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Mr. William Blair
Chief of Police
40 College Street
Toronto, ON M5G 2J3

May 16th, 2014

Re: Suspension of Kathleen "the dancing crossing guard" Byers

Dear Chief Blair:

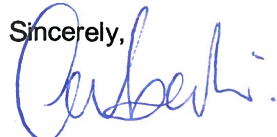
I am writing to express mine and my community's dismay over the recent suspension of Kathleen Byers, which lead to her resignation and to our community losing a great public character.

As you may be aware, this suspension was the final straw in a longer dispute. Late in November of 2013 Kathleen was asked to refrain from dancing while wearing her crossing guard uniform. I was unable to understand the need for Kathleen to stop dancing and therefore called Sergeant Jill Miller. At the time I heard that Kathleen would be limited to dancing only when on the sidewalk and not allowed to dance when performing a crossing with children, which seemed reasonable.

This most recent suspension, on the other hand, does not seem reasonable. The rationale provided for the suspension is that Kathleen was found dancing in a video while wearing a crossing guard uniform. Soon after hearing news of the suspension and subsequent resignation, I called Kathleen to express sympathy and support. She told me, "I love life, I want to enjoy my life" and that fighting this issue was more trouble than it was worth. Luckily for Kathleen, she has a lot of friends in the community who will take up her fight and say that what happened here was not right.

Kathleen remains an example of what is right about our community – it is possible to focus on community safety while never forgetting that playful fun is part of the equation for healthy neighbourhoods and neighbourly interaction. Our community's spirited response on this issue shows how dearly we care about Kathleen and the joy that people like her bring to our daily lives. I recognize and support these unique personalities and believe there is room for unique expression within the boundaries of safe conduct.

We must have rules to promote safe conduct, there is no doubt about that. What I question in this case is whether the heavy-handed application of the rules were a means of targeting Kathleen in light how public her story had become. Along with hundreds of members of our Ward 18 community, I believe Kathleen was not only doing her job adequately, she was adding an element of fun and creativity that is rare to see and, quite frankly, very welcome by community members. Rather than being quashed, we should be learning what we can from these unique individuals who are able to bring smiles to people's faces, while safely performing their duties, day in and day out.

Sincerely,


Ana Bailão
Toronto City Councillor
Ward 18, Davenport

Cc: Interested community members