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## **Big reasons to celebrate Pride this month**

CUPE members have three big, new reasons to celebrate Pride this month and to celebrate their hard work for equality and human rights.

This month two very important new laws passed in Ontario. First came Bill 13, the Accepting Schools Act, an important anti-bullying law that makes schools safer and gives students the right to form Gay-Straight Alliances and to call them that if they so choose.

As part of the GSA Alliance, we lobbied and rallied at Queen's Park and helped push forward this act. We did it because it was the right thing to do, and because our CUPE Ontario School Board Coordinating Committee, representing more than 50,000 workers in all four school systems, voted to support the bill.

The second big legal change came last week, with an historic vote that saw all three parties in the legislature finally come together to pass Toby's Act. The new law, amends the Ontario Human Rights Code to include gender identity and gender expression, and makes Ontario the first major jurisdiction in North America to provide human rights protection for transgendered people.

It took New Democrat MPP Cheri DiNovo four attempts since 2007 to get this bill passed. The historic legislation means future generations of Ontarians will grow up knowing they are protected from discrimination based on gender identity or gender expression, it is an important first step to ensuring that all transgender members of our community have equal access to good jobs, housing and protection from harassment.

These changes are both welcome and long overdue. We are extremely proud of the work CUPE Ontario has done over many years to advance LGBTQ rights. We supported our member, Martine Stonehouse, in taking the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care to a Human Rights Tribunal on the delisting of sex-reassignment surgery from OHIP, and she won. We took the Government of Canada to the Supreme Court to change the definition of "spouse" in the income tax act, a big step toward legal same-sex marriage. We bargained transition leave for members who transition in the workplace and were the first union to develop a kit of bargaining proposals and tools to assist Locals with support for transgendered members. We were the first union to bargain benefits for gay and lesbian workers and their families, something that is now common in Canadian workplaces. And we were the first union in Canada to elect an openly gay president.

We have a long list of accomplishments, but in May, delegates to our annual Convention added one more big one to the list.

In Windsor, CUPE Ontario became the first major union to guarantee a seat on its executive board for LGBTQ workers. Delegates voted almost unanimously to create a new Diversity Vice-President, LGBTQ workers.

There is a great deal of work yet to do, but all spring and summer, record numbers of CUPE members are celebrating across the province at Pride events in communities large and small. Please join us in Toronto for Pride Week events and celebrate these important victories for our union, our province and for all people.

Sincerely

Fred Hahn

Candace Rennick

President

Secretary-Treasurer

