

Namaste!

Dear Mayor and City Council Members,

Namaste! I am writing to you with concern regarding the recent vote of CPSC committee against the recommendation from 2023 to allow Diwali and Chinese New Year backyard fireworks in London. The Hindu community in London would like to go on formal record that we have grave concerns on the city's vacillating position on a critical religious issue.

In August 2023, London City Council voted 10-5 in favor of allowing backyard fireworks for Canada Day, Victoria Day, Diwali, and Chinese Lunar New Year. The whole process leading up to this vote was fair and democratic. Now, we are disappointed to learn that the CPSC has voted against the addition of Diwali and CNY to bylaw PW11.

As a community, we are very disappointed and feel that the CPSC is unfairly meddling in how we practice our religious festivals. I would like to reiterate the extremely important role of home fireworks as an integral part of Diwali, which is the most celebrated of all Hindu festivals and dates back 2,000 years. During Diwali, backyard fireworks are essential to complete our Diwali rituals and celebration. Backyard fireworks, along with other rituals, food, family, and friends all make Diwali such a joyous and rich tradition of the Hindu diaspora all over the world. Many of you have attended our Diwali Dhamaka and therefore understand the essence of this festival.

Organizations such as Hindu Legacy and CNFA have submitted reports that provide objective statistics for the preservation of backyard fireworks (e.g. AQI data, etc.). We are very sensitive to issues like noise pollution and PTSD and ensuring respect to all Londoners. By the same token, we must also be sensitive to religious freedom and the fundamentals of reasonable religious celebration. In 2023, Hindu Legacy and our affiliated organizations went the extra mile to ensure that the entire community understood safe practices outlined by the London Fire Department. We promoted awareness of safe practices through social media and at our events. We continue to promote and educate our communities to follow fire department guidelines and practice safe fireworks every year!

The Hindu community's core values of self-sufficiency and respect for others have added so much to our city for decades. Hindus have integrated peacefully in every walk of life in London, including education, professional organizations, businesses, and nonprofits. We are proud Canadians and Londoners and have fully inculcated our country's core values of diversity and acceptance of others. The Hindu community has rarely, if ever, asked for any concessions from the City of London.

However, today, once again, we are asking that City Council not kill an 800-year-old tradition and preserve the smiles of a community that is over 10,000 strong in London (and growing). The ban on fireworks will deeply scar the Hindu community and create a feeling of alienation and loss of religious freedom. It will also create a sense of loss of

democracy where a few disgruntled individuals are allowed to use their influence to undermine our ability to positively and joyously celebrate a major religious event.

As you prepare to vote to update by law PW11, please consider the importance of family-based fireworks during Diwali and the impact on the next generation of Hindus as we consider the erosion of a centuries-old tradition. Given that City Council committed to being culturally sensitive and inclusive, denying a cultural and religious practice to be continued goes against the very principle that the City has been trying to achieve. We ask that the City respect our right to make responsible choices (i.e., safe use of fireworks) and not act punitively. We ask that you review the available data objectively and not make policy changes based on subjective claims.

Thank you and Namaste!

p.s. PLEASE SHARE THIS LETTER AS PART OF THE COUNCIL AGENDA FOR THE APRIL 2ND MEETING.