

# Hartford Courant

BREAKING NEWS

## Enfield bans Pride flag from being flown on town property. 'It's a very sad day' council member says.

The interim town attorney said the decision protects the town from unnecessary lawsuits



The Town of Enfield officially designated June as Pride Month, and will mark the occasion with a flag-raising and ceremony, on June 1.



By [STEPHEN UNDERWOOD](#) | [sunderwood@courant.com](mailto:sunderwood@courant.com) | Hartford Courant

PUBLISHED: January 12, 2024 at 6:00 a.m. | UPDATED: January 12, 2024 at 2:40 p.m.

[Enfield](#) officials are coming under criticism after a decision this week to ban the Pride flag from town property.

The Enfield Town Council voted 6-5 this week to ban all flags from town property except for the American flag, Connecticut state flag, POW/MIA flag, and military branch flags. The controversial decision repealed a previous flag policy allowing the town to display a Pride flag at town hall during Pride month in June.

Enfield, [unlike many towns throughout the state](#), did not adopt an official flag policy in 2022 after the U.S. Supreme Court found that the city of Boston violated a private organization's First Amendment rights by refusing to allow them to raise a Christian flag outside of Boston City Hall, given that they had allowed other flags in the past and that the city did not have a policy in place.

The interim town attorney Tom Tyler said the decision protects the town from unnecessary lawsuits from organizations or individuals wanting to fly flags on town owned property and forbids town flagpoles from being used as public forums of free speech.

"So if you have no flag policy, anybody can come in and do what they want. ISIS could come in and want to display one, the IRA ... basically anybody," Tyler said at the council meeting where the vote took place. "You'd have to be content neutral. This doesn't mean you can't get sued by the ACLU or anybody. I mean anybody can get sued for anything at any time, but it doesn't mean that they win."

Newly elected Republican Mayor Ken Nelson Jr. said that the resolution speaks for the will of the Republican majority council.

"The town council wishes to speak only for itself not for any other person or organization," Nelson Jr. said at the council meeting.

But the meeting turned contentious as Democrats on the council denounced the resolution.

"I don't support it. I think it's ridiculous. We have an opinion, and I think the real reason is you don't want that Pride flag up on this town hall which is absolutely disgusting," Councilor At-Large Gina Cekala said.

Other council members said they believe the resolution goes against the U.S. Constitution.

"It's a very sad day in Enfield," Councilor At-Large Cynthia Mangini said. "I for one am not going to support this resolution. This to me is a form of tyranny and I will not endorse that."

Outside of the town hall, the decision has been met with mostly fear and confusion from the town's LGBTQ community.

"I have received so many messages from people asking me what this means. People are afraid," said Brandon Jewell of the LGBTQ nonprofit [PFLAG Enfield](#). "I'm not shocked by this, but I'm very disappointed. It's extremely concerning. I don't know what else will come next."

Jewell helped organize the [town's first ever Pride Celebration](#) in 2022 where over 100 people turned out to celebrate. A large Pride flag was hung above the main entrance of town hall where then-mayor Bob Cressotti read a proclamation and said it was a "great day" for the town.

"It was an amazing outpouring of community support. Nobody complained about it," Jewell said. "There is no reason for this resolution."

Greg Gray, pastor of Enfield UCC and president of [Enfield Pride](#), said the decision is disheartening for the LGBTQ community. But Gray said that it remains unclear what the parameters of the resolution actually are and that the town is left with more questions than answers.

"It looks like the town council was flying by the seat of their pants, they didn't have a clear understanding of what they were even voting on," Gray said. "What if a teacher wants to have an Italian heritage day in one of our schools. Can you fly an Italian flag in a classroom since schools are on town property? If I'm a French language teacher can I have a French flag in my classroom? At this very moment, I don't think anybody knows the answer to that question."

Gray said he will be calling residents and businesses around town to increase the number of Pride flags displayed during the month of June. The town, with a population of approximately 42,000, has an active and thriving LGBTQ community, according to Gray.

"If we can't fly the flag at town hall anymore, then I want to see more Pride flags flown around town," Gray said. "I will be calling up everyone I know to put up a flag."

Jewell along with several supporters plan on holding a rally before the next council meeting on Jan. 22. He is calling on members of the public to show up to town hall around 5 p.m.

"We want to show just how much support there is in the community," Jewell said. "Come dressed in Pride attire, and bring your Pride flags."

*Stephen Underwood can be reached at [sunderwood@courant.com](mailto:sunderwood@courant.com)*