



To the Honourable Jim Prentice, Premier of Alberta;  
The Honourable Gordon Dirks, Education Minister;  
To All Alberta MLAs:

November 25, 2014

I write today to express great concern and opposition to a private member's bill introduced recently by a member of the Alberta Liberal party, Bill 202.

Bill 202 has been given the title of Safe and Inclusive Schools, but it's clear that the bill is actually *Exclusive*: it would exclude parents, exclude choice, and exclude freedom.

I hope all MLAs carefully consider the ramifications of this dangerous bill. If MLAs are given the freedom to vote as they think best, they should vote against Bill 202 since this bill - even with amendments - would take away the freedom of parents to educate as parents think best.

This bill would actually take away freedom from all Albertans in the following ways. Although the Education Act, passed in 2012, includes language which makes clear that parents are the primary educators of their children - and that includes ALL parents, not just those who home educate - Bill 202 would work to undermine parental authority, reduce educational choice, and limit freedom of speech as well.

As per Section 11.1 of the Alberta Human Rights Act, parents currently have the choice to remove their children from Alberta classrooms if topics are to be discussed that include religion or sexuality, topics which many parents think would be better taught by parents when the parents decide it is appropriate. Bill 202 would repeal that right to choose.

Another goal of the bill would be to force school boards to form one kind of student group to the exclusion of all others, as if one response is the only way to be supportive of certain students and all other responses are inadequate and wrong. This 'one-size-fits-all' approach would clearly reduce educational choice, dismantle useful groups and projects already in place, and focus solely on one group of students when there are many who need support.

A third goal of this bill would be to enforce agreement with the Alberta Human Rights Act as the definition of the 'common values of Albertans'.

This would be a 'proscriptive' measure, forcing the teaching of the AHRA not in terms of "thou shalt obey this law" but in terms of "thou shalt *believe* this and not have any other beliefs".

Forcing agreement with any law is totalitarian and would reduce freedom of speech as well as freedom of thought and belief, in contravention of the Fundamental Freedoms listed at the very beginning of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

In addition, while the AHRA may be in current use, human rights acts in Alberta and other parts of Canada have come under fire as critics point out that they have often been used as cudgels to harass and intimidate groups and individuals with strong views.

The AHRA is flawed, as many such acts in Canada are, and takes an 'assumed guilty' point of view before adjudicators who may have little legal training and are not bound by the same rules of evidence or the traditional rights of due process that bind our courts.

Human rights can still be respected without needing to be enforced by the AHRA and the free speech of teachers and students should not be restricted through forced agreement.

To reiterate, Bill 202 is called the Safe and Inclusive Schools, but the bill would exclude parents, exclude choice, and exclude freedom.

I ask all MLAs to carefully consider and then vote against this very dangerous bill.



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