

## Bring Toronto police back to Pride

Pride Toronto claims their mission is to bring people together to celebrate the history, courage and diversity of our community<sup>1</sup>. On their website, they also list inclusivity and diversity as two of their four values, stating, “We welcome everyone and want everyone to be welcomed. We are accessible to everyone as we create a sense of belonging and shared purpose.”<sup>2</sup>

The decision to ban uniformed police officers from the Pride parade contradicts these values. If everyone is welcomed, Toronto police officers should be no exception. A person should be welcome to join in a celebration of the LGBTQ community regardless of their race, religion, creed or profession. To exclude a group based on their profession is a mockery of the Pride institution. Toronto police have been participating in the Pride parade since 2000, and the decision to remove them is callous and unnecessary.

The argument for removing uniformed police as a way to ensure the comfort of marginalized and racialized citizens is disrespectful to the minority groups that are represented within the Toronto police organization. There are both visible minorities and LGBTQ members of the Toronto police, and forcing them to choose to take pride in one part of who they are over another is a form of oppression in itself.

The ban on police participation does not negate their duty to ensure that participants in the Pride parade are safe, as a gathering of this magnitude requires police presence. Toronto police officers protect and serve the community, and are expected to do so at the Pride parade. Police officers that want to celebrate and support the queer community should be given the opportunity to do so without prejudice. It is absurd to accept the protection of the police force but to reject those offering that protection.

The police officers who would march in the Pride parade are the LGBTQ community’s biggest allies within law enforcement, whether gay or straight, and to prevent their participation is to turn away a group who are willing advocates for the marginalized and racialized individuals Pride Toronto is seeking to protect.

Further, to allow Justin Trudeau, our nation’s Prime Minister, to be celebrated for showing his support by marching in the parade damages the statement Pride Toronto is attempting to make in support of marginalized individuals. By celebrating the presence of the national figurehead, Pride Toronto is celebrating the symbol of Canadian lawmaking. Logic dictates if Pride Toronto is embracing lawmakers, like Justin Trudeau and Kathleen Wynne, it should embrace law enforcement.

Finally, to exclude Toronto police damages the years of work that has gone into creating a positive relationship between law enforcement and the LGBTQ

community. The two communities have had a precarious relationship historically, and to exclude police officers who are active supporters of the LGBTQ community will not be effective in breaking down barriers, it only serves to create more.

Unity between the two groups and a dedication by both groups to continue to find effective solutions to biases and issues is the only way to effect positive change. Segregation is never the answer. The only way for groups to better understand each other is to grow together. Burning bridges and cutting off the LGBTQ community from their allies within law enforcement is a giant step backward for progress.

Pride Toronto should seriously reconsider its position if it hopes to not be remembered as the perpetrator of hypocrisy in history. They have an opportunity to embrace law enforcement and rectify a poor decision. In the end, we are all people and we should all be supporting one another. Live up to your values Pride Toronto.

---

<sup>1</sup> Pride Toronto Mission statement <http://www.pridetoronto.com/about-us/>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.pridetoronto.com/about-us/>