



Written by [James Murphy](#) on September 18, 2023

“Betrayal”: LGBT Residents of Michigan City Enraged Over “Pride” Flag Ban

In June the City of Hamtramck, Michigan — which boasts of having America’s first all-Muslim city council — issued a ban on flying the so-called pride flag on any city property. LGBT residents of the suburban Detroit enclave have accused the Muslim City Council and mayor of “stabbing [them] in the back” with the ban, and claim that the ban is a “betrayal” of an alliance after LGBT activists supported campaigns for the rights of immigrants in the United States.

In 2013, Hamtramck, a city of approximately 28,000, became the first majority Muslim community in the United States. Slowly, that majority morphed into governing power, and in 2021 Hamtramck became the first U.S. city with an all-Muslim city council and mayor.

The “ban” on the “pride” flag is not specific to that flag, but rather is a part of the city’s “neutrality flag resolution,” which prohibits flags of religious, ethnic, racial, and political movements and assures that the city will not give “special treatment to any group.” According to the policy, the only flags allowed on city property are U.S., state, and city flags and POW/MIA banners.

In an act of defiance, Catrina Stackpoole, a member of the city’s Human Relations Commission, hung a gigantic “pride” flag on a city-owned flag pole in July. Stackpoole, who identifies as LGBT, and Commission Chair Russ Gordon were terminated after the flag flew for two hours.

“We welcomed you,” Stackpoole told the majority Muslim community. “We created nonprofits to help feed, clothe, find housing. We did everything we could to make your transition here easier, and this is how you repay us, by stabbing us in the back?”

Mayor Amer Ghalib made clear that the ban wasn’t an attack on the LGBT community.

“You guys are welcome,” Ghalib told LGBT residents. “Why do you have to have the flag shown on government property to be represented? You’re already represented.”

The mayor denied targeting the LGBT community, but said the city was attempting to make the city extremist-free.

“We’re not targeting anybody,” Ghalib said. “We are trying to close the door for other groups that could be extremist or racist.”

During the flag-raising incident in July, Ghalib claimed he saw a “militia” gathering under the pride flag.

“I was passing by and I saw people videotaping and taking pictures and some militia gathering around the flagpole, and I took action,” [Ghalib told](#) Tudor Dixon, who ran for governor but lost to Gretchen



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Whitmer last year. “The city took it down within a couple of hours, but [came] to find out who led this process, it was the chair of the [Human Relations Commission], the former mayor [Karen Majewski], a group of politicians that one day they used to lead this city, and now they are acting like a militia ... No responsibility, very irresponsible action. No respect for law and order.”

Some members of Hamtramck and nearby communities appear to want the LGBT community to take the ban personally.

“I am a Lebanese person, and I support the American flag,” said Dearborn resident Hassan Aoun. “We are not going to sit here and tolerate you guys coming in here and saying, ‘Oh, it’s Pride Month.’ If you’re gay, no problem. Be gay by yourself. Don’t sit here and throw it down my throat or anyone’s throat.”

Others believe that the city’s “neutrality flag resolution” unfairly targets gays, even though flags of others, including Muslim groups, are similarly banned on city flag poles.

“I think the elephant in the room - the thing we all see and are not talking about - is that homosexuality is a sin, and I think that’s what’s weighing on people,” said Hamtramck resident [Russ Gordon](#). “That is an inappropriate reason for banning this flag.... It may be a sin, but it’s a reality, and a lot of gay people live in this city, and that flag represents them. It allows them to feel like they belong in this community.”

And LGBT activists aren’t buying that the city council was not targeting their community — especially since the new policy arose during so-called Pride month.

“The sole purpose was absolutely to go after the gay pride flag,” said LGBT activist and middle-school teacher Josh Hansknecht. “The ban did not create the conflict, but it emboldened people. It expanded on that tension.”

Michigan Attorney General Dana Nessel, a lesbian, urged the city to reconsider the policy.

“I ask the city of Hamtramck to use its voice to speak up for all its people, take down the wall you have now built that has made this proud city into a national embarrassment,” Nessel said. “Make no mistake, homophobia, transphobia are indeed forms of evil as much as Islamophobia is.”



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