



Statement and Policy on Police Participation in The Rockford Area Pride Parade

Introduction

The Rockford Area Pride Committee recognizes that, while every individual has a right to participate in Pride festivities, not every organization does. Pride event organizers worldwide face a contentious issue: should police be allowed to participate in the celebrations? An argument can certainly be made that police department participation should be viewed as a sign of tremendous progress in the social standing of the LGBTQIA+ community and that the police should be welcomed with open arms. A more common argument is that, historically, Pride marches commemorate the Stonewall Riots, which broke out in June of 1969 in response to persistent police harassment and intimidation. To include police, some will say, is a betrayal of the origins of the movement.

Like the civil rights movement championed by BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color) Americans, it is necessary for the arsenal of liberation tactics of the LGBTQIA+ rights movement to include steadfast opposition and sustained engagement as circumstances demand. We must balance our long term hopes against the knowledge that, both here and elsewhere, members of our community have had—and continue to have—their own unpleasant run-ins with law enforcement. Due to that, they will choose to stay away from Pride festivities simply because there will be uniformed on-duty police officers present near the parade as a condition of hosting the parade on the public streets of Rockford. In our judgment, to include uniformed officers in the parade would be a bridge too far, too soon. Trust will need to be earned over time.

National Findings

Our foremost goal is to allow a free celebration of love, identity, and expression. The facts are that police have been used to stifle these efforts and have not made the reforms necessary that will allow them to peacefully coexist with the LGBTQIA+ community. Specifically:

- 1) Police rely on laws prohibiting lewdness, vagrancy, and disorderly conduct to harass gay and lesbian people when congregating in public.
- 2) A 2014 report on a national survey of LGBT people and people living with HIV found that 73% of respondents had face-to-face contact with the police in the past five years. Of those respondents, 21% reported encountering hostile

attitudes from officers, 14% reported verbal assault by the police, 3% reported sexual harassment, and 2% reported physical assault at the hands of law enforcement officers. Police abuse, neglect, and misconduct were consistently reported at higher frequencies by respondents of color and transgender and gender-nonconforming respondents.

- 3) A 2011 study reported findings from the largest survey of transgender people to date found that 22% of transgender respondents reported that they had been harassed by law enforcement because of bias, and 6% reported having been physically assaulted by an officer. Additionally, nearly half of respondents (46%) reported being uncomfortable seeking police assistance.
- 4) According to an analysis of the 2012 National Inmate Survey, self-identified lesbian, gay, or bisexual (LGB) people are incarcerated at a rate of 1,882 per 100,000—a rate three times higher than the heterosexual US adult population. More than 40 percent of women who are incarcerated identify as lesbian, gay, or bisexual, compared with only 5.1 percent of all US women.
- 5) The 2015 US Transgender Survey found 2 percent of the transgender population had been to prison or jail—nearly double the share of cisgender people in the US. Fifty-eight percent of transgender people reported some form of police mistreatment in their encounters with law enforcement.
- 6) Transgender people are extremely vulnerable to being killed by police and correctional staff.
- 7) Less than 10 percent of all American youth identify as queer, but in 2017, 20 percent of youth in juvenile justice facilities were LGBT. Eighty-five percent of incarcerated LGBT and gender nonconforming youth were people of color.
- 8) According to the US Bureau of Justice Statistics, while incarcerated, more than 30 percent of LGBTQ people experience sexual victimization, compared with only 8 percent of heterosexual people. Transgender people who are incarcerated are five times more likely to be assaulted by correctional staff and nine times more likely to be assaulted by other incarcerated people.

Local Findings

1. As recently as 2023, police perpetrated an undercover sting operation in local forest preserves and charged members of the community with public indecency and battery charges.
2. Conversations with members of our community have revealed personal stories of discrimination, harassment, and violence perpetrated by law enforcement

officers, highlighting the persistent challenges facing the LGBTQIA+ and its sister communities when interacting with local police.

3. Instances of discrimination and mistreatment of BIPOC and LGBTQIA+ individuals by law enforcement agencies are well-documented in Rockford and the surrounding area, underscoring the need for continued action to address systemic issues with policing.
4. There is a lack of empirical data regarding the relationships and interactions between the LGBTQIA+ and BIPOC and the local police departments, which creates a significant barrier to understanding how policing affects these communities.

Policy

In solidarity with minority communities, indigenous communities, people of color, the LGBTQIA+ community at large, and other “invisible” communities, Rockford Area Pride Committee states its official position and policy regarding police participation in the annual Rockford Area Pride Parade as follows.

1. Individual police and/or law enforcement officers who wish to participate in the Parade will be invited to do so only as private individuals, without badges, firearms, weapons (lethal or non-lethal), or any other identifying gear or equipment present.
2. Police vehicles will not be included in the parade except as required by local ordinance.
3. The Committee will engage only the minimum mandated number of officers to be present at the Rockford Area Pride Parade to meet the requirements set forth in the City’s permitting process .

Specific Call to Action

Policing, as it exists today, does not make BIPOC and LGBTQIA+ individuals feel safer. Many in the community are threatened by the police, and justifiably so. While the Committee appreciates the efforts of the City of Rockford Police Department in public outreach and efforts to be more visible to the LGBTQIA+ community through: recruiting at Rockford’s previous Pride celebrations, appointing an LGBTQIA+ liaison to the city’s executive departments, and engaging some dialogue with local LGBTQIA+ community leaders, these efforts are, at best, lip service when faced with the systemic problems of policing. The Rockford Area Pride Committee call upon the Rockford Area Policing Agencies to take the following actions:

- 1) Engage in constructive and effective dialogue with BIPOC and LGBTQIA+ community leaders;
- 2) Conduct studies and research within the BIPOC and LGBTQIA+ communities in and around Rockford to determine what portion of those communities express discomfort and apprehension regarding the Rockford Police Department and its surrounding agencies, and then act appropriately based upon those findings;
- 3) Train officers about intrinsic bias and institute and enforce anti-bias and anti-discrimination policies;
- 4) Provide training in regards to trans, non-binary, and gender-nonconforming cultural competency;
- 5) Stop using “broken window” policing strategies that criminalize poverty;
- 6) End practices of “profiling” of the LGBTQIA+ community, including the rampant profiling of LGBTQIA+ youth and trans people of color as, by default, engaging in sex work;
- 7) Advocate for the Winnebago County Sheriff's Office to develop equitable standards of accountability regarding treatment of BIPOC and LGBTQIA+ citizens in their custody.

In reaching these conclusions, this policy will be reviewed periodically. We hope that, as the relationship between police and the LGBTQIA+ community moves towards a better and more equitable future, one day, this policy of exclusion will no longer be necessary. We are optimistic that such a day will come; we just do not know when, and we know it is not today.

Adopted by vote of the Board of Directors of the Rockford Area Pride Committee.