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October 19, 2016

House of Commons Standing Committee on
Public Safety and National Security

Re: Public Consultation on Canada's National Security Framework

At the pride march which followed and celebrated the passage of a bill which incorporated the words "sexual orientation" into the Ontario Human Rights Code (1986), two groups were asked to lead that march. One group was the Coalition for Lesbian and Gay Rights in Ontario (CLGRO), which is the predecessor of our group Queer Ontario (QO). The other was a group named the Right To Privacy Committee (RTPC). This symbolizes the degree of importance placed on the right to privacy in our communities.

Accomplishing this success, which was met with tremendous resistance and had been the major focus of CLGRO for 12 years, enabled us to lobby for and eventually win recognition federally in the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Resistance to these accomplishments within Canadian society continues. We see Bill C-51 as an example of that resistance and an effort to undermine the Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

Much as we appreciate the need for the government to protect Canadian public from the threats of terrorism, we keep in mind that a major goal of those threats is to undermine our way of life and destroy those rights and freedoms for which we have so long fought. The aspects of Bill C-51 which undermine the Charter of Rights and Freedoms actually work to support the goals of the terrorists.

I'll just provide two examples:

First, the Bill expands the definition of security threats to potentially include an extraordinary range of social justice activities.

Second, Canada's Security Agency, CSIS, was created to erect a buffer between the collecting of information and the ability to act on that information as law enforcement due to the history of past human rights abuses duly recognized. Bill C-51 radically redefines CSIS's role to one which bears resemblance to a secret state police force with no public accountability. This is not compatible with the most fundamental tenets of liberal democratic states and is in violation of the Canadian Charter.

We entreat the government to repeal the Act created by Bill C-51 and ensure that legislation brought forward to protect the Canadian public from threats of terrorism will also protect those rights enshrined in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

Queer Ontario is a provincial network of gender and sexually diverse individuals — and their allies — who are committed to questioning, challenging, and reforming the laws, institutional practices, and social norms that regulate queer people.