



Legal opposition continues to gather against a new rule for a long-standing Canadian summer jobs program, which requires grant applicants to affirm abortion access as a human right.

Previous legal challenges have concerned prospective grantees' right to advocate against abortion, but newer challenges now cite arguments about religious freedom and compelled speech, the Canadian newspaper *The National Post* reported.

The Canada Summer Job Grants program has funded an estimated 70,000 summer jobs for secondary school or college students, granting small businesses, non-profit organizations, and religious employers the money to fill positions such as camp counselors or landscapers.

Under the grant application's new clause, non-profits and for-profit organizations must check a box affirming their consistency with Canada's Charter of Rights and Freedoms, relevant case law, and the Canadian government's commitments to the human rights it recognizes. These include "women's rights and women's reproductive rights, and the rights of gender-diverse and transgender Canadians."

The wording has drawn objection from foes of abortion, among others.

Among those challenging the new requirement is Power To Change, a Christian campus ministry, which filed a federal lawsuit in late May. Its applications for grants for 44 summer jobs were rejected because it included a letter stating its objections: "Our belief is contrary to the current government's view on women's reproductive rights. Our

honestly held belief is protected under the Charter,” the objections said.

The Toronto Right to Life Association had filed the first federal challenge against the requirement in January, a case that has been slowed by additional allegations. A September hearing will address allegations that the government wrongly withheld documents during the disclosure process.

However, Power To Change contested a government request that the court consolidate its case with the pro-life group or stay its proceedings until the case is decided. The campus ministry group said it is not principally involved in raising awareness about abortion and the government would gain “a significant tactical advantage” by tying religious objections to the anti-abortion objections.

Power To Change said its challenge represents “a far larger segment of the non-profit sector.” Its challenge contended that the requirement is overbroad and blocks funding not only to groups acting against abortion, but also to “organizations that do not have this mandate.”

Private businesses are also challenging the new requirement for summer jobs grants.

Saturn Machine Works Ltd., a manufacturing company in southeast Edmonton, on July 3 applied for judicial review of its rejected application.

“No government should be using the power of the state to coerce a business to express agreement with government ideology in order to receive funding to help employ students,” said Kurt Feigel, the business’ owner, the Edmonton Journal reports.

The business had applied to fund a student position through the summer jobs program but did not check the box on the application affirming agreement with the values. It attached a letter seeking accommodation to remain neutral. The application was returned

as “incomplete and therefore ineligible for assessment.”

Saturn Machine Works is backed by Free to Do Business Canada. Its spokesperson, Tamara Jansen, characterized the issue as “compelled speech.”

“We wouldn’t make employees state their views on their stances on reproductive rights,” she said. “Being asked to do this is an incredible overreach of the government.”

Jansen has been involved in pro-life work, but she said this work is unrelated.

Sarnia Concrete Products Ltd. filed a case in late June arguing that it does not take a position on abortion or “other political, moral, ethical and social issues” that are “completely unrelated to its business.”

Roy Botma, the company’s CEO, has served on the boards of many Christian groups and Redeemer University College. The legal challenge aims to argue the right of his business to maintain neutrality, according to Free To Do Business, which announced the court challenge.

Opponents of the mandate have considered whether to file civil lawsuits or a human rights tribunal case alleging discriminatory government spending. Applications for federal court must be filed within 30 days after the rejection of grants.

In January the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops said the new policy “seriously undermines the right to religious freedom since the Government of Canada is directly limiting the right of religious traditions to hold, teach and practice their principles and values in public.”

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