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IWOMEN INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE 2018

The Choice of Fairfax County as Hosting Agency

February 1, 2018– There have been recent news stories and publicity surrounding the Fairfax County Fire & Rescue Department (FFCFD). Some may wonder if this agency is the correct one to assist with hosting our 2018 International Conference. We, at iWomen, believe the answer is yes. We are not going to run, or turn our backs on the good firefighters of Fairfax County. We will show up in Fairfax County, with large numbers of men and women that support diversity, inclusion, and fairness. We will help them to face this head on, with the help of the iWomen Board and our members. If these accusations turn out to be true, iWomen is willing to provide guidance and assistance to Chief Richard Bowers and his staff to develop a more inclusive work environment for the Fairfax County Fire & Rescue Department. These are the pillars and principles of iWomen.

From Battalion Chief Kathleen Stanley, "A season of change. Across the country and in every profession, women are coming forward to enact change on their work environment. The fire service is no different. There is no change without conflict. Kathleen Stanley of Fairfax Fire and Rescue, I have been working for change in my department for years, with minimal success. I took it upon myself to resign my post of Women's Program Officer in hopes of creating a significant change. It is imperative in the time of flux, that women speak up and have their voices heard, and we embrace the strength to come forward without fear. As we all watch what will become of Fairfax Fire and Rescue, our hope is there will be a more inclusive and positive environment in the end. There is so much to learn from Fairfax, if we have the guts to listen. This is not a lost opportunity."

From iWomen Vice-President, Battalion Chief Carol Brown, "My emotions have ranged from angry to disgusted to sadness. I have come out the other side with courage and resolve. We were assured by the Chief Bowers that FCFRD had changed and that he wanted to showcase that change to the firefighting community. We realize that we took a chance but wanted to support his efforts, and we still do, even though these current accusations. We have no plans to change the conference location but will continue to work with the leadership of FCFRD to ensure an excellent conference and to empower women firefighters from around the world to descend on Fairfax in May and show what powerful, capable, and strong women have to offer the fire service.

Whatever the case, we will continue to assist the FCFRD in moving forward and not hide when things get hard; we need to have those courageous conversations now, at the conference and in the future to rid the fire service of the old way of thinking and acting. We have allies, but we must continue to lead the way. We cannot retreat or hide when possible confrontation with bullies and the 1960's attitudes that remain within the fire service. Now is our chance, our moment, our opportunity to truly be "The Voice," putting our mouths where our mantra is and take this opportunity to move our issues and the issues of women around the world to the forefront of the national fire service agenda.

I encourage everyone to act against the bullies within the fire service globally and encourage both women and men to attend our conference in May to show what harmony can look like in the fire service. We cannot run and hide from those that no longer have a place in the modern fire service."

We have not received an official statement from the Fairfax County Fire & Rescue Department or Chief Bowers at this point. There will be an official Press Conference today at 1430 hours EST in Fairfax County.

We value all of our members and followers, and hope that you will join us in Fairfax County this May. If you would like more information about iWomen, or the conference, please email us or visit our website at www.i-women.org.

***International Association of Women in Fire & Emergency Services
The Voice of Women in the Fire Service***

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