



20 March 2024

Rotorua Lakes Council

Mayor Tania Tapsell Tania.Tapsell@rotorualc.nz; Deputy Mayor Sandra Kai Fong Sandra.KaiFong@rotorualc.nz; Gregg Brown Gregg.Brown@rotorualc.nz; Robert Lee Robert.Lee@rotorualc.nz; Conan O'Brien Conan.O'Brien@rotorualc.nz; Don Paterson; Don.Paterson@rotorualc.nz; Fisher Wang Fisher.Wang@rotorualc.nz; Lani Kereopa Lani.Kereopa@rotorualc.nz; Trevor Maxwell Trevor.Maxwell@rotorualc.nz; Rawiri Waru Rawiri.Waru@rotorualc.nz; Karen Barker Karen.Barker@rotorualc.nz

Rotorua Library Rainbow Storytime event

Good afternoon,

1. The Free Speech Union is a registered trade union with a mission to fight for, protect, and expand New Zealanders' rights to freedom of speech, conscience, and intellectual inquiry. We believe that freedom of speech is not only a legal principle, but a social good that allows for people in modern liberal democracies to peacefully, freely advocate for the causes they care about without risking unjust retribution.
2. We write to commend the Council and the Mayor, Ms Tapsell, for their comments to *RNZ* published yesterday regarding a Rainbow Storytime event being held at a library.
3. The Free Speech Union has consistently insisted that public venues must not pick and choose which perspectives are allowed to be expressed on the premises. The right for legal events to use public facilities was upheld by the High Court in *Whitmore v Palmerston North City Council* [2021] NZHC 1551, which determined the Palmerston North City Council could not discriminate access to venues based on the views that would be presented.
4. As the Council will be aware, if members of the community disapprove of the event, they are entitled to protest peacefully outside in an orderly manner. Threats to 'shut the event down' and any threats of violence, disruption or intimidation are entirely unacceptable.
5. Free speech must swing both ways and the Council's decision to defend the right to express an opinion should not be interpreted as necessarily defending the content of that speech. Allowing local authorities to decide which events should be allowed sets a terrible precedent. Individuals have the right to decide what events they wish to attend, whether it be the Storytime event or a peaceful protest outside the event. Bad ideas are beaten with good ideas, not censorship.

Yours faithfully,

Free Speech Union (New Zealand) Inc.

Jonathan Ayling
Chief Executive
jonathan@fsu.nz
021 842 215