



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

Dear Mayor Horwath and City Council,

By way of introduction, my name is Michael, and I am the Director of Finance with Pride Hamilton. I have been a member of the Board of Directors of Pride Hamilton since November of 2021. I would like to start off by saying thank you for the opportunity to share my thoughts on behalf of Pride Hamilton regarding my own concerns about the safety and security of our Strength with Pride Event at Pier 4 Park on August 10<sup>th</sup>, 2024.

It has come to our attention that a motion will be put forward to City Council this week that will prohibit the closure of the pathways at Pier 4 Park for the duration of our event and replace the fencing that we are currently planning to use with additional security and signage. This motion is extremely concerning for me as a member of the 2SLGBTQIA community and as an organizer of the festival this year.

As we all know from the Annual Report on Hate/Bias Occurrences by the Hamilton Police Service, the number of hate/bias incidents and criminal offences have been increasing. 2022 saw a 61% increase in the number while 2023 saw a further 26% increase. For the past two years, the 2SLGBTQIA community has been the second most-frequently targeted group within the city. In addition, according to the HPS breakdown by type and category, 2023 saw the highest number of crimes committed because of sexual orientation. These alarming statistics show the dire state of safety for the 2SLGBTQIA community within Hamilton. As a result of this, Pride Hamilton has been working tirelessly to ensure that our event is safe for all Hamiltonians to attend and enjoy. During our 2023 Event, Pride at the Pier, we established a perimeter around the edges of Pier 4 Park such that there was only one entrance point to the event. This singular entry point also contained a bag check area, to ensure that no weapons or dangerous items were brought into the park. This allowed us to ensure that our event was protected and that any groups who may want to protest Pride or harm the community could not enter our event space. I am pleased to confirm that as a result of this, our 2023 Event had no security or safety incidents occur. All members of the Hamilton community were able to enjoy the entire day without any threat to their safety or well-being. They were able to be present and enjoy the festivities to the fullest. We had countless individuals share with us how grateful they were for the steps we had taken and that they were very happy with the security measures in place.

If this motion were to pass, it would be impossible for us to replicate this safe space. First, we would not have enough space to conduct our event. If we were only allowed to fence in the grassy area at Pier 4 Park, the space would be too small to safely and comfortably host all aspects of our event, leaving us no choice but to have no fencing at all. Our fencing last year created a perimeter by using the front and natural features of the park so that the entire lakefront portion of the park was open. This allowed us to create an enclosed space that didn't feel that



way. In addition, if we were unable to fence in an area, it would create an endless amount of entry points to the event space. Even with additional security (as mentioned in the motion), it would be difficult to ensure that any threatening groups would not be able to sneak into the event. Furthermore, due to the events of 2019, it is very difficult for members of the community to trust law enforcement and security to protect them. Our previous layout, which blocked the pathways, helped us to work with the police and security to safeguard the event. The perimeter we created allowed us to put the HPS dispatch tent in a location that was less obvious, enabling us to protect people who may be triggered by seeing a police presence at the event.

To close, I would like to implore the members of City Council to consider the negative impact this motion could have on the 2SLGBTQIA community in Hamilton, who continue to feel that they are not welcome in the city they call home. We, as an organization, are asking for path closures for one day out of 365. We want to make Hamilton a place where every person, regardless of race, gender, gender identity, religion, and sexual orientation, feels welcome and at home. Help us to take this step with our event and create that space for them.

Thank you for your consideration,

*Michael Harper*

Michael Harper

Director of Finance, Pride Hamilton