

Some Portland police officers, notably those who are members of the LGBTQ community, expressed outrage this week when they received a request from Pride Northwest to consider wearing something other than their police uniforms to march in the Pride Parade on Sunday.

Debra Porta, executive director of parade host Pride Northwest, said Friday the organizers made the request because some members of the gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender community “are not open to having conversations with people simply because that uniform is there.”

Porta said a significant divide exists between police and some members of the public, particularly people from marginalized communities. As a result, some parade goers told Pride Northwest that they don’t feel comfortable attending alongside police in uniform, Porta said.

“To that end, we are asking LGBTQ and allied people in law enforcement, who plan to march in the Portland Pride Parade NOT to march in uniform,” Porta wrote in a letter to Portland police and shared with officers this week. “Maybe wear department polos or other shirt — something besides the uniform. To be clear, we are NOT asking you not to march.”

Porta then clarified in another email sent to police and the Multnomah County Sheriff’s Office that Pride Northwest “does NOT have a preference that personnel not march in uniform. Our one and only ask is that individual officers give thought to that choice. We, as an organization, will honor and celebrate whatever choice someone makes. There isn’t a right or wrong for us.”

Some Portland LGBTQ officers blasted the request as a backward and contradictory move that essentially sends the message: Hide who you are.

Lt. Tashia Hager wrote on Facebook that she won’t shy away from wearing her uniform during the parade.

“Today I learned I was asked to step back into a closet by a group of people who should know better,” she wrote on the social media site. “I have been a part of the gay community in Portland for 25 years. I would like to think that the ideals of inclusion and acceptance are not only what the gay community preaches but it is also what it practices.”

Hager said she felt “sad and mad” when she first learned of Pride Northwest’s request. “To have my own gay community tell me to hide a part of who I am seems to be against everything they stand for,” she said.

Retired Portland police officer Lisa Clayton also sent an email to Pride Northwest, voicing her dismay.

“I am disgusted at your political pandering. ... I thought inclusion and acceptance was part of your mantra?” Clayton wrote. “Since when is being a wonderful, respected, loving, kind, generous gay

woman not acceptable? Oh yeah when you are a Portland Police Officer.”

Robert Ball, commander of the Police Bureau’s reserve officers program who is active in the city’s gay community, said he contacted the parade organizers directly to complain.

“I thought it was a mistake,” he said. “In my view, it actually sets us back.”

He first marched in uniform in the parade in 1996 and remembers how scary it was for him then. At that time, Mayor Vera Katz noticed he was uncomfortable and extended her hand, offering to march beside him.

“You think about how far we’ve come,” said Ball, who recently put together a film called “Diversity in Blue” featuring interviews with local LGBTQ officers talking about what it was like for them coming out and working in a patriarchal institution.

Former Portland Police Chief **Tom Potter** was the first city police chief to march in uniform in the parade in the early 1990s, partly in support of his lesbian daughter **Katie Potter**, also an officer. At that time, other officers in uniform turned their back on him.

The concerns came from some LGBTQ members after the police response to the dueling protests in downtown Portland on June 4 that brought out alt-right supporters of President Donald Trump and several groups of counter-demonstrators, she said.

Police used flash-bang grenades and pepper spray balls after they said some people threw bottles and other objects at them. They ended up arresting 14 people. Mayor Ted Wheeler has asked Police Chief Mike Marshman to explain the reason for some of the tactics.

“We absolutely recognize the work and effort that our LGBTQ officers have put into getting to where they are, in being out and proud in their profession,” she added. “While issues around marginalized communities (including LGBTQ) and law enforcement have always been there, in this current unsettled time, particularly with the recent protests and police interactions in Portland, the concern has just become more visible and vocal.”