



THE CANADIAN ASSOCIATION OF PROFESSIONAL ACADEMIC LIBRARIANS
L'ASSOCIATION CANADIENNE DES BIBLIOTHÉCAIRES EN ENSEIGNEMENT SUPÉRIEUR

CAPAL Statement on the Toronto Public Library's October 29, 2019 Meghan Murphy event

Over the last few weeks members of the Board of Directors of The Canadian Association of Professional Academic Librarians — Association canadienne des bibliothécaires en enseignement supérieur (CAPAL-ACBES) have been engaged in discussions surrounding the Toronto Public Library's (TPL) decision to approve and uphold a room rental contract for a talk by Meghan Murphy on October 29, 2019. While members of CAPAL's Board hold different views with regards to certain aspects of the TPL decision, we are united in our agreement of the importance of the principles of equity, diversity, and inclusion, and we are troubled by the manner in which intellectual freedom was used by TPL leadership as justification for the decision to promote an event that was experienced by many as a continuation of societal discrimination against transgender individuals and communities.

The CAPAL-ACBES core values and principles include intellectual and academic freedom, eradicating discrimination, and fostering diversity and equity. These, along with the other principles listed within CAPAL's Statement of Principles, are intended to offer guidance and support to academic librarians. They do so in their entirety and with an understanding that principles and values will necessarily intersect with one another. In other words, the application of a set of guiding principles requires judgment and balance. The TPL Community and Event Space Rental policy displays a similar attentiveness to these matters and states that the library "reserves the right to deny or cancel a booking when it reasonably believes" that use "will be for a purpose that is likely to promote, or would have the effect of promoting discrimination, contempt or hatred for any group or person on the basis of race, ethnic origin, place of origin, citizenship, colour, ancestry, language, creed (religion), age, sex, gender identity, gender expression, marital status, family status, sexual orientation, disability, political affiliation, membership in a union or staff association, receipt of public assistance, level of literacy or any other similar factor" (TPL, 2018, Section 4.4). In the view of several CAPAL Board members, the TPL decision to allow Meghan Murphy's talk in the name of intellectual freedom failed to adequately consider the impact that decision would play in perpetuating discrimination against the transgender community.

To date, much of the response to the TPL decision has focused on the need to protect and uphold intellectual freedom above all else. While this immediate response is perhaps understandable given the prominent role intellectual freedom plays in library discourse, the TPL decision and subsequent discussions about the decision point to a clear need to re-examine how the library community understands and deploys core values and principles. Such a re-examination is necessary to ensure that decisions

made in the name of intellectual freedom do not override or undermine other core values, including the commitment to uphold equity, diversity, and inclusion, to eradicate discrimination, and to ensure that libraries are welcoming spaces for all marginalized communities, including transgender, non-binary and genderqueer persons.

To further the goals of working towards equity, diversity, and inclusion and to ensuring that libraries are welcoming spaces, CAPAL-ACBES will support and provide a venue for critical re-examination of ways core principles inform the work of librarians. CAPAL-ACBES is also committed to developing guidelines to support librarians who wish to respond to similar events on their campuses or in their communities.

Signed by the CAPAL Board

November 6, 2019

References:

CAPAL Foundational Documents

<https://capalibrarians.org/membership/#mission>

Toronto Public Library, "Community and Event Space Rental Policy," 1 January 2018,

<https://www.torontopubliclibrary.ca/terms-of-use/library-policies/community-and-event-space.jsp>