



June 9<sup>th</sup>, 2024

Dear Mayor Horwath and City Council,

My name is Matt Sbrissa, one of Pride Hamilton's Co-Directors of Fund Development. As a Hamilton-born and raised queer individual and an advocate for at-risk youth, I appreciate the opportunity to express my concerns on behalf of Pride Hamilton regarding the safety and security of our upcoming Strength with Pride Event at Pier 4 Park on August 10th, 2024.

It has come to our attention that a motion will be presented to City Council this week, which proposes prohibiting the closure of pathways at Pier 4 Park during our event and replacing the planned fencing with additional security and signage. This proposal deeply concerns me as a member of the 2SLGBTQIA community and an organizer of this festival. During our 2023 Pride at the Pier event, we established a perimeter around Pier 4 Park with a single controlled entry point and a bag check area. This setup effectively prevented weapons or harmful items from entering and kept potential protestors or threats at bay. The result was a secure, incident-free event where all attendees felt safe and enjoyed the day without fear. Many participants expressed their gratitude for these safety measures, reinforcing the importance of maintaining such protocols.

If the proposed motion is approved, replicating this safe space would become impossible. Limiting our fencing to only the grassy areas would drastically reduce the space needed to comfortably and safely host all aspects of our event. Last year's layout allowed us to create an open yet secure environment by utilizing the park's natural features to form a boundary, enabling us to manage entry points effectively.

Additionally, not having a fenced perimeter would result in multiple uncontrolled entry points, even with additional security. This would make it challenging to prevent potentially threatening groups from infiltrating the event. The traumatic events of 2019 have already eroded trust in law enforcement and security among community members. Our previous arrangement, which blocked pathways, facilitated cooperation with the police and security while discreetly placing the HPS dispatch tent to minimize distress for attendees sensitive to police presence.

The Pride Hamilton Festival serves as a vital lifeline for queer youth in Hamilton, providing not just a celebratory space but also a crucial sanctuary where they can feel seen, supported, and safe. In a world where queer youth often face significant challenges, including higher rates of bullying, discrimination, and mental health issues, events like this festival offer a rare opportunity for them to connect with their community, access supportive resources, and



reinforce their sense of identity and belonging. The festival's importance extends beyond mere celebration; it is a beacon of hope and safety in an otherwise uncertain landscape. By providing a secure environment where queer youth can express themselves freely and without fear of harassment, we empower them to thrive and build resilience. Neglecting to ensure their safety during such critical gatherings not only undermines the inclusive values we strive to uphold but also borders on negligence. Ignoring the security needs of these young individuals and failing to protect their right to a safe, affirming space is not just shortsighted; it is fundamentally irresponsible. As leaders and protectors of our community, we have a duty to support and safeguard all our members, especially the most vulnerable. Denying the necessary safety measures for events like Strength with Pride would be a profound failure in our commitment to fostering a nurturing and inclusive city for everyone.

In conclusion, I urge the members of City Council to consider this motion's potential negative impact on the 2SLGBTQIA community in Hamilton. We request pathway closures for just one day out of the year to ensure that our event remains a safe, inclusive space where everyone, regardless of their identity, feels welcome and at home. Let us take this vital step together to create a supportive environment for all Hamiltonians.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "M. Sbrissa". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "M" and a long, sweeping underline.

Matt Sbrissa (he/him)  
Co-Director of Fund Development, Pride Hamilton