



June 8th, 2024

Dear Mayor Horwath and City Councillors,

Thank you for the opportunity to speak on behalf of Pride Hamilton regarding safety and security concerns at our upcoming festival at Pier 4 Park. I am the Director of Inclusion, Youth and Family. I'm also a lifelong resident of Hamilton (excluding time spent in higher education) and a mother to a queer son.

I joined the Board in May 2023 and quickly got to work planning child, youth and family-friendly activities for our 2023 Pride Festival. Generally speaking, it is very important to me to have a constant read of the social, political and cultural climate as it relates to the safety, dignity and rights of the 2SLGBTQIA+ community, with a special focus for me on children and youth. Last year, after acts of violence against a Gender Studies professor at University of Waterloo, against local drag performers, as well as the extreme hate speech I regularly faced on social media when voicing my support for trans and gender-diverse issues, I became concerned about the safety of our Pride Event. In particular, given the alarming rise in acts of intolerance and hate towards trans children and youth (and their caregivers), I was especially concerned for the safety of the volunteers and attendees of the Child and Youth area. As such, I was greatly comforted by the presence of our security fence which provided a safe perimeter for volunteers and attendees to be free to be themselves and enjoy Pride. We also had security guards devoted to the Child and Youth area, especially during Drag Story time. The event was a massive hit and a platform for love, acceptance and pride.

Unfortunately, security concerns are even greater for Pride 2024. This fall saw large protests at school boards and other associated areas which aimed to erase education and acceptance around diversity in sexuality and gender. I attended the counter protest at the HWDSB at the end of September and was appalled and frightened by the violence and hatred directed especially at gender diverse individuals and their supporters. Protesters attempted to goad members of the 2SLGBTQIA+ community into physical conflict through swarming them, hurling unspeakable insults and, often, filming the interactions while laughing. After numerous incidents of protest-counter protest across Canada, the protest groups (many of which are national and international) openly vowed to disrupt 2024 Pride events, in any way that they saw fit. This was a warning.

Since this time, CSIS has indeed warned Pride organizations across Canada that there is a significant threat this Pride season that organized hate groups will disrupt Pride festivities and that violence is a possibility. It is imperative that Pride Hamilton be allowed to uphold, at minimum, the level of security that kept us safe last year. This must include a secure perimeter that will temporarily close some walkways at Pier 4 Park.

This brings me to my final point. As you know, Councillor Kroetsch is a former board member of Pride Hamilton and was a member during Pride 2019. Since the events of 2019, the 2SLGBTQIA+ community has been somewhat split into opposing groups, those that accept security measures at Pride events and those that are strongly against such measures. The latter group has opposed and even protested Pride Hamilton events of the last few years, in part because of some of our security measures.

The board is aware that Councillor Kroetsch has at times expressed support for the opposing (i.e., security-averse) group, be it through his social media affiliations and likes, or his in-person attendance of opposing activities. It is of note that on June 27th, Councillor Kroetsch will be a part of a panel “Pride 2019- Working Together to Reclaim the Narrative”; it is unfortunate that no current members of the Pride Hamilton board were encouraged to be a part of this panel.

Thank you for the opportunity to share my thoughts. I hope that we can come to an agreement about the safety needs of our August 10th celebration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jennifer Barrett". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Jennifer Barrett, RP, PhD

she/her

Pride Hamilton, Director of Inclusion, Youth & Family

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