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**Queer Ontario Deputation Re: Item – EX31.2
“Compliance with the City of Toronto’s Anti-Discrimination Policy – Pride Toronto”**

**Presented by Nick Mulé, Chair of Queer Ontario to
City of Toronto – Executive Committee, April 23, 2013**

Mission: Queer Ontario is a provincially-based network of gender and sexually diverse individuals -- and allies -- who are committed to questioning, challenging, and reforming the laws, institutional practices, and social norms that regulate queer people. Operating under liberationist and sex-positive principles, it fights for accessibility, recognition, and pluralism, and engages in public education, coalition-building, and political action utilizing social media among other means in doing so.

Position: Queer Ontario holds the clear position that Pride Toronto is in compliance with the City of Toronto’s Anti-Discrimination Policy, for its inclusion of QuAIA in the Pride Toronto Parade or its indifference to use of the term ‘Israeli Apartheid’ was never seen by us as contravening the policy. As such, we see no merit in the City’s consideration of funding cuts to Pride Toronto festivities based on this reasoning and urge the City of Toronto to continue to support Pride Toronto both in grants and services.

Rationale Re: Pride Toronto’s Compliance

1. Our view at Queer Ontario that Pride Toronto was not in violation of the City of Toronto’s anti-discrimination policy has now been supported by City staff findings outlined in city manager Joseph Pennachetti’s 2011 report which clearly stated that the term ‘Israeli Apartheid’ does not contravene the policy; and, now, the report (2013) by Chris Brillinger, Executive Director of Social Development, Finance, and Administration, which concluded that the City is not in a position to determine discrimination in this circumstance as it falls under the jurisdiction of the Ontario Human Rights Commission. As such, we urge that city politicians recognize these staff conclusions by concluding your involvement on the issue itself.
2. We believe it is unfair to single out Pride Toronto with threats of withholding funds, ceasing funds, or entertaining a motion requiring Pride Toronto to ensure the complete absence of the term ‘Israeli Apartheid’ in the Parade and/or to guarantee QuAIA’s non participation therein. To undertake any of these actions would in essence be a form of politically imposed censorship on a grassroots group in the LGBTQ communities, regardless of where one stands on their positions.
3. The attempt to curtail expression and speech with regard to Pride Festivities is not new as we are all under an insidious neoliberalism that threatens to further erode an already eroding democratic process. Political expression and speech at Pride is also not new. In fact Pride was founded on the political premise of courageously being out, public and



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proud of one's sexuality and gender identity and expression in direct resistance to and defiance of society's heterosexist and cisgendered notions of normality. Over the years, our political messaging has changed with the varying needs of the times. Pride has been and will (hopefully) always be a venue for the expression of such political stances and it will do the City no good to even attempt to curtail that.

Indeed: Although we are discussing today the funding of Pride 2013, it is also worth noting that your decision for this year can have very serious implications for next year when Toronto will be hosting World Pride 2014 – an event that will see tens of thousands coming into Toronto the world over, with expectations that we are a free and democratic society that allows for freedom of speech and expression

4. What we are dealing with here is not an issue of discrimination or hate speech, but rather one of competing interests. QuAIA is not discriminating against a people; rather, it is critiquing a set of policies which it sees as negatively affecting a people. In such circumstances it does us well as a society to hear out, with an open mind, opposing views that are expressed respectfully as a means of weighing and gauging differences in the hopes of coming to some kind of resolve. Even in circumstances in which resolve cannot be reached, there is great value in ensuring a climate that allows for differing perspectives and expressions.

Conclusion:

A City decision to withhold or cut funding to Pride Toronto because of use of the term 'Israeli Apartheid' would be considered a legal infringement on freedom of expression and freedom of speech. Not only would the City of Toronto undermine the expression of diverse points of view within the queer communities, it would undermine your very roles as publicly elected officials charged with the task of upholding democracy by hearing out opposing, controversial, and even challenging views. This is the essence of democracy, wherein the critiquing of policy should never be censored. To do so is to risk the democratic process itself.

Like QuAIA, we at Queer Ontario also critique policy, although our geographical mandates are quite different. An attempt to censor critical analysis of policy is a threat to any individual, group, organization, or community that engages in the same as a form of political activism, regardless of our respective mandates. More importantly: The civics, development, and growth of the very society that is being critiqued is placed at risk – for in the absence of critique we are subject to stagnation.