

Matthews, Rayanne

To: Proton, Adriana
Subject: RE: Reconsider granting tax exemptions to anti-LGBTQIA2S+ organizations

From: Maurita Prato <[REDACTED]>

Date: October 24, 2023 at 5:05:33 PM PDT

To: CouncilAlias <Council@courtenay.ca>, Chrystoph Cooper <[REDACTED]>, psc2021@gmail.com

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Subject: Reconsider granting tax exemptions to anti-LGBTQIA2S+ organizations

Dear Mayor Wells and Courtenay Councillors,

As concerned citizens, parents, and queer-identified community members - we are inspired by and aligned with the Pride Society of the Comox Valley in its deep appreciation to you and City staff for your rapid response to recent anti-LGBTQIA2S+ events in Courtenay.

We have been made aware that charitable and nonprofit organizations who own property in the City, or property owners who rent to them, are eligible for Permissive Property Tax Exemptions.

We have also been made aware of the fact that the City may be granting a Permissive Property Tax Exemption for 2024 to an organization that was recently involved in leading an anti-LGBTQIA2S+ protest locally, seeking to suppress transgender identity in schools. We stand with the Pride Board in their encouragement of Council to reconsider granting exemptions to any organization, regardless of their charitable activity, which also advocates for the denial of human rights to equity-seeking groups. This would be consistent with the City of Courtenay's stated mission to "...promote educational opportunities and diversity, and care about the health and well being and safety of our citizens, businesses and environment."

Discriminatory practices by religious organizations should not be allowed because of their claim to freedom of religion. While people of faith are guaranteed the right to believe and worship as they wish without interference from the state, their religious freedom does not supersede the law of the land with respect to the promotion of hate and discrimination against marginalized groups. The Canadian Civil Liberties Association says,

"Religious freedom in Canada means that there are no state-sponsored religions and that the government cannot prefer some religious beliefs or groups over others. Similarly, religious belief cannot be preferred to non-belief. We strive to ensure that any restrictions on freedom of religion are necessary and minimally intrusive and that our public institutions treat all individuals equally, regardless of religious affiliation." (<https://ccla.org/our-work/fundamental-freedoms/freedom-of-religion/>)

Thank you for taking the time to give this issue careful consideration. We love living in the Comox Valley and have immense appreciation for the work you all do. Please consider this a call to rally around the need for creating community that is inclusive of and supportive of all of its members equally.

Thank-you for your consideration,

Maurita Prato and Chrystoph Cooper

Maurita Prato
MSc Strategic Leadership towards Sustainability

I respectfully acknowledge that this land, where I live and that I love, is the stolen lands of the Pentlatch, E'iksan, Satsila, and Sahtlout people, now collectively known as the K'omoks First Nation. I honour the K'omoks Nation and their ancestors - the traditional keepers of this land - and give thanks for generations of stewardship of this land, the animals, the people, and the waters.

“Do the best you can until you know better. Then when you know better, do better.”- Maya Angelou