women to hold union office, and we offer multiple training opportunities to enhance their leadership skills. Our statewide and region conferences and workshops, including our biennial CSEA Women's Conference, empower CSEA women to be more effective leaders in the workplace and in their communities. I am always proud to lead by example and to point out that three out of our four CSEA statewide officers are strong union women. As only the second woman president of our union's 112-year history and the first elected woman president, I look forward to seeing more women take on leadership roles and work hand in hand with our union brothers to build a better future for the entire CSEA family.

As we celebrate the achievements of working women this month, and those who've gone to great lengths to struggle on their behalf, we thank all our union women for their contributions to our workplaces, to our communities, and to our union.

In Solidarity,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mary". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Mary E. Sullivan, President