

September 21st, 2007

By courier and fax

The Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne
Minister
Ministry of Education
22nd Floor - 900 Bay Street
Toronto, Ontario
M7A 1L2
Fax: 416-325-2608

Dear Minister:

Re: Public Funding of Religious Schools

Enclosed, is a copy of a brief to you from the Canadian Civil Liberties Association (CCLA). As you will note, the brief outlines a number of unacceptable developments that would be likely to flow from any widespread funding of religious schools in this province. Such funding could well trigger a migration of students from the public schools to various religious schools. Deprived of the kind and size of constituency they now enjoy, the public schools would no longer be able to perform the integrative function they now do. The result, in time, could be a much less tolerant Ontario.

No matter what happens in the forthcoming elections, the situation is such that this issue is not likely to fade from the scene. As long as the Roman Catholic separate schools remain fully funded out of the public purse, the other religious communities will feel like victims of unjust discrimination.

It is worth noting that the Catholic funding arrangement was inherited, not initiated, by contemporary Ontario society. This arrangement owes its origin to a 140 year old bargain between the groups that founded this country. It was never designed to favour them at the expense of anyone else; it was designed to iron out the equities between them. Thus, it cannot legitimately operate so as to justify all the risks and disadvantages in the current proposal to fund all religious schools. The historic anomaly of Catholic funding should not be resolved by any measure that would be likely to worsen the situation. Accordingly, there is no adequate argument for – and many valid arguments against – the idea of funding all religious schools.

Having said that, the Canadian Civil Liberties Association believes that the time is ripe to reassess the merits of Catholic school funding. The circumstances in today's Ontario differ quite substantially from those that obtained in pre-Confederation Upper Canada. In today's multi-religious, multi-cultural, and heterogeneous Ontario, there is simply no justification – if ever there was one – for conferring special benefits on the Catholic community. Both Quebec and Newfoundland initiated constitutional amendments that effectively disbanded the public Catholic and other religious school systems then in place.

It is important, therefore, to repeal this anomaly. No religious schools in this province should receive public funding. We urge the government of Ontario to begin the process of constitutional amendment so that the anachronism of Catholic school funding will be eliminated.

Sincerely,

A. Alan Borovoy
General Counsel

Noa Mendelsohn Aviv
Director, Freedom of Expression Project