

Canada's bishops welcome changes to Summer Jobs attestation

Canada's bishops welcome the revisions to the 2019 Canada Summer Jobs (CSJ) application, but they remain concerned over some language and details.

The new application has dropped the mandatory check off of a pro-abortion attestation regarding the applicant's core mandate, making it possible for many charities and parishes to apply for grants this year in a manner "true to their faith tradition and/or conscience" the CCCB said in a [statement Jan. 10](#).

The Canadian Catholic bishops are concerned however, over the 'eligible activities' section of the application and its "language related to 'restricting or undermining rights' and how that working will be interpreted for applicants."

The new employer attestation now says: "Any funding under the Canada Summer Jobs program will not be used to undermine or restrict the exercise of rights legally protected in Canada."

The ineligible job activities in the CSJ guide are those that: "restrict access to programs or, services, or employment, or otherwise discriminate, contrary to applicable laws, on the basis of prohibited grounds, including sex, genetic characteristics, religion, race, national or ethnic origin, colour, mental or physical disability, sexual orientation, or gender identity or expression; advocate intolerance, discrimination and/or prejudice; or actively work to undermine or restrict a woman's access to sexual and reproductive health services."

"We will closely monitor the participation of charities and faith-based organizations in the 2019 program and trust the review of applications will be undertaken in a fair and equitable manner, consistent with the rich make-up of Canadian society which includes people of faith," the CCCB said.

The CCCB said the changes "indicate a willingness to listen seriously to faith-based institutions" on the part of the government and reflect "the importance of respect of conscience and freedom of religious expression."

The revision remains problematic, however, for prolife groups advocating for a change in Canada's legal vacuum regarding abortion, with no laws restricting abortion for all nine months of pregnancy. A range of prolife organizations have spoken out against the revision.

Alissa Golob, co-founder and executive director of [It Starts Right Now](#), said the revisions are even worse for pro-life Canadians.

“Now the government is going one step further by saying that if you’re personally pro-life as an organization or institution, that’s fine, as long as you shut up about it,” she said.

Barry Bussey, director legal affairs at the [Canadian Council of Christian Charities](#) (CCCC), pointed out in a Jan. 3 blog post “although abortion was decriminalized in 1988, there is no such constitutional right.”

“Of course, that could change, given the activist nature of the Supreme Court of Canada in recent decades – but, to date, the Court has not declared a positive, unrestricted right to abortion,” he wrote. “The current government ignores that fact and wishes the law to be what it is not.”

He recalled how last year the government’s “ideological commitment to abortion and other issues involving sexuality was imposed, without exemption or accommodation.”

“This totalitarian approach was roundly rejected by religious and secular groups across the country,” he said, noting the government “refused to back down” and consequently over 1,500 charities refused to participate.

“It is not lost on anyone that 2019 is an election year,” Bussey wrote. “The government decided that things had to change, if for no other reason than political expediency.”

The CCCC is leaving it up to its member organizations whether to apply for the program under the revised application.

Bussey notes they may require legal advice in filling out the applications request for the employer to describe how they are “providing a safe, inclusive and healthy work environment free of harassment and discrimination (eg. hiring practices, policies, guidelines).”

“It would appear that the government is still seeking to impose its ideology on the process,” Bussey wrote. “The government is trying to determine whether there is, in their view, discrimination against those who do not agree with the religious beliefs and practices of a religious charity.”

“Special care must be taken in filling this out to ensure there is nothing to ‘trigger’ the ideological concerns of government bureaucrats. At the same time, applicants must remain honest and accurate – it would not be advisable to deliberately or inadvertently mislead the government or misuse funds for a job that does not match the description given.”

“Human rights legislation across Canada allows Canadians, in certain circumstances, to discriminate,” he said. “Christian organizations can require employees to abide by a lifestyle agreement, or a code of conduct, which is in keeping with their religious beliefs and practices. The organization has to show that it is a ‘bona fide occupational requirement.’”

Legal challenges of last year's CSJ program involving [Toronto Right to Life](#) and several charities and small businesses are still before the federal court and one case is before the Alberta Court of Queen's Bench.

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