

Catholic Women's League presses Ottawa on summer jobs attestation and palliative care

The Catholic Women's League (CWL) delegation came away from meetings on Parliament Hill optimistic there may be changes to the Canada Summer Jobs attestation.

"It's really charter rights that seem to be infringed upon with [the attestation], because people were being forced to connect employment of summer students with values they did not share," said Anne-Marie Gorman, the national president of the CWL, Canada's largest women's group with more than 80,000 members.

"Therefore it made it very difficult for Catholic communities applying government funding. They simply could not do it."

The three-women delegation also included national president-elect and chairperson of organization Fran Lucas who is based in Edmonton; and chairperson of resolutions Cathy Bouchard who came to Ottawa Nov. 26-28 armed with resolutions passed at the CWL's National Convention in August, and in previous years.

The Canada Summer Jobs resolution calls for the CWL to "urge the federal government to remove the attestation for all future Canada Summer Jobs programs.

"I got the impression it's going to be different," said Gorman, noting she expects it might be more in line with what the CWL and the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops (CCCB) has been calling for.



Cathy Bouchard

“No one said, ‘Yes, we’re going to change it,’” said Bouchard, who is based in St. Albert.

But everyone they spoke to on both sides of the aisle said, “it’s going to be looked at and it’s going to be different next year.”

Last December, the federal government changed the policy regarding Canada Summer Jobs grants, requiring applicants to attest the mandate of the organization supports Charter rights, including a “right” to abortion.

The delegation also brought a palliative care resolution that calls on the CWL to “urge the federal government to legislate the designation of hospice/palliative care services in facilities to exclude medical assistance in dying.”

“We’re concerned, overall about conscience rights being eroded in different areas, for physicians and health care providers in the provision of medical aid in dying (MAiD) and their requiring the attestation,” said Bouchard.

“We know there are young people trying to get a summer job to support themselves in university who may not be well-formed in their faith,” Bouchard said. “They don’t understand they are giving up their conscience rights as a Catholic.”

Bouchard said the CWL is concerned with the language of the attestation because it may not be “clear to the person in the pew what rights might be eroded because of the careful political wording.”

“We’re asking them to completely eliminate the attestation,” said Gorman.

The delegation did not meet with Employment Minister Patti Hadju who is in charge of the program, or one of her representatives. They did meet, however, with people from the offices of Justice Minister Jody Wilson-Raybould; of Crown-Indigenous Affairs Minister Carolyn Bennett; of Indigenous Services Minister Jane Philpott; and Health Minister Ginette Petitpas Taylor.

They also met with former Conservative justice minister now justice critic Rob Nicholson; and several opposition MPs, including MP Marilyn Gladu, who is expecting soon the federal government's proposed national framework for palliative care as required by her private member's Bill C-277 that passed into law in Dec. 2017.



Conservative MP Marilyn Gladu

Gladu pointed out that British Columbia is forcing palliative care facilities and hospices to also provide MAiD, to have the same people providing palliative care also carrying out euthanasia.

“B.C. is going against the World Health Organizations definitions and best practices for palliative care,” she said, noting the definition says “palliative care does not hasten death in any way.”

Gladu said she was happy to meet with the CWL delegation. “They are an important stakeholder because they represent 82,000 women across Canada.”

The national framework for palliative care must be presented by law by Dec. 11, though Gladu expects it earlier than that.

“My only disappointment was there was no money announced for it in the economic update,” she said. “When the [health minister] tables the framework, I will be looking for a funding announcement to go along with it. A plan without funds

won't happen."

The CWL delegation was happy to meet with staff from the two ministers handling Indigenous affairs.

"We were very interested in finding out what we might be able to do," said Gorman.

"The big thing we talked about was water and education and children on reserves need so much," she said, noting the government has a goal of reducing to zero drinking water advisories by 2021.

Gorman noted the CWL had a resolution on forming relationships with our Indigenous sisters, to be able to "access entry into their world," to "educate ourselves" and find out how we can help.

Bouchard pointed out resolutions not only call for lobbying the government, but for individual members to get involved. For example, on the resolution on palliative care, one of the liberal staffers they met with suggested they could play a role in visiting the sick, Bouchard said.

Gorman noted the government officials assured them no changes were coming to the law on MAiD to make it more liberal, but that the government is in the process of collecting data.

"It's not all about going to government them, asking them to do things," said Gorman. "We got 80,000 members. There's a lot of things 80,000 women can accomplish."

"It's a privilege to go to government," said Gorman. "We've been welcomed since 1974. We take it very seriously no matter what government is in power at the time."