

Honorable councillors,

We, the collective membership of Christians for a Free Palestine (Toronto), representing Christians from various denominations and worshipping communities across Toronto and the GTA, wish to express our firm and principled opposition to the proposed changes to this bylaw.

This bylaw amendment is a redundant and unnecessary restriction of our civil liberties and our ability to utilize the mechanisms which a democratic society relies on to reduce harm in our communities and in the communities around the world that ours touches.

With regards to most examples of “Social Infrastructure,” this new amendment is wholly unnecessary. We already have more than sufficient policy to allow us to navigate the difference between principled protest against injustice and displays of hate and bigotry. In the case that the latter occurs, existing tools and frameworks are more than enough to ensure community safety—and it would be a mistake to overlook the role that community advocacy groups play in mitigating harmful actors, such as the community response to anti-LGBTQ+ protests in recent years.

For little benefit, we sacrifice the ability to call our community members to account for the harm they cause when they do so from within “Social Infrastructure.” As Christians, we have to reckon daily with the harm that members of our community have caused and continue to cause from the walls of our own holiest spaces. From colonialism and the development of the Residential Schools program, to anti-LGBTQ bigotry, to white-supremacist Christian nationalism which continues to rise today, we know firsthand that some of the most grievous harms can grow in spaces that we consider our spiritual homes. People of conscience should be able to speak up against these harms and discourage our neighbours from participating in them, no matter where we find them—in fact, that is the example that our faith provides (cf. Jeremiah 7:1-3, Matthew 21:12-17).

If the city truly wishes to support community safety, it should do so not by curtailing the community’s ability to redress harm, but by working to prevent and correct the harms which cause the public to cry out. We know that, for example, the similar bylaw in Vaughan, which influenced this proposed amendment, was made in part due to protests at a Thornhill synagogue over the sale of illegally occupied land in Palestine’s West Bank. These sorts of blatantly illegal and harmful land sales should never have been allowed to take place at all, and future protests at such spaces would be avoided if governments better applied Canada’s responsibilities under international law by barring such events from occurring on Canadian soil.

This bylaw amendment is not the right way forward for Toronto. Safety does not come through constriction, nor justice through silence. If we were not to speak, rest assured, the very stones would cry out.

Sincerely,

Christians for a Free Palestine