



October 22, 2019

**Deputation to Toronto Public Library  
Re: Community Rental Space at Palmerston Branch  
By: David Morris, Board Chair, The 519**

[CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY]

My name is David Morris and I am the Board Chair of The 519's Board of Management. The 519 is an LGBTQ2S community centre and a City of Toronto agency that has been involved in organizing and advocating for the rights of LGBTQ2S communities for more than four decades. As an organization, we respond to the evolving and emergent needs of queer, trans, non-binary, and two spirit communities and we respond every day to the consequences of discrimination and social isolation that many in our communities' experiences.

While LGBTQ2S communities have won many legal and social battles over the years, including having our rights enshrined in law, many of us continue to face violence and marginalization in very real ways. And we continue to face the chilling effects of public debates that continue to question our rights to exist. Debates like the ones around Bill C-16 which proposed that the Canadian Human Rights Act be amended to include trans and non-binary folks and the Ontario Government's move to repeal the 2015 version of the Ontario Sex Ed curriculum directly impact our feelings of safety and well-being. That we have to continue to fight for our right to exist – regardless of whether or not we win those struggles in the end – takes its toll on our communities and explains why we have higher rates of substance use and suicide, more negative physical and mental health outcomes, and higher rates of violence and victimization. This is particularly true for trans and non-binary communities who face epidemic levels of violence, discrimination, and poverty.

According to the most recent report by Statistics Canada, hate crimes motivated by sexual orientation and/or gender identity are far more likely to be violent than other hate crimes. Roughly two-thirds of these crimes are

violent in nature, mostly assaults. Reducing violence against LGBTQ2S people requires holding leaders and others accountable for their words and actions – which brings me to my reason for being here today.

I think we all understand the importance of free speech. I think we all understand why we need to uphold the values of free speech as public institutions and as leaders. But we also need to acknowledge – in thought and in action – that we live in a society where we do not have equal voices. We do not have equal access to that free speech that the City Librarian holds so dear. It continues to be permissible to deny trans and non-binary communities their rights. It continues to be permissible to hold an ideological position that trans and non-binary identities do not exist. It continues to be permissible to mis-gender people. It continues to be permissible to allow hostility against trans people to exist within our public discourse and our public institutions unacknowledged. And as long as we live in a society where that permissiveness exists; as long as trans people are denied their basic humanity, we must continue to work tirelessly to change that. Period.

Ultimately, ideology is always linked to actions. There is a reason why trans and non-binary communities face disproportionate levels of violence. There are reasons why trans women of colour face epidemic levels of violence. There are reasons why people find it acceptable to hate trans and non-binary people, and there are reasons why people find it acceptable to harm trans and non-binary people. If we want this to stop, if we want something different, we need to take every and any action to prevent it.

The Toronto Public Library policy related to Community and Event Space Rentals clearly states that:

The Library reserves the right to deny or cancel a booking when it reasonably believes:

- i. use by any individual or group will be for a purpose that is likely to promote, or would have the effect of promoting discrimination, contempt or hatred for any group or person on the basis of race, ethnic origin, place of origin, citizenship, colour, ancestry,



language, creed (religion), age, sex, gender identity, gender expression, marital status, family status, sexual orientation, disability, political affiliation, membership in a union or staff association, receipt of public assistance, level of literacy or any other similar factor;

Your policy says nothing about needing to meet the threshold of hate speech and yet your public response has rooted your decision as one that is solely about free speech. What about your responsibilities to uphold your equity policies? Your anti-discrimination policies? Your obligations to create a workplace that is free from harassment and discrimination?

You have the opportunity to change this – right here and right now – you have the ability to acknowledge that the work that you need to do as an institution to protect and uphold the rights of trans and non-binary communities comes before your blanket nod to free speech. You have the ability to make a decision that commits to doing the work to understand the issue and the potential harm it might cause before you cause that harm.

As a sister City Agency we are committed to doing that work with you – but only if it is in the spirit of true ally-ship and solidarity.

We implore you to reverse your decision.