



DISABILITY JUSTICE  
NETWORK of ONTARIO

**Subject: Follow Up Regarding Protest Bylaws and the Threat to Freedom of Expression and Dissent**

21 May 2025

Dear Mayor Chow and Councillors:

The Disability Justice Network of Ontario (and I as a Toronto-St. Paul's resident) reiterate our fundamental concern with the growing element in Toronto regarding the development of protest bylaws. The simple fact of the matter is that your Bylaw is being proposed—regardless of individual city councillors' ideals or justifications—inside a wider ecosystem of cities responding to the work of human rights defenders and regressive political actors equivalently. Changes brought forward in amendments have failed to address our concerns in the least. If anything, our concern has deepened to the public harm that this Bylaw will cause to marginalized disabled communities. To retain any semblance of our belief that you will protect access to justice and our freedom to dissent, you **must** vote against this Bylaw—in any form—and take up similar stances against Provincial and Federal legislation to the same ends.

The result of passing this Bylaw remains to only stifle dissent, attack movements, and limit the freedom of expression of countless Ontarians concerned with the upholding of basic principles of human rights and dignity. While we remain sympathetic to the need to defend religious freedom and have a long history of promoting the intersectional needs of our own communities, there is little to suggest that such bylaws would actually achieve this.

Instead, these laws would paralyze movements for justice. May we remind you again: this Bylaw would represent another in a long line of instances—from the 2010 G20 demonstrations in Toronto to the 2019 Hamilton Pride community defence to the constant monitoring of Indigenous land defence—where hate crime legislation is used to target, defame, and criminalize the very peoples it is said to defend. We know, through long histories in social movements, that far-right provocateurs of various stripes (including outright fascists) will not be prosecuted through such legislation. Instead, the weight of history shows us where such ideas will lead us. It is our view that, as T.Y. Kui asserted last year in [Briarpatch Magazine](#), “Anti-hate infrastructure does not actually exist to protect potential targets of reactionary violence from street-level harassment and assault, or even from far-right mass murderers”.

We also know that this concern is not limited to Toronto or to Ontario. As UN Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression, Irene Khan, [has said](#):

The right to peaceful assembly, protected under *article 21 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights*, is closely related to freedom of expression. States have an obligation to allow peaceful assemblies, including peaceful civil disobedience, to take place without unwarranted interference, as well as an obligation to protect the participants. The possibility that a peaceful assembly may provoke adverse or even violent reactions from some members of the public is not in itself sufficient reason to prohibit or restrict the assembly.

info@djno.ca | djno.ca |    @djnontario

*Creating a world where People with Disabilities are free to be.*



**DISABILITY JUSTICE  
NETWORK** of ONTARIO

In a city like Toronto where major protests to defend Black, Indigenous, Palestinian, and other marginalized communities have and will continue to happen, one must elevate these words all the more and remind you—again—of your responsibility to these very communities. Over these last weeks, members of your Council have defended these bylaws in the names of those marginalized, but in the days to come, this Bylaw will be used to repress our very voices. We will not forget it when the inevitable scandal and our communities' indignation erupts when our rights are put on the line.

We must also raise with you again the creeping scope of such legislation. We know our disabled communities will speak out against low social assistance rates, continued inaccessibility, lacking rent control, institutionalization, alongside constant issues of environmental and medical racism. But if every legislature, parliament, and city hall through these types of legislation are insulated from hearing our voices on these issues—what good does it truly serve? Who will be left unheard? Rather, we are again silenced and pushed further to the margins—counter to the justification of such law.

Rather, there is much Toronto can do to defend the voices of marginalized peoples across the Province. You can redouble your own investments into access to justice—even if it means marginalized peoples can challenge your cities. You can support wider advocacy at the Provincial and Federal levels to support the concerns of peoples most impacted by these types of legislation. You can strengthen the power of city Ombudsmen to keep your institutions accountable. You can uproot institutionalized violence against racialized, queer and trans, and disabled communities that are embedded in the systems within and beyond this city. These are not just words, but possibilities and commitments the City could be making instead.

In a time of economic and social uncertainty—where countries near us are literally disappearing and deporting people for expressing dissent for human rights—we cannot build the infrastructure to empower these forces down the line. In a city where rich histories of resistance to oppression have survived in spite of attempts to criminalize the marginalized—we cannot forget the lessons and legacies of our past.

Toronto has the opportunity to resist wider social forces that criminalize dissent, but taking the lead is a choice you must actively take. You will either lead in building a better future or fail us—creating systems that will only empower the very people and ideologies that such legislation is framed to protect us against. We will live to regret it, if you do.

With sincerest respect,

**Brad Evoy,**  
**Executive Director, Disability Justice Network of Ontario**

info@djno.ca | djno.ca |    @djnontario

*Creating a world where People with Disabilities are free to be.*