



LETTER IN SUPPORT OF THE CHURCH & WELLESLEY VILLAGE

May 27, 2020

Dear Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, Premier Doug Ford, and Mayor John Tory,

To walk down the street and visit the restaurants and shops in the Church & Wellesley Village is akin to many of us, as walking through the rooms and corridors of our own family home. The Village is where our communities gather to share our experiences, our stories, our joys, and our struggles. Our bars are steeped with history. Our stages are full of passion. The restaurants are our family dinner table. The shops carry and proliferate our culture. The spaces in between are where life's small moments help connect us.

For forty years, Pride Toronto has been honoured to call the Village home. The Pride festival is, in some ways, our incredible annual house party, where we invite the world to experience the magic of this place and its people.

To help keep everyone safe during the COVID-19 global health crisis we have moved to a Virtual Pride experience. While we are excited about the new possibilities for expression and access that this approach will create, the impact on the Village will be incredibly difficult. So many of our local businesses depend on Pride festival crowds to bring them through the slower times of the year.

COVID-19 has brought with it a confluence of crises for LGBT2Q+ communities. Job losses, housing losses, fear & anxiety, and loss of support for vulnerable individuals are part of the current reality. The Canadian Civil Liberties Association [reports that homophobic and transphobic attacks](#) have increased dramatically. Egale Canada's national study: [The Impact of COVID-19 on the LGBTQI2S Community](#) reveals the depth of some of the challenges in startling statistics:

- 52% of Canada's LGBT2Q+ households have faced lay-offs or reduced employment as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, as compared to 39% of overall Canadian households.
- 53% of the LGBT2Q+ community do not feel confident in their current household's financial situation, as compared to 40% of non-LGBT2Q+ people.

The effects of the crisis on the cultural and economic fabric of the Village are just as pronounced. The Church Wellesley BIA remains in close conversation and collaboration with our community of businesses, and the situation is dire. Rents in the Village are higher than on Yonge Street and so many local bars, restaurants, and shops operate on razor-thin margins in the best of times. The spectre of losing a large number of LGBT2Q+ businesses is real as the weeks roll by without income or strong government support. This is a reality we cannot let come to pass.



This is not a crisis that's limited to the geographic boundaries of our neighbourhood. The Village is a beacon and a promise for every LGBTQ2Q+ kid in the far reaches of Canada. It is the destination that a global tourist gives their cab driver when they land at Pearson. It is the centre of gravity for those who've moved away but still know they can always return. This home has space for all of us and it requires protecting.

There are tangible and actionable steps that can be taken to save the businesses, culture, and support-systems within the Village. We call on elected officials at all levels of government to enact the following:

- CECRA amendments;
- Financial aid instead of debt deferral;
- Suspension of commercial evictions; and
- Post-COVID-19 recovery support

Christopher Hudspeth, Chair of the Church Wellesley BIA and owner of Pegasus on Church, has stated that "It Takes a Village to Save the Village." While our community has repeatedly used resilience and creativity to overcome adversity, this time it will not be enough. We are calling on those beyond our village, to the leaders at all levels of government, to step forward, and to do it now.

Sincerely,

Pride Toronto and the Church Wellesley BIA