



COMMENTARY*

"THE FIGHT FOR POSITIVE LEARNING SPACES"

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Last November at our annual Advocacy Week in Fredericton, our organisation presented to government one of our most progressive policy recommendations to date:

We asked government to remove all regulatory and legislative barriers to gender neutral bathrooms. We asked this with the hope that government would go one step further and mandate that there be at least one gender neutral bathroom in every building at every public educational institution in this province.

Postsecondary institutions are increasingly moving in this direction, but regulation continues to hinder the full implementation of gender neutral bathrooms.

Buoyed by further discussions in Ottawa with Senator John Wallace, we wrote to New Brunswick's senators and implored them to support Bill C-16, which would enshrine in law protections against discrimination and hate crimes on the basis of gender identity and expression.

The philosophy of inclusive education has been at the heart of New Brunswick's early education system for almost 30 years. It is, as identified in the province's 10-year education plan, "the foundation of our society." To truly ensure the plan's seamless transition of learning from K-12 through to postsecondary, these principles of inclusivity must be integrated at our postsecondary institutions.

Inclusion is essential in fostering a health learning environment. It is the practice of allowing all people to live and study freely and openly without being forced to conform to



heteronormative standards. Our campuses should proactively provide support to marginalized groups, including those from our LGBTQ+ communities.

Now, more than ever in its history, New Brunswick must guarantee that its learning spaces are positive and inclusive.

An entire generation of young New Brunswickers, from those just starting kindergarten to those finishing an undergraduate degree, will grow up in with constant reminders of a neighbouring presidency — one whose central defining feature, if its campaign was any indication, may be hate.

Now more than ever, New Brunswick must provide safe spaces for our youth to grow and flourish — spaces in which they fundamentally understand that love is love is love is love is love — spaces in which they can fully express their identity free from harm and harassment.

Now more than ever, New Brunswick must recommit to its marginalized youth that their lives matter and that their bodies are inviolable.

New Brunswick will usher in the first days of a new continental relationship this month as we begin to celebrate the 50th anniversary of our Human Rights Act. Inclusivity does not come easily for this country, but while we join the rest of Canada in feting the last 150 years, we cannot forget our collective responsibility to fight against the forces of systemic racism, institutionalised oppression, and internalized misogyny that blight our national history.

As a founding province of this federation, New Brunswick has an even greater responsibility to be a leader in shaping the next 150 years. Our youth are looking to our politicians for the kind of leadership that puts people before politics.

To our marginalized members, we say: we will continue to fight for the liberties heteronormativity does not guarantee you. We will be defiant in the face of hate. We we will be unabashed in our defence of your wellbeing.

We see you. Your lives matter.