



2019 Pride Hamilton Event A Success Despite Protestors Concerns Raised Over Safety of 2SLGBTQIA+ Hamiltonians

Yesterday's 2019 Pride Hamilton celebration was attended by thousands of 2SLGBTQIA+ Hamiltonians and their allies and was the largest and most successful Pride event in Hamilton's history. Pride-goers had a wonderful time hanging out with friends, enjoying wonderful entertainment, great food, and amazing vendors all in an event space where they were free to celebrate safely and without judgement.

We had a strong contingent of volunteers from the local community on hand to help with the event and received a lot of positive feedback from people stopping by the Pride booth.

Unfortunately, once again, a group of organized protestors led by religious leaders from the United States and Canada came out with the expressed purpose of hatefully disrupting Pride. This year, they were joined by so-called "yellow vest" protestors from the local community, and others, in what can only be described as a measurable escalation from last year's protest.

We personally witnessed what happened yesterday and are deeply troubled by the violent attacks carried out by the protestors that resulted in several members of the community being injured. A number of attendees required onsite and offsite medical attention, some attendees requiring escorts to their vehicles to ensure their safety.

The emotional and physical impact of this has been traumatic for many people who were at the site of the protest. Thankfully, the protest was largely contained to the outer edges of our permit area so did not disrupt the event itself. This was due to our plans to keep the event contained and at a distance from the edge of the permit area to minimize the disruption from the protestors.

Upon reflection, we feel that much of what happened yesterday could have been prevented by Hamilton Police Services. Despite several attempts to meet with police in advance of Pride to hear their requests, we weren't able to connect with them until April, which did not provide us enough time to hold a town hall with the community.

Hamilton Police Services did contact us this past Thursday to ask for information about what we were expecting would happen this year to inform their operational plan for the day. We explained, in detail, that this happened last year, where it happened, that this was happening at Pride celebrations in neighboring cities, and that we expected there to be an escalation from protestors this year. Despite this, only a small number of officers were on hand on the opposite side of Gage Park (in parked vehicles).

There have been long-standing issues between the 2SLGBTQIA+ community and Hamilton Police Services that remain unresolved. We feel that this was an opportunity for police to demonstrate that they were there to protect and act in solidarity with the community. The operational plan discussed on Thursday was not put into place and it took far too long for police to respond to the escalating situation created by the protestors.

We will be calling for a community town hall later this summer where we hope to gather feedback in anticipation of publishing a position statement in advance of Pride 2020.

We sincerely hope that the City of Hamilton and HPS take this seriously and will work with us to ensure that this hateful activity is not permitted at Pride.

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All media inquiries can be directed to pride@pridehamilton.com. Representatives from Pride Hamilton will not be speaking to the media further about this matter. We appreciate the interest but we must spend time debriefing and talking with our community in preparation for Pride 2020.

About Pride Hamilton: Pride Hamilton incorporated at the end of 2018 and is an entirely volunteer-run grassroots organization with a small budget whose main function is to plan an annual celebration for 2SLGBTQIA+ Hamiltonians and their allies.