

# Outrage won't sway Liberals on jobs attestation: Sohi

Liberal MP Amarjeet Sohi faced hard questions and cries of outrage from frustrated constituents, but he defended his government's controversial Canada Summer Jobs attestation.



Amarjeet Sohi, MP for Edmonton Mill Woods

"The attestation is not going to change," Sohi, the MP for Edmonton Mill Woods, told more than 80 people at a town hall at Mill Woods Assembly church. "If that is the core mandate of your organization, to discriminate, to deny women the right to an abortion, then you will not qualify for funding."

Leaders from the Catholic, Jewish and Muslim faiths across Canada – including Edmonton Archbishop Richard Smith and the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops – say the Trudeau government's new requirement for Canada Summer Jobs funding is an attack on religious freedom.

Organizations are expected to attest that their "core mandate" supports Charter and reproductive rights, including the right to an abortion, as well as the government's gender ideology.

Political and faith leaders say that amounts to an attack on their religious freedom.

"This attestation is unacceptable. In effect, it simply excludes any Catholic parish, organization or charity from funding for hiring a summer student,"

Archbishop Smith wrote in a recent letter to Catholic parishes, charities and organizations.



**Allen Verbeek**

“In checking this box, they’re getting us to affirm that we will silence our right to our conscience, our religious beliefs,” said Allen Verbeek, a vice-president at The King’s University, a Christian institution in Edmonton. “They either don’t get that or choose to ignore that.”

Refusing to sign the attestation will mean that an application for funding will be denied. The Edmonton Archdiocese stands to lose between \$10,000 to \$20,000 earmarked for hiring staff at Catholic youth camps.

Others are in a similar position.



**Ryan Waine**

“We’re blessed to have camps and do camps and be able to continue this summer, but our future is in question,” said Ryan Waine, who is concerned Mill Woods Assembly youth camps are at risk.

Kieran Verghese, who also attends Mill Woods Assembly, says the government’s attestation requirement has had an unintended consequence.

“Now they put this in place, it’s at a point where now we feel as if we’re discriminated against.”

Ironically, even some who support the government’s social agenda say the

attestation goes too far.



**Neil Singh**

“You shouldn’t force faiths to sign something they don’t believe in. It’s not good policy,” said Neil Singh, who is pro-choice and supports the government’s gender ideology. “In that way it becomes discriminatory.”

Sohi defended the attestation, noting faith groups are still eligible for funding—provided their activities don’t directly involve challenging Charter or reproductive rights. And Prime Minister Justin Trudeau himself reiterated his support for faith groups during a visit to Edmonton last month.



**Garnett Genuis**

Nevertheless, Conservative MP Garnett Genuis, a Catholic, told the town hall that the attestation needs to be reworded or removed entirely.

“This attestation and the rhetoric around it is deeply disparaging to faith communities and the good work that they are doing,” said Genuis, the MP for Sherwood Park-Fort Saskatchewan.

Genuis' fellow Conservative MP, Karen Vecchio, has put a motion forward in the House of Commons to allow "non-activist, non-political" organizations to access Canada Summer Jobs funding without signing the attestation.

Asked how he would vote on March 19, Sohi avoided a direct answer, saying that it's the government's responsibility to defend people's rights. Sohi serves in the Trudeau cabinet as minister of infrastructure and communities.



Aleena Zelman

Aleena Zelman, who attended the town hall, said she hopes Sohi will realize the gravity of the outrage.

"It raised a lot of important questions for Sohi, because I don't think he quite understands the perspective we are coming from," said Zelman, a Christian.

"He needs to learn more of why this is so upsetting to Christians or people who believe in this."

Genuis said concerned Canadians should contact their local MP about the motion, saying that despite the current Liberal majority, the upcoming vote on the attestation may be a surprise.

"There really has been a groundswell around this issue, so people providing that additional contact will make a difference."