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July 15, 2013

Queer Ontario Steering Committee Decision Regarding Complaint Involving the Election of Denise Freedman as Member at Large to the Queer Ontario Steering Committee

Background: Soon following the May 25, 2013 Annual General Meeting of Queer Ontario (QO), a complaint was received from a QO member regarding the election of Member at Large (outside Toronto) Denise Freedman. The complaint was premised on concerns of misrepresentation in that it was not until after the vote, that this QO member learned that Denise Freedman (name on ballot) and Jessica Freedman (common identity in QO and other online forums) is in fact one and the same person. The complainant expressed that had they known that this was the same person, they would have voted differently. Further to this, the complainant expressed greater concern for the integrity of Queer Ontario's election process, feeling that such misrepresentation tainted our attempt at conducting a fair and transparent democratic vote, hence calling the election of this particular position into question.

In light of the complaint Denise Freedman clarified that her legal name is Denise Jessica Freedman and that as a trans woman she retains the right to use whichever name(s) she chooses.

Queer Ontario Steering Committee Consideration of Complaint: The Queer Ontario Steering Committee (sans one member who sent regrets and Denise Jessica Freedman due to conflict of interest) met at its first opportunity on July 11, 2013 to address the concerns raised. At this Special Steering Committee Meeting, it was determined that the perception is that this is a misrepresentation in the democratic process, regardless of intent. During the Special Steering Committee Meeting it was learned that the confusion extended beyond the complainant. The Steering Committee also noted that the exact same confusion could have arisen if a cisgendered (non-trans) person had used one name in online forums, then a different name on the ballot.

Queer Ontario Steering Committee Decision Regarding Complaint: Even if one person did not know that Denise Freedman and Jessica Freedman is the same person prior to the election that is sufficient for us to deem the election invalid. As such, the Queer Ontario Steering Committee came to the consensus that the election of Denise Freedman to the Member at Large position on the Steering Committee at the last QO AGM is deemed invalid and as such the position remains open.

Although Queer Ontario acknowledges that self-naming is of great value and we respect the right of any person to choose their own name, and that anyone could use a 'pseudonym' in place of their name; Queer Ontario also feels that it is of the utmost importance that name consistency and transparency be upheld to avoid confusion, perceptions of misrepresentation or deception in order to conduct a fair and open democratic election process.

Queer Ontario Actions based on Decision:

- Queer Ontario informs Denise Jessica Freedman and the complainant of this decision by means of this statement
- Queer Ontario will circulate to the QO membership and post on its social media forums its decision via this statement
- Queer Ontario will call a Special Membership Meeting in either September or October 2013 to hold a special election for the two (2) Members at Large (outside Toronto) positions currently vacant on its Steering Committee. This election will be open to all eligible QO members including Denise Jessica Freedman
- Queer Ontario Governance Committee will revisit the QO Bylaws in light of these circumstances and make recommendations for revisions

Nick Mulé
Chairperson,
Queer Ontario

On behalf of the Queer Ontario Steering Committee