

## Transgender flag raised after government quashes gender identity motion



**By Brock Weir**

Transgender Day of Remembrance was commemorated by York Region activists in Aurora on Tuesday morning with a special flag raising and ceremony hosted by the York Regional Police.

The event brought together OPP Senior Forensic Analyst Stephanie Howard, who shared her personal story of transitioning in the workplace, Child and Youth Care student Benjamin Debbert who shared his own experience, and Dr. Alex Abamovich, who received an advocacy award for his ground-breaking work towards policy reform for the LGBTQ2S+ community.

The ceremony came just hours after policy reform was very much in focus in Ontario following the passage of a controversial resolution at the Progressive Conservative Party's convention on Saturday, ultimately rejected on Monday by Premier Doug Ford, which questioned 'gender identity theory'.

Put forward by former Tory leadership candidate Tanya Granic Allen, the resolution called for the party to (reproduced here with original punctuation) 'recognize 'gender identity theory' for what it is, namely a highly controversial, unscientific 'liberal ideology'; and, as such, that an Ontario PC Government will remove the teaching and promotion of 'gender identity theory' from Ontario schools and its curriculum.'

The passage of the resolution immediately raised alarm bells among local LGBTQ2+ advocates within the Region, including Pflag York Region, which highlighted how the timing of the resolution coincided with Trans Awareness Week.

'The week memorializes victims of transphobic violence as well as educates transgender and gender non-conforming people and the issues associated with their transition or identity,' said Pflag. 'According to recent Canadian polls by the Trans Pulse project, of those who identify as transgender or gender non-conforming, 77 per cent have seriously considered suicide and 43 per cent have attempted suicide. Trans students have reported that 87 per cent of them have felt unsafe in places at school. LGBTQ2 organizations such as Pflag Canada are dedicated to ensuring students receive the proper gender diversity education and support services in their schools and communities.'

Hours before Premier Ford shot down the resolution, saying it would not be pursued or debated as party policy, Deputy Premier Christine Elliott, MPP for Newmarket-Aurora, spoke out against the resolution.

'We had a very great convention over the course of the weekend,' Ms. Elliott told The Auroran. 'We had over 2,000 people that [attended] and it is really important that members have the opportunity to put forward their ideas. However, a resolution passed at a convention is not government policy and it is really something that is going to be discussed at our policy convention in the next year and we will discuss where it goes from there.'

'I think it is very important that we recognize transgendered people. In fact, when I was a member of the Legislature previously, I co-sponsored a member's bill that was brought forward by Cheri DiNovo (former NDP MPP representing Parkdale-High Park) called Toby's Law. It enshrines the rights of self-identity and self-expression as a means of discrimination, I guess, that is not allowed pursuant to our Ontario Human Rights Code. I have been consistent in my view of that for a number of years. I support the rights of transgendered people.'

Meanwhile, Pflag said it is still keeping an eye on the Province's education reforms as it pertains to health and sex education.

'Pflag Canada is working to secure a well-rounded curriculum that reduces discrimination based on gender identity and aims at

improving the well-being of all youth," said Bev Belanger, President of Pflag Canada in a statement. "By dismissing the validity of gender identity, you are increasing the likelihood of anxiety, depression, suicidal thoughts, as well as further mental health issues in schools. Trans and gender-diverse people in the Province of Ontario deserve support from governing parties that are responsible for enacting public policies that shape our shared social environments."