

**DELEGATION TO THE CITY OF HAMILTON'S LGBTQ
ADVISORY COMMITTEE
ONLINE MEETING VIA WEBEX
TUESDAY, MARCH 16, 2021
LYLA MIKLOS**

Good Evening Members of the City of Hamilton's Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer Advisory Committee, City Staff, Delegates, Guests and those listening and watching online via YouTube.

My name is Lyla Miklos. My pronouns are she and her and I self-identify as queer or bi. I come to you tonight as a past Chair of this Committee, past Chair of Hamilton Pride and an out member of Hamilton's Two Spirit and LGBTQIA+ community for over 25 years.

The conversations that our community had back in the late 1990's and early 2000's were very different from the ones we are having now. To have a Pride Festival that elected leaders didn't try to proactively stop was an accomplishment. To have a Pride march and rally that our elected officials wanted to attend and share messages of solidarity at was an accomplishment. To have a Rainbow Flag raising at City Hall that the media, politicians, police, local businesses, community members and more wanted to participate in was an accomplishment. Even the creation of this committee that I am speaking to today was an accomplishment.

I sat on the Community Roundtable of SHCI (Strengthening Hamilton's Community Initiative), led by then Mayor Bob Wade, formed after the firebombing of Hamilton's Hindu Temple following the events of 9/11. No one ever said after that Temple was firebombed that maybe those people who bombed the Temple had some valid point of view that needed defending. When a member of our community was nearly beaten to death SHCI called an emergency meeting, led by then Mayor Larry Dilanni, and they unequivocally condemned that hate crime and spoke out and stood in solidarity with our community.

Now the language I hear from our leadership and police is that perpetrators of hate crimes have a legitimate viewpoint that must be defended because freedom of speech is more important than my right as a queer woman to simply exist without constantly being threaten with violence.

In 2019 I shared with the Police Services Board an incident which took place a couple of years ago where a member of the HPS gave a presentation on hate crimes and claimed that the Police are a group who are victims of Hate Crimes and even provided stats.

What I didn't share in 2019 was that this presentation was given at a local High School's Gay Straight Alliance Club's meeting to a room filled with Two Spirit and LGBTQIA+ students and staff.

I challenged the officer at the time stating that the Police are NOT an identifiable group under the human rights code so hence they cannot be victims of hate crimes. The officer doubled down on their assertion that the police are victims of hate by emphatically stating that people DO hate the police. I replied that may be so, but hating the police is not against the law. The officer who gave this presentation is the HPS's current head of hate crimes. He has publicly stated on several occasions that as a police officer the law ties his hands when it comes to pursuing hate crimes in this city. This is a sad commentary coming from the HPS officer leading this file as our City continues to wear the stain of shame of being named the Capital of Hate Crimes in Canada.

20 years ago our community's relationship with the Police although far from perfect was far more amicable. When there was an HPS LGBTQ Police Task Force I was often invited to their meetings as the Chair of Pride or this Committee. Every one of those meetings were attended by the Police Chief, Head of Hate Crimes and Community Liaison Officer. HPS staff came to these meetings with a sincere desire to learn and listen along with an open compassionate heart and commitment to do better.

Now our Police are gate keepers who refused to even allow the current chair of this committee to address them at their public board meetings.

The Police came into our safe space as we discussed the collective trauma of the violence done to us at our Pride celebration and then arrested and jailed a trans women for speaking out against them.

The Police arrested members of the community who came to our rescue and protected us at Pride when the Police chose to stand back and not get involved while hate groups came with the intent to do us harm and violence. A stark contrast to our 2006 Pride Parade where police put their bodies between parade participants and homophobic World Cup soccer fans.

20 years ago when I was doing this work we were grateful to simply be at the table. Grateful to be seen. Grateful to be heard. Grateful to be validated. This was after so many years of being ignored, vilified and silenced. That gratitude has now evolved into some critical examination of the power structures that are in place that continue to persecute our sexual and gender identities. Tokenism is no longer enough.

The plan HPS is presenting to your committee tonight is far too little far too late. Our queer and trans communities can't wait any longer. The time for change is now.