

Pilon, Janet

Subject: Defend Our Voice: Protect freedom of Speech and Expression in Hamilton

From: letter@easymail.arpacanada.ca <letter@easymail.arpacanada.ca>

Sent: February 26, 2024 2:38 PM

To: Office of the Mayor <Officeofthe.Mayor@hamilton.ca>

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Subject: Defend Our Voice: Protect freedom of Speech and Expression in Hamilton

Dear Hamilton City Council,

I am writing to you out of concern because I have become aware of a proposal in the City of Hamilton to enact new restrictions on sharing a pro-life message in public.

I am sure that you are well aware of your responsibility under the Charter to not unjustifiably infringe freedom of expression. That Charter guarantee is designed to promote conversations, even when they're challenging.

Canadian courts have made it abundantly clear that the Charter right to freedom of expression extends to all non-violent expressive activity that conveys meaning, even if it may be offensive or disturbing to some people, and even if the message is unpopular.

Your role as an elected representative is an important one in the community of Hamilton. I ask that you use the responsibility wisely, remembering that your actions are scrutinized under the Charter, which includes protection for freedom of expression. The City of Hamilton is not well-served by expensive litigation.

The freedom to discuss a topic like abortion is especially important for women in the community facing an unplanned pregnancy. As women, we deserve to be presented with the truth and not treated as if we are incapable of handling heavy subjects.

In a democracy, it's important to have difficult conversations. We have challenging but important conversations on issues like climate change, racism, war and peace. Abortion is another contentious issue that is nonetheless important to be able to discuss.

Photos play an important role in public discourse in a democracy, whether photos of refugees or the victims of war, photos used by vegan activists or in government anti-smoking campaigns, or photos of pre-born children, public conversations on contentious issues often involve visual evidence that can be challenging to see.

Why is the City of Hamilton targeting one particular group and one particular message for special restrictions? In a democracy, the government should not be stifling speech from one side of a debate on a contentious issue.

The Hamilton community deserves to be fully informed on the issue of abortion and abortion alternatives. While we recognize that the conversation is challenging for those who have experienced the trauma of abortion, it is important that the community can hear about abortion alternatives, and about hope and healing from the trauma of abortion.

Many people are thankful to hear about the pro-life perspective and the local community support available in Hamilton, and it can be critical information for people who are trying to make a fully informed choice about a difficult pregnancy.

It is important that government not single out one particular movement and one particular message for special restrictions. Can I count on you to vote against by-laws that place restrictions on freedom of expression?

Sincerely,

Katrina Marshall