**Inclusion Earned (?)**

**Participation of Toronto Police Service in Pride Toronto Parade**

Much has been said since Pride Toronto decided to support Black Lives Matter - Toronto’s (BLM-TO) demand to not have the Toronto Police Service (TPS) participate in the Pride Parade. Framing this as an act of ‘exclusion’ in a festival that celebrates ‘inclusion’ on the part of the TPS, mainstream society and some members of the LGBTQ communities is to distort the meaning of ‘inclusion’ in this circumstance.

Pride Toronto’s mission and vision includes celebrating, uniting and empowering gender and sexually diverse communities through values of inclusivity, diversity and creativity. Showing up one day a year in uniform to be on a float or march in the Pride Parade does not atone for how the police treat members of our communities the remainder of the year.

Police services in this province including the TPS are:

* Carding people of colour, particularly young Black males, at greater rates than other races
* Engaging in violent altercations with people of colour, especially Black males
* Killing people of colour including Black males
* Participating in the incarceration of Indigenous and Black people at disproportionate rates as compared to the White population
* Contributing to the criminalization of people with HIV, particularly racialized males
* Stigmatizing HIV-positive people with misinformation
* Disrespecting and harassing trans people
* Arresting men who engage in public sex with other men in parks and washrooms
* Surveilling poor communities under the guise of community policing (TAVIS)
* Harassing and intimidating sex workers, drug users and the homeless

Members of all of the above communities are also members of the LGBTQ communities. When the police, an institution of the state, can show respect and devise a way to work meaningfully with all these communities then they will have earned a place of inclusion in the Pride Parade. No ‘regret’ from a police chief for the bathhouse raids of over 35 years ago nor unveiling of a mural without community consultation, will smooth over the harsh realities of many in our communities both then and now.

Queer Ontario would like to see the day the TPS or any police service in the province can participate in the Pride Parade respecting the values of Pride Toronto and more importantly respecting all members of the LGBTQ communities all year round. Unfortunately, they are far from having earned this inclusion.

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. Operating under liberationist and sex-positive principles, we fight for accessibility, recognition, and pluralism, using social media and other tactics to engage in political action, public education, and coalition building.