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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Hamilton Community Legal Clinic's Statement on anti-2SLGBTQ+ action at Terryberry Library

On November 24th, 2022, the Terryberry branch of the Hamilton Public Library organized a Drag Storytime event. Drag storytime events are family-friendly and age-appropriate entertainment and celebrations of the diversity of human experience, including Queer identities and family dynamics. Drag itself is an art form that is often tailored for specific events and audiences.

Unfortunately, in response to the organization of this event, a small group of bigots gathered in an attempt to disrupt and protest. The words and actions of this group are part of the rising tide of violence and hate that Queer communities across Canada are facing. Their allegations against the organizers, talent, and Queer community more broadly, have no basis in reality, and are irresponsible, ignorant, and dangerous. For our community at large, who might be just engaging with issues impacting the Queer community, we encourage you to take advantage of numerous educational and informational tools that can be accessed online, including through the Hamilton Public Library. Queerness challenges and calls on all of us to reconsider beliefs and realities about more than just gender and sexuality but about how we love and live alongside each other in ways that respect and celebrate differences. All members of our community should rise to that challenge out of a shared spirit of love and acceptance – and not hatred and violence.

The Queer communities are strong, and we are not going anywhere. In the face of rising hate and intolerance, we are confident that our communities will continue to embody the values that we have always espoused, including love, support, and acceptance. Every Queer community member, regardless of their age, has the right to feel safe and to be themselves without fear of experiencing violence or condemnation of any kind. Our communities know all too well what harms result from trying to exist in an unsupportive or oppressive environment.

The Queer Justice Project and the Hamilton Community Legal Clinic want all members of all Queer communities to know that we see what is happening and we stand with you, including at Terryberry library. We see how our communities, particularly the Trans and drag communities are being explicitly targeted by a growing movement of hate, fueled by far-right ideologies. We know that this was not an isolated incident.

Bomb threats are being made against schools with gender-diverse staff in Ontario right now; hate crimes against Queer people are on the rise; Pride, other Queer events, and our safe spaces are being increasingly threatened with violence; politicians seeking election as school trustees and to other positions are openly running on platforms that explicitly seek to exclude or harm Queer people; gender-affirming healthcare and its providers are under attack by equally baseless allegations of harm; we watched the fallout when 5 innocent and beautiful Queer family members were murdered in Colorado Springs just last week with the memories of the Pulse shooting still in our hearts and minds, and the list goes on.

To the Queer communities, all of your feelings about what is happening are valid, whether that be anxiety, fear, sadness, anger, a combination of them all, or something else entirely. This is not meant to stoke panic, but to call out what is happening and name it for what it is. It is ignorant bigotry that is putting our Queer communities in danger. It must not rest solely on Queer communities to bear witness, defend against, and call out this pattern of hate and violence.

As a result, the Queer Justice Project and the Hamilton Community Legal Clinic make the following calls to action:

1. We call on all allies of the Queer communities to take a stand and to use your own personal, professional, and social platforms to call out hate and misinformation targeting the Queer communities when you witness it. Show up when we need you to;
2. We call on all public institutions, including government bodies, police services, and NGOs to do more. Calling this out is not enough, taking action is necessary here. We call on each entity to take what action they can to protect Queer communities and combat dangerous misinformation. Governments must enact strategies that seek the de-platforming and de-radicalizing of those who spread hate;
3. We call on the Queer communities to continue being your beautiful selves, and to take the time to care for yourselves and others around you. Continue standing up to hate, as we always have, and we will persevere through this together.