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### TCDSB PRIDE MONTH MOTION

I would like to thank you all for your time this evening, although I genuinely believe it is a shame that this topic is being so heavily debated to begin with. I believe that in the times we are currently living in, Catholic schools should have put up pride flags a long time ago to show solidarity to the LGBTQIA2S+ community that for many many many years have been marginalized and discriminated against within the Catholic community.

As Catholics, we were not put on this earth to discriminate and isolate, rather to love one another. To intentionally ignore this group and perpetuate homophobia and hate against members of the community is to fail at what God intended for us. This is an issue that has long been ignored, and it is due to our ignorance as Catholics that this hatred continues here and around the world.

My first point as to why the TCDSB should recognize pride month and fly the pride flag is that the LGBTQ+ community is a marginalized group, and the flag would be a constant reminder that they are welcome and that they belong in our schools. School is meant to be a home away from home, a place where you feel comfortable being yourself so that you are able to learn. How are students expected to thrive if they have to walk the halls everyday being afraid to be their true selves?

Even if just by an underhanded side comment, these students are discriminated against. It can ruin a student's mental health, their education, and it follows them to other aspects of daily life. A pride flag is the minimum we can do to stand in solidarity. It will be a symbol that ALL are welcome here and that they ALL belong here.

Students in the LGBTQ+ community know that this stigma is born of a misconception. And for those Catholics who believe God would not want us to love one another unconditionally, they are simply wrong. Because we are called upon to love and not to hate and to respect, not condemn. Secondly the TCDSB is a publicly funded board, including those who belong to the LGBTQ+ community and therefore they should fly the flag in their buildings. Claiming we are Catholics isn't a viable excuse that can be used in a publicly funded institution. We cannot allow the spread of hatred towards this marginalized group that has done nothing more than be themselves. As a publicly funded board we a responsibility to be accepting to LGBTQ+ students in the same way that any other Catholic student is welcomed.

And if there *are* students who are being hurt because of the opinions of some, then the responsibility falls on the institution to break down these misconceptions and stigmas. I've personally dealt with these struggles as a member of the LGBTQ in the TCDSB.

Each time I walk through the halls, I hear a nasty comment because students are taught that this is okay. They believe they have the right to speak on my identity, and authority figures are enabling them through complacency. So then I, and others like me, walk down the halls, feeling as though we are creatures of a foreign place that don't belong here. Being told we are not loved by God and destined to burn in Hell.

And many of these students hide behind the notion that they are simply being "good Catholics" but Catholicism is not about judgement or discrimination, judgement is left for God and God alone. No, see, Catholicism is about loving thy neighbour, a value that is too often forgotten in times like these, when we finally have a chance to take a step in the right direction. The flag is not a symbol of anti-catholicism, putting it up does not take away from anyone's faith, in fact, I view it as an opportunity to strengthen our faith and relationship to God. You are choosing and focusing on your journey to heaven and trying to follow the path that God has set out for each of us.

The flag is not being put up for the Catholics. It is a symbol of solidarity, to stand with those who have felt discrimination and anguish at the hands of the Catholic Church. And it is for all the Catholics who are LGBTQ+ and who, for far too long, have felt alienated in our Catholic community, feeling as though they cannot simultaneously belong to the Church and the LGBTQ+

In the announcements every morning we acknowledge the land which was taken by indigenous communities long ago. Did this mean we follow indigenous's teachings? Does this mean we agree with all their beliefs or their spirituality, no. It is merely to acknowledge the wrong and the suffering that was caused to those that we hurt. To atone for the sins that Catholics committed in the past. This is a different story but the same rules apply. The catholic faith doesn't share the same beliefs as the LGBTQ+ community and that's ok, but the TCDSB can't neglect its students while they're suffering.

The TCDSB needs to be on the right side of history, they need to take this step in the right direction to answer for all the hurt that has been done to marginalized students at the hands of misinterpreted Catholic teachings. To recognize pride month and to fly a flag won't change the lives of any Catholic, but it will create a world of change for students who will finally feel as though they, too are loved by God, and that they truly belong in our nurturing and loving Catholic community.

Thank you.