

theHoustonMuseumofnaturalscience

July 26, 2018

Shawn Laatsch, President
Emera Astronomy Center – University of Maine
167 Rangeley Road
Orono, ME 04401

Dear Shawn:

This letter is in reply to your request of July 24 for how we plan to address safety and security concerns, expressed by the LGBTQ+ community within IPS about Houston being selected as host of the 2022 IPS conference.

Houston is a very open-minded, tolerant city where none need be concerned with their safety, as I hope the following points will demonstrate.

- Houston is home to the largest gay community in Texas, and the 6th-largest in the nation with over 60,000 LGBTQ+ residents.
- Houston remains the most populous city in the U.S. to elect an openly gay mayor. Anise Parker was elected in 2010, and was re-elected to two additional 2-year terms before leaving office due to term limits.
- Houston's current mayor, Sylvester Turner, has made numerous public statements in support of the city's diversity and tolerance, including this one from a recent press conference:

"This is the most diverse city in America," Turner said. "We acknowledge and celebrate that diversity in all its dimensions. You can be diverse and yet separate, segregated and apart. As Mayor of this City, I want us to be diverse and *inclusive*, and I want to live in a City where people can be who they are and we can be tolerant of people's opinions, ideologies, sexual orientation, ethnicities, religion and/or cultures."

- Houston is home to the 4th largest Gay Pride parade in the nation.
- The Montrose area is a vibrant, diverse community, featuring gay-owned-and-operated restaurants, businesses, shops, nightclubs and more.
- Houston's LGBTQ+ community is supported by all the city's major religious denominations. As an example, after the 2016 Pulse nightclub shooting in Orlando, Houston's Islamic community issued public statements standing in solidarity with Houston's LGBTQ+ residents against hatred and bigotry.

- Perhaps most germane to safety and security concerns, the Houston Police Department actively recruits from the LGBTQ+ community and ran a full-page ad in the June issue of *OutSmart* magazine. In addition, for at least the last 10 years, HPD had marched in the Houston Gay Pride Parade.
- HPD maintains a liaison, in the person of Officer E.J. Johnson, with the LGBTQ+ community.
- HPD also has a number of openly gay members at the command level.
- HPD recently held sensitivity training for interactions with the city's transgender residents.
- Houston's LGBTQ+ population is well represented at all levels of city government.

Houston truly is a city where a person's sexual orientation and/or gender identity is "no big deal", and where no one should fear for his or her safety. I hope this letter addresses any concerns to the contrary.

Finally it should be noted that the Houston Museum of Natural Science has members of the LGBTQ+ community in many different departments. The Astronomy Department, which will host the proposed IPS 2022 Houston conference, has had gay staff in leadership positions for well over 20 years.

Sincerely,



Dr. Carolyn Sumners
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