

Ariana Perez: Annapolis police add a color of inclusion to the city



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Ariana Perez

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Rainbow flags waving down West Street symbolize LGBTQ Pride Month in Annapolis.

They are also there in anticipation of the city's first ever Pride Parade and festival after Mayor Gavin Buckley signed a proclamation officially making June LGBTQ Pride month for the second year in a row.

Although this change might seem very recent, the city has worked to promote inclusion and create a welcoming environment for the LGBTQ community. The parade is likely the change most talked about. But what some might not know is that the police department has also been a key player in this step toward city-wide inclusion.

In September 2018, the city of Annapolis announced Sgt. Amy Miguez as the first LGBTQ liaison. And in April 2019, Max Huber, military/veterans affairs liaison for the city, was nominated as the second LGBTQ liaison. Miguez said it's a step in the right direction.

"Our threefold purpose is to build a bridge with the community and the police department, make sure our officers are receiving education on topics that are important to the community and also making sure that our employees and officers that are LGBTQ members feel comfortable working for us," she said. "We do a lot of training on diversity and discrimination and our officers are well educated, but there is always an opportunity to learn more."

Since then, Miguez has reached out to other departments' liaisons in DC and Baltimore to learn about similar programs, outreach work and educational resources. One thing stood out — the feeling of integration within the department.

"Officers who are LGBTQ members don't feel as integrated in the police department," she observed. "We are trying to learn how those problems can happen and how we can make our department more welcoming to ensure those problems don't happen here."



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The work the police department has done so far around the community aims at helping LGBTQ members feel embraced and supported, specifically for people that feel less certain about their status.

Working with different high schools, Miguez said she met with kids who expressed feeling afraid of their parents' reaction when opening up.

"They're afraid of not having a home if they talk to their parents," she said. "I've shared resources that I've learned from PFLAG Annapolis/Anne Arundel County with them so that they know that there is help out there. There are quite a few educational resources, both in English and Spanish, on things like religion, homosexuality and transgender topics. I think those are important resources to have when you don't know what to do, aside from knowing that we are also here to help."

Katie Connolly, a senior accountant for Annapolis and a member of the LGBTQ community, said this work is well overdue and exciting at the same time.

Remembering previous experiences and compared to how she feels now, Connolly says this is the most comfortable she's ever felt in a work environment.

"I've had plenty of employers say they're inclusive but really didn't stand behind it," she said. "Mayor Buckley and everyone in the administration, City Council, and departments, have been amazing. This is so important for the community."

Connolly added that she feels supported and that these changes make Annapolis feel safer for communities that are not in the majority.

"It's being inclusive in every sense of the word," she said about the newly hired LGBTQ liaisons.

She also supports having liaisons who are not LGBTQ members, saying that she believes it's a common misconception that you have to identify as a particular group to advocate for them. "You don't have to be one of, to stand with. We need more individuals who don't necessarily identify to stand up and be advocates. That is when the biggest push for change starts."

"To have a liaison, that's step number one," she said. "I don't need to identify with another group in order to stand up for them. If I see something wrong, I'm going to fight for that person's equal rights for them and not let anyone be negative in that space around me."

Miguez says the city still has a lot of work to do to make the city more cohesive, but sees Annapolis Pride Parade as a catalyst toward positive change. "There are people who still don't feel like they're welcome and I think this is just one of many ways to promote inclusion and build bridges," she said.