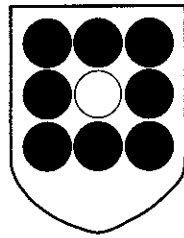


# CANADIAN CIVIL LIBERTIES ASSOCIATION

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Tuesday April 20, 2010

By mail and email

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Dear Sirs/Mesdames:

I am writing on behalf of the Canadian Civil Liberties Association to express our concern regarding recent reports that the Toronto Pride Parade was warned that it may have its funding withdrawn if there were continued 'violations' of the City's anti-discrimination policy. Although we were not able to locate an official statement, media reports suggest that the city found that Pride had contravened the city's anti-discrimination policy due to the participation of the group Queers Against Israeli Apartheid (QuAIA) in the parade. According to quotes from city officials, QuAIA's participation had created an environment at Pride "where not everybody feels welcome," leading to a violation of anti-discrimination policies through the creation of a "poisoned environment."

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Although the CCLA understands the City's concern for anti-discrimination, we question whether withholding funding on the basis of a possible creation of a poisoned environment is appropriate in this context. In our view, a parade is not a traditional 'work environment', and the two cannot be directly equated. Here, there are no allegations that Pride Toronto's organizers were hostile towards Jewish participants or prevented the participation of same-sex pro-Israel groups. The fact that a parade includes a group promoting a very strongly-worded, one-sided political message is not sufficient to find contravention of an anti-discrimination policy. It is true that these messages may offend individuals due to their political affiliations, citizenship, place of origin, religion, or any number of other listed grounds. This is also true, however, of many of the other messages carried in the parade. If posted in a workplace, many of the images at Pride would be highly inappropriate, offensive to some, and under the right circumstances could easily contribute to a poisoned work environment. A workplace and a parade are fundamentally different venues. It simply does not follow that because a small part of a parade shows material that is offensive and makes some uncomfortable, the parade has created a hostile atmosphere and contravened anti-discrimination policies.

Similar complications would arise in the context of arts grantees. Exhibitions and theatre performances may present a point of view on a controversial subject that make individuals from a specific community uncomfortable. These considerations alone should not, however, preclude them from receiving public funding.

Freedom of expression is central to these groups' mandates, and they should not have public funding withdrawn on this basis. We therefore urge you to reconsider your interpretation of the City's anti-discrimination policy.

Sincerely,



Abby Deshman  
Project Director