

**Alberta Mackenzie Provincial Council
The Catholic Women's League of Canada**

Education and Health Communiqué #4

Mary Hunt, Chairperson
November, 2017



“Inspired by the Spirit; Women Respond to God’s Call”

Bill 24: An Act to Support Gay-Straight Alliances

Bill 24 is on the Order Paper to receive Third Reading in the Legislative Assembly of Alberta on the afternoon of Wednesday, November 15th. It is likely to pass given we have an NDP majority government and will receive Royal Assent from the Lieutenant Governor as the legislation falls within the purview of the provincial government. Once the bill passes it still requires regulations which may prove controversial. It is hoped that public input will be sought in the development of these regulations.

What does the Alberta Catholic School Board Trustees Association say about Bill 24?

The Alberta Catholic School Trustees' Association (ACSTA) believes that the overall goal of Bill 24 in protecting vulnerable students is commendable and we are in full support of a welcoming, caring, respectful and safe learning environment. However, after careful consultation, we believe there are two areas of Bill 24 which could have unintended consequences and require clarification.

1) Erosion of Local School Board Autonomy

One of our main concerns with Bill 24 is the diminishment of the role of school governing bodies, particularly the elected school boards and school superintendents. We feel that Bill 24 puts undo pressure on the school principal to be, in effect, the sole decision maker who is only accountable to the Minister of Education bypassing long entrenched best practices and chains of authority as outlined in the *School Act*. The unintended consequence of eroding local board autonomy is that it could give the Education Minister the power to change or rewrite any school board policy without consultation with that Board or the local community which is being served. Should Section 16.1 be amended to force school principals to *(a) immediately grant permission for the establishment of the student organization or the holding of the activity at the school*, it is felt that the unintended consequences in this wording erodes, degrades and removes the school principal's ability to perform their role in an effective and responsible manner at the school and community level. It would also make him or her the sole decision maker in this situation, bypassing both superintendents and trustees. While Inclusion Clubs are welcome in all Catholic schools, the requirement to immediately approve of any activity without the opportunity for a principal to evaluate the broader context in which the activity is held and its potential impact on a school culture and community unduly transfers decision making to students. We seek clarification on this and urge the government to respect the vital role played in local decision-making by boards and superintendents.

2) Parent - School Relationship

Given that research indicates the more involved and active parents are in the education of their children the greater the chance for success and that ACSTA has repeatedly advocated that parents/guardians are the most important educators of their children, a blanket refusal to communicate information to parents without some assessment of the child's best interest in a particular circumstance should be avoided. Further, we have been advised by Alberta Education that the FOIPP legislation will supersede the Bill 24 amendments and that if a child is at risk of imminent harm or danger for whatever reason, a parent will be notified in accordance with the teacher's professional and legal obligations. However, it is not clear what the threshold will be for releasing the information and whether certain information can still be withheld from a parent. We are asking for clarification and assurance on this matter.

ACSTA therefore proposes that changes to Bill 24 are needed to clarify the above concerns. We will continue to work with the Government of Alberta and all of our educational stakeholders to ensure this Bill, and all education policy, respects the autonomy of local school boards and our denominational rights while achieving our mutually shared goals of protecting all students entrusted to our care.

Are Catholics the only Albertans concerned about what this Bill includes?

No. Please find below a point of view from John Carpay of the Centre for Constitutional Freedoms located in Calgary for your consideration.

Ten Reasons to Oppose the NDP's Bill 24:

Bill 24 assumes that parents are enemies of their own children, and that all parents should therefore be kept in the dark about what is going on with their own children, as young as five, at school. The fact that a tiny minority of parents are abusive is cited as justification.

Bill 24 ignores the fact that teachers and principals already have the authority and discretion to withhold information from parents, in the few cases when withholding information is warranted. Rather than allowing teachers and principals to continue exercising the authority they already have, Bill 24 forces all teachers and principals to withhold critical information from parents.

Bill 24 leaves parents in the dark about what is happening with their children as young as five, even around discussions of a sexual nature. Bill 24 makes it illegal for teachers to inform parents about what their children have been taught and exposed to in a Gay-Straight Alliance (GSA).

Bill 24 violates the rights of parents to make informed decisions concerning the education of their children.

Bill 24 creates a new void, in which unknown political activists have access to children without any supervision or oversight from parents. Bill 24 will ensure that parents won't know which activists have access to their children, and what these activists will be teaching their children.

Bill 24 ignores the fact that Gay Straight Alliances (GSAs) are described by the Alberta Teachers Association (ATA) as tools of activism and social change. This is also clear from what GSAs say about themselves, on GSA websites. If GSAs were merely informal peer support groups, parents would not need to be concerned.

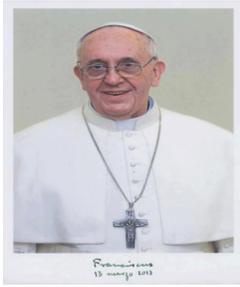
Bill 24 ignores the fact that GSA beliefs and values regarding sexuality and gender are not compatible with the beliefs, values, and behavior expectations of many Alberta schools, including publicly funded Catholic schools.

Bill 24 ignores the fact that many Alberta schools oppose GSAs because they disagree with the ideology of GSAs, not because they oppose having support groups for students.

Bill 24 uses GSAs to circumvent Alberta's law requiring parental notification and opt-out provisions for sexual content. Parents will not be notified of sexual content, presented to children as young as five, in a GSA club, neither before nor after the presentation of such content.

Bill 24 uses children as tools to transform our school into havens of radical political activism and social change.

It is anticipated that more Education Bills will be introduced in the near future...we plan to keep you apprised of any developments that may impact publicly funded Catholic Education in Alberta Mackenzie.



Education cannot be neutral. It is either positive or negative; either it enriches or it impoverishes, either it enables a person to grow or it lessens, even corrupts him. The mission of schools is to develop a sense of truth, of what is good and beautiful. And this occurs through a rich path made up of many ingredients. This is why there are so many subjects—because development is the results of different elements that act together and stimulate intelligence, knowledge, the emotions, the body and so on.”

Pope Francis