

**MAYOR PATRICK BROWN**

January 12, 2023

The Honourable Steve Clark, MPP
Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing
17th Flr, 777 Bay St,
Toronto, ON M7A 2J3

Sent via: minister.mah@ontario.ca

Re: Third Party Advertising

Dear Minister Clark,

I am writing to you today on behalf of Brampton City Council to share some concerns we have over third-party advertising. As you are aware, a third party is defined as an individual, corporation or trade union incurring expenses for advertisements related to the promotion, support or opposition of a candidate.

Since 2018, Ontario has required third parties to register with the Office of the Clerk and we appreciate your government providing further guidance on April 1, 2022, with the release of the 2022 Third Party Advertisers' Guide.

The Municipal Elections Act, 1996 states enforcement is done through the courts and further details that the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing does not have a role in investigating elections or in determining penalties. The current mechanism to deal with these matters through the courts is inadequate. We ask the government to consider proposing new legislation to address what we feel is a lack of accountability.

In recent election cycles, there has been a distinct rise in the activity of third parties, the spreading of misinformation and disinformation, and our specific worries relate to compliance and enforcement.

While the spreading of false or inaccurate information is an unfortunate reality, in today's political climate, deliberate and malicious content is spreading fear and suspicion at an unprecedented rate. Anonymous actors working in the shadows fuels voter apathy, it turns off the electorate from participating in the electoral process, and we believe it to be a contributing factor in the declining rates of voter turnout. It is an attack on our democracy.



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Last month, in consultation with Council colleagues, Deputy Mayor Harkirat Singh brought forward this discussion item to Committee to discuss concerns and possible solutions. Councillor Rowena Santos, who serves as a Board Member on the Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM), shared with our Council some disturbing feedback from FCM. Councillor Santos described how her colleagues were deeply troubled by the level of vitriol seen during the past municipal election, how alarming it was that so many of the attacks were focused on women candidates, and the universal frustration over the only option being available was to take legal action well after the damage is done.

Whether through social media, traditional airwaves, print materials or other vehicles, the driving of disinformation is something that should have serious consequences. It warrants more oversight, robust deterrents and having the appropriate enforcement mechanisms available while these acts are taking place.

In closing, while we acknowledge a municipal Clerk is responsible for running a local election and can monitor activities to a degree, they are not able to safeguard the public from these assaults. It is not something that occurs only in Brampton. These entities with nefarious intentions often originate from outside the municipal boundary and have a broad network of resources at their disposal. In short, they are here to stay and not going away until some form of action is taken to mitigate their destructive influence.

I welcome the opportunity to discuss this important matter with you further, and I thank you in advance for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Patrick Brown
Mayor

cc: Brampton MPPs
Deputy Mayor H. Singh
Regional Councillor R. Santos
Regional Councillor P. Vicente
Peter Fay, City Clerk
Colin Best, President, AMO
Taneen Rudyk, President, FCM