

Cincinnati Pride leaders resign after harassment

Director: Jewish couple targeted at June event

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Two Cincinnati Pride volunteers resigned recently after they became targets of a harassment campaign that singled them out because they are Jewish.

Cincinnati Pride Director Benjamin Morano confirmed the resignations in a statement, writing that the two volunteers, who held leadership positions, were harassed by people protesting Cincinnati Pride for its handling of pro-Palestinian organizations at a Pride event earlier this month. The harassment included threats of violence.

“This was a calculated and focused attack because we had both a Jewish board and committee member,” wrote Morano, who did not immediately respond to Enquirer requests for comment. “As an organization we condemn these actions to the highest degree.”

The resignations and the controversy that has followed come during what is supposed to be a month of celebration for Cincinnati Pride. Those celebrations culminate Saturday with a parade beginning at Seventh and Plum streets at 11 a.m. Marchers will travel past Fountain Square and end at a festival at Sawyer Point and Yeatman’s Cove.

Because of the ongoing tensions, however, the Jewish Federation of Cincinnati is offering a separate parade Saturday along an undisclosed route. Participants are required to register. Organizers of the main Pride parade still expect Jewish participants to march in that parade, as well, and said they will meet with Cincinnati Police

and others to discuss additional security measures.

“We definitely know that there are some groups out there that are very anti- Israel,” said Danielle Minson, the federation’s chief executive officer. “If they see Jewish community members, they might use some verbal harassments that could be possibly antisemitic.”

Tensions between pro-Israel and pro-Palestinian protesters have been growing nationwide as the war between Israel and the militant group Hamas continues in the Gaza Strip. Hamas, which Israel and the United States consider a terrorist group, attacked Israel in October last year, killing more than 1,000 Israelis and taking hostages. Israel’s military response has killed tens of thousands of Palestinians, according to the United Nations.

Minson said some protests have included antisemitic rhetoric. She pointed to a June 2 Pride event in Northern Kentucky, during which socialist groups were removed for distributing flyers calling Israel’s ongoing attacks in Gaza part of a “Final Solution” against Palestinians. In a joint statement from the federation and the Jewish Community Relations Council, that characterization was deemed “a gross manipulation that trivializes the Holocaust.”

The socialist groups’ removal apparently fueled the harassment against the two Jewish Pride members who resigned. The outgoing pair is a married couple, one of whom was a board member and director of diversity, equity and inclusion, according to Cincy Jewfolk, a publication geared toward Cincinnati’s Jewish community. The couple’s names haven’t been released to avoid further harassment.

Morano said Cincinnati Pride is bringing in two experts in diversity, equity and inclusion to co-chair a committee to review the in-house process and make recommendations.

Minson said she’s heartened by Cincinnati Pride’s response. Leaders from both organizations met last week to hash out the “complex and nuanced” situation together.

“We have a really healthy working relationship with Pride. They were very receptive,” she said.

The heightened tension during Pride month was anticipated. Since the Hamas attacks, there has been a 300% increase in antisemitic incidents, Minson said.

“Those are anything from a swastika written on the wall of a classroom or people chanting, ‘Hitler should have finished the job’ or memes that are going across sixth and seventh graders on social media – all the way from that to more physical things,” she said.

How the matter intersected with Pride month might seem confusing, Minson said.

“It feels like a bit of an oxymoron and unfathomable that within a minority group – especially a minority group such as Pride, which is about inclusion and diversity – you’d have people attacking another minority group,” she said.

While this, too, is a complex and nuanced situation, here’s the simplified version: Some activists who support Pride also are organized in opposition to Israel’s attacks on Gaza, which has included the bombing of civilian neighborhoods in its pursuit of Hamas militants. Hamas has been the unofficial governing body in the Gaza Strip since 2007.

Some attempts to protest the civilian deaths in Gaza by denouncing current Israeli leadership have veered into antisemitic territory, Minson said. She said supporting Palestine by, say, holding a Palestinian flag isn’t problematic, but some activists have crossed the line by using fraught chants like, “From the river to the sea,” a slogan adopted by Hamas that Jews consider a call for Israel’s destruction.

The issues are nationwide. Israeli floats were denied entry into San Francisco Pride’s annual parade, while pro-Palestinian floats were allowed. Organizers there said the choice was meant to be anti-Zionist rather than antisemitic, saying in a statement: “SF Pride is careful not to

conflate Jewish groups and Jewish people living in America with the state of Israel.”

Cincinnati Pride and Jewish communities are working hard to calm the tension that has risen here. In his statement, Morano said Cincinnati Pride is learning from the situation how to better the organization, aiming to “take a proactive approach to combating antisemitism and other forms of oppression.

“There is no place for hate of any kind, especially antisemitism, in any Cincinnati Pride space,” Morano wrote.

An employee of Proctor & Gamble waves a rainbow flag during the Cincinnati Pride Parade. CARA OWSLEY/THE ENQUIRER

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