



CHALLENGE THE HARMS OF  
SEXUALLY VIOLENT IMAGES

His Worship John Tory  
Mayor of Toronto  
City Hall, 2nd Floor  
100 Queen St. W.  
Toronto, ON M5H 2N2

Dear Sir,

On Nov. 19, 2015, you expressed concern about patrons accessing pornography on the publically financed computers at the Toronto Public Library. At that time, you indicated that you would look into the matter.

Defend Dignity also has concerns about patrons accessing online pornography on Toronto Public Library (TPL) computers.

Today's "adult content" is misogynistic, violent, degrading, racist, and normalizes rape culture. There is a seamless link between pornography and other forms of sexual exploitation, such as human trafficking, including those who traffic children.<sup>1</sup>

Among the documented harms of pornography is the link between pornography use and sexual violence.<sup>2</sup> Ontario librarians, themselves, have complained about the toxic environment created by the viewing of pornography by patrons on library computers. We know that patrons have accessed child pornography on library computers;<sup>3</sup> and this may have been a factor in reported cases of children allegedly being sexually assaulted in Toronto Public Library branches, two of which occurred in the last 26 months.<sup>4</sup>

Dr. Carla Hayden, Librarian of Congress, confirmed that pornography has no place in the Library. She also reflected that the quality of filters has improved, addressing previous concerns about over-filtering.

Defend Dignity commends the TPL on the use of filters on computers in their children's areas. Given the proven harms of today's pornography, we would ask that the TPL, as one of the largest systems in Canada, lead the way to create a safe environment for all patrons and staff by installing filters on all computers.

In May 2017, we met with Toronto Public Library officials to express our concerns about unfiltered internet terminals and request that they install filtering. They responded that they felt that filtering would impinge on patron's intellectual freedom as expressed in the Charter of Rights.

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<sup>1</sup>Farley, Melissa. "Pornography, Prostitution, & Trafficking: Making the Connections." Presented at the Pornography: a Public Health Crisis forum, hosted by National Center on Sexual Exploitation, Washington DC, July 14, 2015.

<sup>2</sup>[http://www.socialcostsofpornography.com/Layden\\_Pornography\\_and\\_Violence.pdf](http://www.socialcostsofpornography.com/Layden_Pornography_and_Violence.pdf) accessed Nov. 24, 2016

<sup>3</sup><http://www.cp24.com/news/toronto-man-used-library-computer-to-access-child-porn-police-allege-1.2613759> accessed Dec. 1, 2016

<sup>4</sup><http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/toronto/sexual-assault-thorncliffe-library-1.3294571> and <http://globalnews.ca/news/2776257/warning-issued-after-girl-14-sexually-assaulted-at-library-near-fairview-mall-police/> accessed Nov. 24, 2016

We would argue that it is “reasonable in a free and democratic society” to establish limits to the Charter section 2(b), based on the growing body of evidence regarding pornography as a public health crisis and Supreme Court precedent.

In *R vs. Butler*, the Supreme Court of Canada found that the limiting of Charter rights was warranted to “prevent the harm that may come about from the attitudes promoted by pornography, and thus to minimize dangers to society.” The Court further noted that obscenity [pornography in this case] could encourage degrading views of women and could promote violence, contradicting the view of Canada as a society in which people are equal.<sup>5</sup> Please see further details regarding this case and the application to filtering by the Toronto Public Library in the addendum to this letter.

We believe that installing filters would create a balance between the value of intellectual freedom and the risk of public harm. There have been other libraries that have gone this route with no loss of quality service to patrons.

In response to the recognition that pornography is a public health issue, Defend Dignity will be launching the 2018 edition of our *Choose Change* campaign. The goal of this campaign is to reduce the ease of access to violent, sexually explicit images. We invite the Toronto Public Library to choose change and join our Change Maker List as have other libraries in Canada.

The Change Maker List will promote organizations that have pro-actively changed policies and practices to reduce the ease of access to violent, sexually explicit images.

We will ask the public to join us in “challenging the harms of sexually violent images.” Through the [Choose Change](#) website, the public will be asked to contact organizations, such as the Toronto Public Library, to encourage them to change detrimental practices and to embrace affirming practices.

Can the City of Toronto work in concert with the Toronto Public Library to protect patrons by filtering violent, sexually exploitive materials from publicly funded internet access on publicly funded computers, keeping public spaces free from sexually toxic material?

Prior to the launch of this campaign on April 16, 2018, we would like to meet with you, to discuss this matter. We look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

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c.c. Mr. Ron Carinci, Board Chair; Ms. Vickery Bowles, City Librarian

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<sup>5</sup> *R v Butler*, [1992] 1 SCR 48.