
From: Maureen McQuaid [REDACTED]
Sent: March 6, 2020 9:02 AM
To: Office of the Legislative Counsel
Cc: Life Nova Scotia
Subject: Protecting Access to Reproductive Health Care Act - Bill 242

**** EXTERNAL EMAIL / COURRIEL EXTERNE ****

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To the Committee:

I would like to submit a statement to be read to the committee making known my opposition to Bill 242.

Whatever our personal view on abortion, it is important that peaceful, non-violent protests be permitted without restriction in a democratic society which upholds free speech.

The 40 Days for Life is a well-known outreach that aims to end abortion locally through prayer and fasting. Participants stand on the exterior sidewalk on the south side corner of the Victoria General Hospital where abortions are performed. This location is actually quite a distance from the building itself and is only one of several entry ways into the facility. Participants do not approach people but will provide information and support to those who pass by if asked. It is a peaceful and prayerful protest. For the most part, participants stand silently praying and there has been no cause for concern regarding any untoward conduct on the part of the participants and there certainly have not been any incidents of harassment or intimidation. If there were we have laws to deal with that kind of behaviour. A bubble zone law would make illegal to do simple, peaceful activities around the hospital. I have written my MLA and expressed my concern of taking such a restrictive measure on a peaceful vigil when there is no evidence to support it.

Regarding the concern that "*protesters can be very triggering*" - we know from other kinds of protests that wherever there are conflicting interests, opposing opinions will be upsetting to the other persons. To disturb is the aim of any protest. I believe the real concern is that this kind of protest will cause women who seek an abortion to change their mind. This is precisely the whole point of the protest (or any protest). The possibility of changed minds and the saving of human life is why we need to ensure freedom of expression.

Like any protest, the location of the 40 Days for Life vigil is a key element of the campaign. Given the ways people's mind process information the distance between the message and the viewer often determines if the message is understood. Participants of 40 Days for Life wish to express their message where there is an obvious connection between the place where abortions are performed and their message. Something would be lost in the messaging if 40 Days for Life is held any further away from the hospital grounds. Freedom of assembly on a public sidewalk is an important right for all Nova Scotians for any kind of protest and a peaceful vigil for the pre-born ought to be no exception.

Freedom of expression and freedom of religion are basic rights which need to be upheld by our public representatives. They should not be easily trampled on. This is the kind of thing that can drastically erode Nova Scotians' rights by targeting peaceful expression of the pro-life view. I don't see how our legislature can support a bill that will place a restriction on freedom of speech without a just cause; when there has been no incidents of harassment or intimidation. I trust that you will uphold all our freedoms.

Respectfully submitted,

Maureen McQuaid

