

August 22, 2017

Mayor and Council
Ottawa City Hall
110 Laurier Avenue, Ottawa
K1P 1J1

Dear Mayor and Council:

Re: Anti-Choice Proclamation and Flag Raising

Please accept the present letter as a formal request for the findings made by the City following its review of the approval policies for flag-raising and proclamations.

Mayor Watson publicly committed to this review subsequent to widespread backlash to the anti-choice flag that flew over City Hall on May 11, 2017, stating, "[\(w\)e have to make sure it's crystal clear for next year that that kind of divisive cause should not be promoted and publicized at city hall.](#)"

On May 22, 2017, 23 local, national and international organisations called on the Mayor to stop recognizing anti-choice events. Specifically, we asked that the City and Mayor stop signing anti-choice proclamations and deny requests to fly anti-choice flags at City Hall. Unfortunately, we have seen no progress on the promised review, nor has Planned Parenthood Ottawa received any response to the formal complaint it lodged with the Chief of Protocol.

We are deeply concerned by the lack of apparent progress on this important issue. The proclamations and flag-raising advance a cause that undermines equality rights, Charter rights, and international human rights, and espouses a view that is directly contrary to Canadian and international law.

Once again, we urge you to end the practice of proclaiming "March for Life Day" and approving anti-choice flag-raising that offer no consideration of an individual's constitutionally protected bodily integrity and right to health.

Abortion is a lawful medical procedure which, by its nature, is specific to individual women, non-binary and trans individuals. These individuals are constitutionally protected from discrimination. Abortion is thus at its core an issue of human rights and sex equality. The views promoted by the City of Ottawa conflicts with women's, non-binary and trans people's rights to equality, liberty and security of the person, which are protected by the *Canadian Charter of Human Rights and Freedoms*.

For years, abortion service users and providers have recounted experiences of harassment and intimidation due to anti-abortion activities in Ottawa. We applauded the Mayor when he acted to ensure the safety of people accessing and providing abortion services by publicly asking the Attorney General of Ontario to create safe access zone legislation. By acknowledging the serious impacts of anti-choice activities, it follows that the Mayor must stop issuing proclamations raising awareness for those activities.

The City of Ottawa has an obligation to comply with the laws of Canada, including the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* as well as international human rights law. Women, non-binary and trans individuals' autonomy and right to choose are firmly established in these laws. By celebrating and praising a special anti-choice day, which seeks to undermine constitutionally protected reproductive rights, the City calls into question its adherence to the rule of law.

We call on you to ensure City policy supports the refusal of requests for anti-choice, anti-equality, and anti-human rights proclamations and flag-raising.

Sincerely,

Joyce Arthur, Abortion Rights Coalition of Canada

Sandeep Prasad, Action Canada for Sexual Health and Rights

Catherine Macnab, Planned Parenthood Ottawa

Véronique Prévost, Ontario Women's Committee for Unifor Canada

