

This year's National March for Life may become an online event

There will be some sort of national March for Life event on May 14, but whether there will be an actual march through the streets of the nation's capital and a rally of thousands of pro-life Canadians at Parliament Hill is still to be determined.

Organizers of the largest pro-life event in Canada have cancelled indoor events surrounding the March for Life, but are making plans to hold an online event in case the actual rally and march have to be cancelled because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

"There will be a March for Life on May 14 no matter what happens," said Debbie Duval, national capital organizer for the Campaign Life Coalition. "Whether it will be like past years or not, we don't know yet. We are monitoring the situation."

Duval said if the rally and march in Ottawa is called off for public safety reasons, the national March for Life could become an online event.

"We still have the event booked," Duval said. "We are keeping our eyes and ears open to what is happening with other outdoor events at that time in Ottawa and what the health authorities are saying. We are working on a possible online solution if the march has to be put off."

The Ontario government has declared a state of emergency to try and slow the spread of COVID-19, which has killed thousands of people, mostly in Europe, China and Iran so far.

The government's emergency declaration, which prohibits all organized public events of more than 50 people in the province, is in effect until March 31 but can be extended for an additional 14 days. If the province wants to maintain emergency measures after that, it could pass additional legislation.

All provincial governments and the federal government say they will take whatever measures are necessary to slow the spread of the virus, and have taken steps to shut down public events across the country.

"We are acting on the best advice of our chief medical officer of health and other leading public health officials across the province," said Christine Elliott, Ontario's deputy premier and minister of health.

"We know these measures will affect people's everyday lives, but they are necessary to ensure that we can slow the spread of COVID-19 and protect our people," she said.

Campaign Life Coalition has been organizing the National March for Life in Ottawa since 1998. A statement released on March 19 said CLC is heeding public health warnings and cancelling a number of associated indoor events that week. Cancelled events include a candlelight vigil for victims of abortion slated for May 13, the rose dinner and youth banquet May 14 and a youth conference on May 15.

According to CLC, last year more than 31,000 Canadians participated in the national and associated provincial rallies.

Duval said rescheduling the event until the fall would be difficult because a lot of attendees at the events are students who are bused to the rally from the Greater Toronto Area. She said with students already having missed a lot of class time due to current closures and prior strike actions by teachers this year, asking teachers and students to attend a rally next September or October would be difficult.

Duval said there is no set date for when a decision to cancel the march and rally in Ottawa must be made, although she said it would likely have to be made by the middle of April.

Duval urged those who were planning to attend the march to monitor the CLC web site for updates.