

November 20, 2019

Toronto Catholic District School Board
80 Sheppard Avenue East,
North York, ON M2N 6E8

ATTN: Maria Rizzo, Board Chair

Dear Maria:

I am writing to you on behalf of The 519 in response to the recently proposed amendment by Vice-Chair Del Grande to add bestiality, pedophilia, and cannibalism to the TCDSB Code of Conduct. This proposed amendment, in response to adding protections for LGBTQ2S students is deeply troubling and unacceptable.

The 519 is an LGBTQ2S community centre and a City of Toronto agency that has been involved in organizing and advocating for the rights of LGBTQ2S communities for more than four decades. For over forty years, we have responded to the evolving and emergent needs of queer, trans, non-binary, and two spirit communities.

The 519 has a long working relationship with the TCDSB, working in partnership to provide a wide range of programming since 2012. The 519's primary contacts are the Superintendent of Equity, Diversity & Indigenous Education, Community Relations Department, Nick D'Avella and the Superintendent Areas 7 & 8 Settlement Services & Newcomers, Jodelyn Huang. Both individuals have been vital to our well-established relationship with the TCDSB and our ability to connect and provide services to newcomer youth, particularly queer and trans identified students. Examples of our partnership with the TCDSB includes:

- Programming during Asian Heritage Month;
- In-class workshops on healthy relationships, with a focus on queer and trans relationships;
- Establishment of a wide network of settlement workers based in TCDSB high schools – programming includes Newcomer Orientation Week (NOW Program), Peer Leader Training with workshops that include queer and trans inclusion, and delivery of The 519's Creating Safer Spaces curriculum; and,
- During 2012 – 2018 working with the Priority Schools Initiative to support marginalized and vulnerable youth within the Mount Dennis community to implement the Student Newcomer Access Program within the TCDSB.

Every day we respond to the consequences of discrimination and social isolation that many in our communities' experiences. LGBTQ2S youth face approximately 14 times the risk of suicide and substance misuse. Up to 40% of homeless youth in Toronto identify as LGBTQ2S. Surveys of Toronto students have shown that only 35% of LGBTQ2S youth in grades 10-12 state they have a middle to high level of emotional wellbeing, compared to 65% for their heterosexual, cisgender peers.

According to the most recent report by Statistics Canada, hate crimes motivated by sexual orientation and/or gender identity are far more likely to be violent than other hate crimes. Roughly two-thirds of these crimes are violent in nature, mostly assaults. Reducing violence against LGBTQ2S people requires holding leaders and others accountable for their words and actions. These statistics point to a pressing need for the creation of safe, affirming, and inclusive schools. Queer and trans youth face tremendous barriers not because of their identities, but because of a lack of support and understanding from institutions that are responsible for their wellbeing. Actions like Vice Chair Del Grande's sends a strong message to your LGBTQ2S students: that their identities are not valid, that they do not matter, and that they are not welcome in your schools.

The existence and legitimacy of LGBTQ2S identities is not a topic for debate. The inclusion of sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression in Ontario's Human Rights Code is a settled matter, and has been for years. We appreciate that the TCDSB recently voted to affirm this fact. To live up to the spirit of your recently updated Code of Conduct, and the Trustee Code of Conduct, the actions of Vice Chair Del Grande must be condemned in the strongest terms possible.

We call on you and the Board to:

- Publicly denounce Vice Chair's Del Grande's hateful actions and affirm the rights of LGBTQ2S students; and
- Call for his immediate resignation.

We would also extend to you the opportunity to meet with The 519 Education and Training Department to implement gender and sexual diversity training amongst the TCDSB Board and Senior Leadership.

The Board has been presented with an opportunity to demonstrate that your Codes of Conduct are more than paper protections. You have an opportunity to acknowledge that there is work that needs to be done as an institution to protect and uphold the rights of LGBTQ2S students. You have an opportunity to commit to the work needed to protect some of your most marginalized students. Working with organizations to create inclusive working and learning environments for LGBTQ2S people is at the core of what we do. We are committed to doing this work with you, but only if it is done in a meaningful way and in true ally-ship with LGBTQ2S communities.

Sincerely,



Maura Lawless