

Trudeau Is Asking Religious Canadians To Betray Their Conscience For Federal Funding

Churches and religious groups across the country are struggling over what to do with a confusing clause in the Canada Summer Jobs application that seems to require them to endorse access to abortions in order to get funding.

But hundreds of churches, charities, day camps and other religious organizations who hire students for summer programming are upset about the attestation, saying they feel like they're being forced to sign a statement that goes against their beliefs.

The new attestation on the Canada Summer Jobs grant was aimed at anti-abortion groups, but Catholic, evangelical and other religious organizations are arguing it's unprecedented, unfair and possibly illegal to be forced to attest to their views on abortion while applying.

Speaking at a cabinet retreat in London, Ont., Employment Minister Patty Hajdu said she's comfortable with the attestation, which requires applicants to check a box saying they have a core mandate that respects "reproductive rights." The government's website further specifies this includes "the right to access safe and legal abortions." The online application can't be submitted unless the box is checked. "We're working very closely with faith groups Ms. Hajdu said, to make sure that they understand that as long as their core mandate is not in violation of Canadian human rights and the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, and it's not violating a woman's ultimate right to control her own body, that they should have absolutely no problem receiving grant money, provided they, you know, fill out the application properly."

But groups opposing the attestation point out the Charter also protects freedom of expression, freedom of conscience and religion, and freedom to be treated equally under the law. A Toronto anti-abortion group has already filed a Federal Court case arguing their Charter rights are being violated by this attestation.

The Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops released a lengthy statement on Jan. 11, 2018 that said the attestation "seriously undermines the right to religious freedom since the Government of Canada is directly limiting the right of religious traditions to hold, teach and practise their principles and values in public."

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau brought up the controversy during a town hall event in Hamilton. He said faith-based groups should still apply for the grant. But he went on to say "An organization that has as its stated goal to remove rights from Canadians, to

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remove the right that women have fought for to determine what happens to their own bodies, is not in line with where the Charter (of Rights) is or where the Government of Canada is.”

This is a disingenuous statement. There are no Charter reproductive rights or reproductive freedoms despite the Prime Minister’s claims. Any Canadian can verify this by reading the Charter of Rights and Freedoms online. Nonetheless, Employment and Social Development Canada can now deny organizations summer job funding if they fail to attest to endorse a nonexistent right.

The Canadian Catholic community is particularly dismayed. This attestation excludes any Catholic parish or charity from funding for hiring a summer student. We cannot affirm that we support a (non-existent) right to abortion, which is what the euphemism “reproductive rights” means.

Further upsetting many is the Prime Minister’s confused personal comments regarding the logically impossible coexistence of his identity as a Roman Catholic and his support of abortion. The National Post states, “He’s a Catholic who has long had to reconcile his religious beliefs with his responsibilities as a political leader and he said the latter demands that he defend people’s rights.”

Even if Mr. Trudeau were not a Catholic Christian, the fact remains that he cannot invent, promote or defend a non-existent right.

Do Canadians have freedom of conscience and religion, freedom of thought, belief, opinion, and expression, or not?

With this new qualification to access \$215 million in tax funds to finance 70,000 student summer jobs, the Federal Government is denying these freedoms on a false pretext. It is coercing a controversial attestation from pliant employers and is punishing employers who cannot, in good conscience, agree. The freshly launched \$105 million (over three years) Canada Service Corps has the same eligibility criteria with the same coercive effect. Apparently, Canadians have the freedom to hold only the beliefs and opinions approved by the current government. Who is defending our Charter rights and freedoms in this situation?

What Can You Do?

Call or email your Member of Parliament to express your concern, and ask them to seek changes to this policy. For sample letters: <https://www.archtoronto.org/summerjobs/Pages/sample-letters.aspx>