



STATEMENT REGARDING CANADA SUMMER JOBS (CSJ)

February 8, 2018

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

By now you have probably heard of changes made by the federal government to the Canada Summer Jobs (CSJ) program. To qualify for grants from this program, applicants are now required to sign an attestation that expresses support for “reproductive rights.” The government’s website further specifies that this includes “the right to access safe and legal abortions.”

This attestation is unacceptable as it excludes Catholic organizations and many other faith groups that oppose abortion from receiving funds through the Canada Summer Jobs program. Many faith-based organizations are deeply concerned and cannot assent to this new requirement as it infringes on deeply-held beliefs about the sanctity of life from conception to natural death. It is also an assault on the freedoms of conscience and religion, two of the most basic freedoms that we enjoy in a democratic society. Ironically, the government has invoked the Charter of Rights and Freedoms to justify its actions, while discounting fundamental rights that the Charter is meant to uphold.

While infringing on the legitimate rights of faith-based organizations, these new rules will also negatively impact the broader communities served by their programs, often the most vulnerable in Canadian society. The substantial good that is done by churches, synagogues and mosques will be hindered by this policy, all because they cannot submit to the government’s ideological test.

On January 26, the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops jointly signed a statement with eighty other faith organizations from across our country, asking the Prime Minister and the government of Canada to amend the new CSJ guidelines, removing the requirement of the attestation.

I have written to our local Member of Parliament in Peterborough to protest this discriminatory decision by the federal government. I urge Catholics across our Diocese to contact their Members of Parliament to ask them to remove the attestation from the application process. Moreover, I advise all Catholic parishes and organizations in the Diocese of Peterborough not to sign this attestation if they are applying for grants through the Canada Summer Jobs program.

Canada prides itself on being a tolerant society that respects fundamental rights and freedoms. Catholics and all citizens should expect their government to uphold their rights and not compel religious groups to make declarations contrary to their convictions.

Yours in Christ,

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Bishop of Peterborough