



STAFF REPORT INFORMATION ONLY

Communications Report

Date: January 23, 2023
To: Toronto Public Library Board
From: City Librarian

It is recommended that the Toronto Public Library Board:

1. receives Communication (a) from Councillor Moise dated December 7, 2022 regarding the Board's approval of Toronto Public Library's Intellectual Freedom Statement and Equity Statement, for information.

A meeting has been arranged with Councillor Moise for February 6, 2023 to discuss the concerns raised in the Councillor's statement. From the TPL Board, the Chair, Vice-Chair and Councillor Amber Morley are scheduled to participate along with TPL directors.

SIGNATURE

Vickery Bowles
City Librarian

RE: TPL's Intellectual Freedom & Equity Statements

On October 29th, 2019, Toronto Public Library allowed an event rooted in transphobia to be hosted at their Palmerston library location. It was not an uninformed decision, but an intentionally harmful decision that the Toronto Public Library made. The City Librarian defended her decision, saying the event was civil discourse about gender identity. Let me be abundantly clear: debating if people's identity deserves basic human rights is not civil discourse, it is hate speech.

On December 5th, 2022, the City Librarian presented an Intellectual Freedom Statement and an Equity Statement to the Toronto Public Library Board that should have addressed the issues raised by the events in 2019, but fell extremely short of that purpose, and instead reiterated the same rhetoric that continues to harm the transgender community today.

Transphobia has consequences. Homophobia has consequences. This hatred is a leading cause of death for the 2SLGBTQ+ community, and to frame their safety as the antithesis to free speech is not only bigoted, but extremely self-serving. The statements that were presented by the City Librarian do not address any of the concerns that were brought forward by 2SLGBTQ+ community and does not ensure their safety within Toronto Public Library's branches. If the Toronto Public Library cannot commit to protecting psychological safety of transgender individuals, then they need to take responsibility for creating environments that exacerbate the mental health crises that Toronto is facing. I recognize that libraries are important spaces to seek out information and learn about diverse perspectives, however these statements fail to address that in presenting two competing arguments, especially around transgender identities, as equally well-founded is misleading.

Framing transphobic rhetoric as "unconventional and unpopular" or "controversial and challenging" opinions instead of detrimental hate speech demonstrates that the Toronto Public Library is not committed to providing a safe space for transgender individuals in the city of Toronto. I urge the Toronto Public Library Board to repeal these statements and address the concerns of the 2SLGBTQ+ community.

In solidarity against bigotry and hate,



Chris Moise
City Councillor
Ward 13 - Toronto Centre