

When Pride Is Targeted, Oxford County's Conservative Leaders Go Quiet

Please join the Norwich JEDI Alliance and ally's for a peaceful solidarity walk and rally June 15th at 6:00pm at Emily Stowe Public School.

[JORDAN KENT](#)

JUN 14, 2026

There is a difference between leadership and politics.

Politics is easy.

Leadership is hard.

Politics is saying what people expect to hear. Leadership is saying what needs to be said, even when it might upset some of your supporters.

Politics is condemning hate when it is politically safe. Leadership is condemning hate consistently, regardless of who is being targeted.

That is why the silence from Oxford County's Conservative representatives on the recent attacks against Pride symbols and allies of the 2SLGBTQIA+ community across our region is so disappointing.

As the former Vice President of Oxford County Pride, I spent years working alongside former President Tami Murray and a dedicated team of volunteers from every corner of this county. Together, we built events, created safe spaces, supported young people, and worked to ensure that 2SLGBTQIA+ residents knew they belonged in Oxford County.

I know what Pride flags mean.

I know what they mean to the teenager who is afraid to come out.

I know what they mean to the parent trying to tell their child they are loved.

I know what they mean to the older members of our community who remember a time when visibility came with tremendous personal risk.

A Pride flag is not just a piece of fabric.

It is a declaration.

It says: You belong here.

Which is precisely why people target them.

Over the past several weeks, Pride flags have been stolen or vandalized at Emily Stowe Public School, East Oxford Central Public School, Norwich United Church, and private residences across Oxford County.

Then, on Friday night, Gunn's Hill Artisan Cheese was targeted. Its business sign and mailbox were vandalized after the company publicly demonstrated allyship and support for the 2SLGBTQIA+ community.

At Emily Stowe Public School, a flagpole was snapped in half. The Pride flag was removed. A Canadian flag was left in its place.

These incidents are happening in different places and targeting different people.

Schools.

Churches.

Homes.

Businesses.

The common thread is impossible to ignore.

The targets are individuals and organizations that have publicly demonstrated support for the 2SLGBTQIA+ community.

Some people will insist these incidents are merely vandalism.

I disagree.

Because context matters.

Nobody accidentally tears down a Pride flag.

Nobody mistakenly targets Pride displays at schools, churches, businesses, and private homes.

And nobody snaps a flagpole in half, removes a Pride flag, and leaves a Canadian flag behind without understanding the message they are sending.

The target was never the fabric.

The target was the people that flag represents.

**We Have Seen Them Find Their Voice
Before**



Arpan Khanna 

Apr 23 · 

I am deeply troubled by the hate motivated incident in the area of Turtle Island School and Knights Lane in Woodstock.

I have spoken with the Woodstock Police and expressed gratitude for their swift response. They are actively investigating the incident, and the accused is currently in custody pending a bail hearing.

I will remain engaged and continue working with all community partners to ensure Woodstock is a safe, respectful place for every resident.

Oxford is a beautiful, caring, and welcoming community. Together, we must work in collaboration to protect that.



Woodstock Police Service

Apr 23 · 

**Woodstock Youth Arrested Following
Hate-Motivated Assault... more**

When a Sikh man was attacked near Turtle Island Public School, Arpan Khanna responded appropriately.

He described it as a hate motivated incident.

He was right.

When people are targeted because of who they are, leaders should have the courage to say so.

Nobody should criticize Arpan Khanna for speaking clearly in that moment.

The question is why that clarity seems to disappear when the community being targeted is 2SLGBTQIA+.

Why is one community immediately afforded public solidarity while another receives silence?

Why is one incident understood in its broader social context while another is reduced to discussions about vandalism and property damage?

Those are fair questions.

And Oxford County deserves answers.

The Letter That Says More Than It Intended To

Thank you for taking the time to write to me regarding the vandalism of the Pride flag and the destruction of the flagpole in Norwich.

I was disappointed to learn of these incidents. Acts of vandalism that target symbols of inclusion and community are concerning and upsetting for many residents, and I recognize the impact this has also had on children in the community.

As Premier Ford has said, "Hate and discrimination have no place in Ontario." Our communities are strongest when all residents are treated with dignity, respect, and understanding.

I understand that the Ontario Provincial Police are actively investigating these incidents and are working diligently to bring those responsible to justice.

Thank you again for sharing your concerns. I appreciate hearing from constituents about issues that matter to them, and I join those who hope Norwich continues to be a welcoming and respectful community for everyone.

Following the incident in Norwich, MPP Ernie Hardeman sent a response to concerned constituents.

It was polite.

It was measured.

It was carefully written.

It was also revealing.

In nearly 200 words, Hardeman managed to condemn vandalism without ever explicitly naming the community being targeted.

He acknowledged that symbols of inclusion had been attacked.

He acknowledged that children had been affected.

He quoted Premier Doug Ford's statement that "hate and discrimination have no place in Ontario."

Yet nowhere in the letter did he explicitly acknowledge that these incidents were directed at Pride symbols.

Nowhere did he publicly recognize the fear, anxiety, and frustration these incidents created within the 2SLGBTQIA+ community.

Nowhere did he apply the same moral clarity that Conservatives have shown when other communities have been targeted.

That omission matters.

Because words matter.

What elected officials choose to say matters.

And what they choose not to say matters too.

The Circle Of Targets Keeps Growing

What makes these incidents particularly alarming is the widening circle of targets.

This is no longer just about Pride flags at schools.

It is no longer just about churches displaying symbols of inclusion.

It is no longer just about private residents expressing support for their neighbours.

Now local businesses are finding themselves in the crosshairs as well.

Gunn's Hill Artisan Cheese did not become a target because of the cheese it produces.

It became a target because it chose to stand publicly alongside the 2SLGBTQIA+ community.

That should concern everyone, regardless of their political views.

When schools are targeted, communities should speak up.

When churches are targeted, communities should speak up.

When homes are targeted, communities should speak up.

When businesses are targeted because they chose inclusion over silence, communities should speak up.

The question remains: where are the voices of those elected to represent Oxford County?

If leaders cannot clearly and publicly stand beside schools, churches, families, and businesses that are being targeted because they chose inclusion, then what exactly does leadership mean?

More Than Property Damage

In correspondence with constituents, Arpan Khanna reportedly described these incidents as vandalism, intimidation, and property damage.

Those descriptions are not wrong.

But they are incomplete.

A Pride flag costs a few dollars.

The message sent by targeting it carries a much higher cost.

When someone repeatedly targets Pride symbols, they are not selecting random objects.

They are targeting visibility.

They are targeting belonging.

They are targeting the idea that 2SLGBTQIA+ people deserve to live openly and proudly in the communities they call home.

I did not spend years helping build Oxford County Pride so that attacks on Pride symbols could be reduced to a discussion about property damage.

I spent those years working with young people searching for acceptance.

I spent those years working with parents trying to support their children.

I spent those years helping build a community where everyone knew they belonged.

That is why these incidents matter.

And that is why the response from our elected representatives matters too.

If Hate Has No Place In Ontario, Prove It

Premier Doug Ford says hate and discrimination have no place in Ontario.

Good.

Most Ontarians agree.

But principles only matter when they are applied consistently.

If hate has no place in Ontario, then say so when Pride flags are targeted.

If hate has no place in Ontario, then say so when schools become targets.

If hate has no place in Ontario, then say so when churches displaying symbols of inclusion are targeted.

If hate has no place in Ontario, then say so when local businesses are targeted because they chose to support their neighbours.

If hate has no place in Ontario, then say so regardless of whether doing so is politically convenient.

Leadership is not tested when standing up is easy.

Leadership is tested when standing up carries risk.

The Questions Their Silence Creates

Only Arpan Khanna and Ernie Hardeman know why they have chosen not to publicly address these incidents with the same force and clarity they have shown elsewhere.

Perhaps they believe public statements are unnecessary.

Perhaps they believe remaining silent avoids controversy.

Perhaps they simply view these incidents differently than many members of the 2SLGBTQIA+ community do.

I do not know.

What I do know is that Oxford County contains some deeply socially conservative communities.

Both politicians have built successful political careers in those communities.

That is simply a political reality.

And when repeated attacks occur and public condemnation never arrives, people naturally begin asking whether speaking clearly in defence of the 2SLGBTQIA+ community has become politically inconvenient.

Those questions are not created by activists.

Those questions are created by silence.

Because silence is not neutral.

Silence communicates.

Silence is noticed.

Silence sends a message whether intended or not.

It Is Time To Show Up

Fortunately, leadership does not belong exclusively to politicians.

Communities can lead too.

That is why the No Way Norwich Peaceful Solidarity March matters.

On Monday at 6:00 p.m., residents will gather at Emily Stowe Public School to send a message that Oxford County is stronger than hate, stronger than intimidation, and stronger than silence.

The march is being organized by the Norwich and Area JEDI Alliance and will bring together allies, educators, faith leaders, families, advocates, local businesses, and members of the 2SLGBTQIA+ community.

If you plan to attend, please RSVP through the Eventbrite registration so organizers can accurately prepare for attendance.

Most importantly, show up.

Because every stolen Pride flag deserves a hundred people standing beside the next one.

Every act of intimidation deserves an even stronger act of solidarity.

And every elected official who chooses silence deserves to see that the community they declined to publicly defend is more than capable of defending itself.

Leadership is a choice.

Courage is a choice.

Solidarity is a choice.

Silence is a choice too.

And Oxford County has every right to ask why some of its elected leaders continue choosing it.

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