

Pickering City Council, Meet Councillor Lisa Robinson

By Lynn Frances

Within five months of beginning her first term with the City of Pickering on October 23, 2022, many of her constituents invited Councillor Lisa Robinson to a Durham District School Board (DDSB) meeting in the spring of 2023. (The children of her constituents attend either the Durham District School Board or the Catholic District School Board.) The parents were frustrated because they couldn't dialogue with the school trustees at the DDSB meetings. The trustees continuously shut the parents down and kicked them out of the meetings for asking simple questions.

Councillor Robinson was disturbed by what she observed at that meeting.

Then, on May 15, she returned to a second DDSB meeting, which resulted in all the attention she has received since then. Everyone was flustered, and at the break, the school trustees cleared everyone out of the meeting. Outside, two of many concerned parents from the Muslim community were addressing a large crowd using a bullhorn. They asked Councillor Robinson if she would like to talk with them. She took the opportunity to speak and get their opinions on three motions that constituents had asked her to bring forward.

• **A motion to prohibit the flying of all special interest flags on Municipal Property.**

There is a lot of controversy at the schools with raising different flags. Based on the 2015 Supreme Court decision about the "state of neutrality," Councillor Robinson noted that elected officials and government bodies should be neutral. When elected officials fly a flag of a special interest group, it creates a hierarchy, which isn't fair because it doesn't represent all of their constituents. In their city bylaws, underneath their policy about flag procedures and displays, they're not allowed to fly any political flags related to controversy or ideological beliefs.

• **A motion to restrict drag queen story time and pride events to adults only.**

Councillor Robinson proposes an age restriction of 18 for drag queen story time in libraries and pride events to make them age-appropriate. She is responding to her constituents, those outraged parents who demand a stop to the sexualization of their children in the schools and libraries.

• **A motion to have a female-only change room, a male-only change room, and a universal change room to be inclusive of all genders and families.**

Councillor Robinson focused on the Pickering Recreation Center (the Chestnut Hill Recreation Center), where, during COVID, they revamped the change rooms: a female change room for members over the age of 18 and a male change room for members over the age of 18, with

a universal change room for everyone else. So, a male or female member under 18 or a guest for the day would all be forced to use the universal change room. With mental health and physical health issues for children, younger adults, and adults, Councillor Robinson was firm about the right to choose, with even the provincial government saying women should have designated female bathrooms.

Councillor Robinson never had the chance to present these draft motions to the City Council and only explained them on her Facebook page. Pickering City Council voted



unanimously on October 23, 2023, to freeze Councillor Robinson's pay. The City of Pickering had already docked Councillor Robinson's pay for 30 days for a sarcastic remark on her personal Facebook page, and they voted to extend that freeze another 60 days. So, for 90 days (a quarter of her first year's salary), Councillor Robinson, a single parent with no other source of income, is working on behalf of her constituents for free and unable to support her family, pay her mortgage, or cover legal fees coming into the Christmas season. She will not receive her salary again until January 2024.

The Integrity Commissioner, Janice Atwood-Petkovski, and Councillor's fellow Council members (Mara Nagy, Maurice Brenner, and Linda Cook), found Councillor Robinson's proposed motions "unethical" because they considered them "homophobic" and "transphobic." Councillor Cook further argued that drag performances are a form of "art" and are not hyper-sexualized events targeting children.

In the Council's complaint against her, they stated that she wants to abolish any support from the City of Pickering

for the LGBTQ+ community, which is untrue. When many targeted Councillor Robinson for the timing of presenting the first and second motions ahead of Pride Month, she emphasized that was not why she did it.

During the Council meeting, Mayor Ashe told Atwood-Petkovski that she did not have to answer Councillor Robinson's questions regarding the Integrity Commissioner's report, which the Commissioner based on double hearsay, personal opinion, and personal views.

When Councillor Robinson asked the Integrity Commissioner if she had ever been to the Chestnut Hill Recreation Center change room the Commissioner avoided answering. Councillor Robinson told her that contrary to what the City of Pickering says about the renovations, it's not safe because, as a grown woman, Robinson can crawl under and over the stalls. She also pointed out that in universities, authorities are charging people with voyeurism for using cameras to watch women in the showers. It's a space where people are vulnerable and have the right to feel safe.

Through the Councillors' actions, it became clear they do not respect that Councillor Robinson is doing her job as an elected city councillor by representing her constituents' pro-family values and upholding the 2015 Supreme Court decision about the "state of neutrality" for elected officials and government bodies.

The Pickering City Council then passed the "Legislative Amendments to Improve Municipal Codes of Conduct and Enforcement," which will allow the removal of a sitting member by recommendation of the Integrity Commissioner through the court system.

In collusion with the Integrity Commissioner, the Pickering City Council has disregarded the Charter of Rights and Freedoms that protects differences of opinion, including Councillor Lisa Robinson's freedom to represent her and her constituents' opinions within municipal government. Freezing a publicly elected official's salary because she holds a different opinion than her colleagues is unhealthy for democracy. It is a great disservice to all citizens to freely choose who they want to elect as their City Councillor.

See the petition started by Gregory Tomchysyn to Mayor Kevin Ashe on behalf of Councillor Lisa Robinson: citizenengo.org/en-ca/fm/212301-defend-lisa-robinson-pickering-city-council

Donate to assist with her legal fees:
<https://www.givensendgo.com/GBSDP>

Contact Councillor Lisa Robinson:
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