

08 November 2019

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York University, 4700 Keele St.
Toronto ON
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Sue Graham-Nutter, Chair of the Toronto Public Library Board
Vickery Bowles, City Librarian

c/o City Librarian's Office
Toronto Reference Library
789 Yonge St.
Toronto ON
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Cc: His Worship John Tory; Mayor, City of Toronto

To the Toronto Public Library Board and the City Librarian:

You made the wrong decision in allowing the Meghan Murphy room rental. The Community and Event Space Rental policy is reasonable, but your decision about section 4.4 a) in this case was poorly considered and very hurtful. A determination of community harm, including the likelihood of discriminatory or hateful speech, should be made in consultation with the community most affected by that speech. It is shameful that the trans and gender non-conforming community was not engaged as part of the deliberation.

Upholding the Radical Feminists Unite room booking is a violation of the safe space that marginalized and targeted communities have come to cherish at TPL. Dismissing Murphy's arguments as not legally-defined hate speech is a callous simplification that ignores the struggles of trans people for dignity, safety and equality. The impact of this abuse is immediately evident. The people protesting at the Palmerston branch weren't just opposed to the talk inside; they were against the Toronto Public Library. Toronto citizens—readers, writers, library users—were protesting the *library*! You'd called in the police, and they locked some people inside the building! This is no way to treat any community member, and certainly not how to work with vulnerable communities.

As librarians and archivists at York University we regularly tell our students that TPL is open to them and that they should use it for academic work as well as

recreation. We use it ourselves. We've always been happy to have such a fine public system beside our own, but we're no longer comfortable recommending TPL to all of our students. What's more, your decision has damaging consequences for our profession as a whole. Your free speech absolutism betrays a limited understanding of the very value you seek to protect.

Stand up for trans rights. Librarians have a responsibility to support evidence-based arguments and to oppose those who deny the rights of others. A stance of neutrality should not permit false equivalencies—not all arguments have equal merit—and you should have the critical capacity to see the difference between legitimate debate and outright discrimination. History will not look favourably on this decision. At a time when all libraries struggle to demonstrate relevance and when public libraries have shown great leadership by transforming into innovative accessible hubs for all equity-seeking groups, you have let us down.

Sincerely,

William Denton

for the librarians and archivists of the York University Faculty Association

Associate Librarian, York University

Union steward, York University Faculty Association

Art Redding

Professor, York University

President, York University Faculty Association