**FW City Council Board Meeting Testimony – Pride Badge Removal**

My name is Sheri Allen, I use she/her pronouns, I live in FW and I am the Cantor and co-creator of Makom Shelanu congregation.

Mayor Parker, I was so encouraged and impressed by your courage and honesty when I read your comments in the Texas Tribune a year ago, defending transgender children when the state sought to accuse their parents of being child abusers. You said, “I'm worried right now that you're targeting families that are already incredibly vulnerable and in a really difficult circumstance, when there are so many other hundreds of thousands of kids and families that are in dangerous positions with no regard for the subject of transgender.” <https://www.texastribune.org/2022/02/28/mattie-parker-fort-worth-mayor/>

Which is why I feel so confused and deeply hurt that you decided to pull the pride badge from the reading challenge after receiving complaints from a narrow-minded group of individuals and their followers who claim that this challenge promotes an “anti-biblical agenda toward children.” The biblical teachings that I, and those of my clergy colleagues here tonight follow, celebrate the beauty and sanctity of every individual, and that includes those who identify as LGBTQ+.

What confuses me more is that your statement defending your decision only strengthens the argument that this badge should remain. I’m wondering:

 - how does removing the opportunity to earn an optional Pride Badge contribute to your goal of “having ALL families feel welcome to participate” when it intentionally excludes those who *want* their children to learn about LGBGQ families, or recognize their own experiences in these books?

- How does taking away a reward for drawing a self-portrait that ‘highlights their uniqueness’ make them feel anything but shame and embarrassment?

- And why, if the Pride Badge was instituted 3 years ago, is this suddenly an issue now, other than the obvious reason: that those who espouse their own brand of religion want to impose it on everyone else?

I also wonder what protections you have in place to support and protect your LGBTQ constituents who are unfairly caught in the crosshairs of these outright false accusations? Kids with LGBTQ parents who provide safe, loving homes, LGBTQ kids themselves who are bullied - sometimes resulting in the taking their own lives - because these kinds of allegations make them targets for violence and encourage people to treat them as unworthy of being seen and represented in a positive light? How are LGBTQ members of this community and the people who love them supposed to feel safe when *any* validity is given to such incendiary accusations?

I urge you to reconsider your decision and add the Pride Badge back into your reading challenge. LGBTQ children have just had their lifesaving healthcare taken away. Please, at least allow them to hold on to their pride and dignity. Thank you.