PARENTS OF WATERLOO REGION

EMPOWR | Educating Minds; Parents of Waterloo Region | EMPOWRconnect@gmail.com |

SEPT 27, 2023

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DEAR CHAIR REDMAN:

Regional Chair's Office
1st Floor, 150 Frederick Street
Kitchener, ON N2G 4J3

We are writing as members of Educating Minds, Parents of Waterloo Region (EMPOWR), a grassroots collection of local parents and citizens primarily concerned with education and liberty.

We are alarmed by the severe speech restrictions proposed in the recommended motion to amend the Code of Use Bylaw (#13-050) pursuant to Report CAO-EDI-23-003 of September 12, 2023.

As outlined in the report, the proposed amendments will expand the list of "prohibited activities" to be so expansive that it could include almost any form of expression. For example, the new "prohibited activity" would include:

> *'communicating, causing or permitting communication, with any person in a way that causes the person, reasonably in all the circumstances to feel harassed;'*
>
> Where ' *"communicating" and "communication" includes but* ***is not limited to*** *words spoken, written, or recorded electronically or electro-magnetically or otherwise as well as gestures, signs or other visible representations*;' [bold emphasis added]
>
> And ' *"harassed" includes, but* ***is not limited to****…feeling tormented, troubled, worried, plagued or badgered'* [bold emphasis added]

These definitions are so expansive that the Region of Waterloo – our municipal government – can deem any form of expression to be harassing. In effect, citizens will be left to rely on benevolent government restraint if they wish to express political opposition of any kind. This will lead to self-censorship and prevent our government representatives from hearing the diverse views of their constituents.

Furthermore, as a point of logic, the amendment is unworkable even in principle; this very letter is evidence that the amendment is causing people to feel 'troubled' or 'worried'. The amendment itself could therefore be harassment.

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While we agree that offensive and humiliating speech should be condemned, we disagree with censorship as the solution. History shows that speech restrictions – almost always in the name of protecting the vulnerable or advancing the common good – are invariably abused by those in power to suppress dissent. In fact, free expression is often the only hope of the marginalized; as the abolitionist Frederick Douglass noted, free speech is the 'dread of tyrants' and incompatible with slavery because 'five years of its exercise would banish the auction block and break every chain in the South.'

We believe that we also share with you a vision of civil discourse that, through respectful disagreement and challenge, gets us closer to truth. (Surely good policy-making depends on getting as close as possible to truth.) We therefore urge you to consider the effects of speech restrictions on those who may earnestly be in error. Rather than being subject to challenge, or even ridicule, their banishment from the public sphere will not persuade them out of their beliefs. Instead, they will be driven into echo-chambers where their views may be reinforced and even further radicalized. Meanwhile, the rest of us will be left with an inaccurate sense of public sentiment as the marginalized radicals quietly expand their ranks.

Letting people speak is a tried-and-true pathway to a peaceful and prosperous society. And the greatest test of our commitment to free expression is insisting on allowing deplorable views to be heard. This was famously stated by Noam Chomsky, "Goebbels was in favor of free speech for views he liked. So was Stalin. If you're really in favor of free speech, then you're in favor of freedom of speech for precisely the views you despise. Otherwise, you're not in favor of free speech."

Finally, many of us are immigrants, or their descendants, who have escaped repressive societies in search of freedom. Some of us may have even forgone relative financial security to seek freedom for ourselves and our children. The freedom to speak and express ourselves is among the most basic of human liberties, and one that long-established Canadians perhaps have come to take for granted.

We urge you to vote against this repressive amendment and reaffirm your commitment to liberalism and free expression.

Please be aware that we are posting this as an open letter and will also post any formal reply.

Sincerely,

Parents of Waterloo Region

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Sincerely,

Parents of Waterloo Region

EMPOWR (Educating Minds; Parents of Waterloo Region)
EMPOWRconnect@gmail.com

If you agree with the contents of this letter (pages 1-2) please sign your full name, contact and signature below:

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