



**DISABILITY JUSTICE
NETWORK** of ONTARIO

Subject: Protest Bylaws and the Threat to Freedom of Expression and Dissent

23 April 2025

Dear Mayors Chow, Horwath, and Sutcliffe:

The Disability Justice Network of Ontario wishes to express our increasing concern with the growing element in each of your cities regarding the development of protest bylaws in your cities. The simple fact of the matter is that these Bylaws are 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. The result, however, will only be to stifle dissent, collapse movements, and limit the freedom of expression of countless Ontarians concerned with the upholding of basic principles of human rights and dignity.

While we are 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 which would paralyze movements for justice. Such laws 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 your cities 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.

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



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In cities where major protests have occurred (and will continue) to defend Black, Indigenous, Palestinian, and other marginalized communities, one must elevate these words all the more and remind you of your responsibility to these very communities. Today, members of your Councils may defend these bylaws in the names of those marginalized, but tomorrow they may be used to repress our very voices.

Moreover, we must also raise with you 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 cities in Ontario 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 build and strengthen the power of city Ombudsmen to keep your very cities accountable. You can uproot institutionalized violence against racialized, queer and trans, and disabled communities that are embedded in the systems within and beyond your cities.

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. We cannot create systems that will only empower those 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

CC: Robin Jones, Association of Municipalities of Ontario President and Village of Westport Mayor