



**Abortion Rights  
Coalition of Canada**

*Your Voice for Choice*

*Canada's only national political pro-choice advocacy group*

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October 25, 2023

### **Re Canada Summer Jobs program**

Dear Members of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities,

I'm the Executive Director of the Abortion Rights Coalition of Canada (ARCC) and am writing to express support for the current eligibility requirements for the Canada Summer Jobs Program, and to ask you not to change those requirements in a way that would give eligibility to groups that primarily work to oppose human rights, or allow applicants to use CSJ funds to discriminate or undermine human rights.

In this brief, I provide some history and context on these aspects of the eligibility requirements, and why they should be maintained.

It was our group ARCC that first raised attention to the issue in April 2017 via a [press release](#) that revealed several extremist anti-abortion groups had received almost \$350,000 in CSJ funding between 2010 and 2017 (although many more anti-abortion groups were also receiving funds).

Two days later, an [iPolitics report](#) by Amanda Connolly blew open the issue, revealing that Liberal MP Iqra Khalid had allocated more than \$50,000 in federal summer job funding in 2016 to the Canadian Centre for Bio-Ethical Reform, a group known for its fanatical opposition to abortion rights. Their main activity, which CSJ funds was bankrolling, is to display and distribute very offensive and graphic pictures of alleged aborted fetuses in dozens of cities across Canada, using large sidewalk signs and flyers delivered to homes without consent.

The Liberal government responded quickly, promising to make anti-abortion groups ineligible for the funding. In December 2017, the CSJ program was changed to require groups to sign an attestation that their "core mandate" (activity) was not to oppose human rights and that they would "respect" human rights (i.e., not work to oppose them) in their disbursement of funds.

While religious groups were eligible for the program under this attestation requirement, they raised fears about having to “attest” that they support abortion rights – which was incorrect but arose from confusion over the meaning of the contentious terms “core mandate” and “respect” for rights. Even I raised concerns in the media, urging the government to issue a clarification to “correct the confusions” and “mitigate the effects of any lawsuits.”

After extensive consultations with religious groups and human rights groups, the Liberal government amended the CSJ program in December 2018. Basically, the language about discrimination and rights was moved from the attestation itself to the eligibility requirements, and contentious terms such as “core mandate” and “respect” were removed. The wording of the eligibility requirements, under Ineligible projects and job activities, is as follows:

- Projects or job activities that:
  - restrict access to programs, services, or employment, or otherwise discriminate, contrary to applicable laws, on the basis of prohibited grounds, including sex, genetic characteristics, religion, race, national or ethnic origin, colour, mental or physical disability, sexual orientation, or gender identity or expression
  - advocate intolerance, discrimination and/or prejudice, or
  - actively work to undermine or restrict a woman’s access to sexual and reproductive health services

My understanding is that the change put in place in December 2018 ***still has the same basic effect as the original attestation***. Anti-choice and other groups that primarily work to oppose human rights have their applications rejected out of hand, while churches and religious organizations remain eligible as long as they don’t use CSJ funds to discriminate, such as by refusing to hire 2S/LGBTQ+ youth, or spending the funds in a way that discriminates or undermines rights. By the way, these rights include not just reproductive rights, but also 2S/LGBTQ+ rights, racial equality, the right to medical assistance in dying, and any other fundamental right protected under our Charter and human rights codes.

When groups have a **main focus** on opposing human rights, funding them would contradict and harm the government’s obligation to ensure equality. Regardless of the CSJ job – even if it’s to mow the lawn – that work gives sustenance to the group’s harmful mandate and activities. The government was correct to deny such groups eligibility for CSJ funding and should continue to do so.

The change to eligibility has been working very well as far as we can tell. CSJ funds to anti-abortion and other anti-human rights groups have virtually stopped since 2017. In 2021, the group Priests for Life mistakenly got CSJ funding – \$3,362 from the Essex riding in Ontario. But when the group applied again for funding this year, it was correctly denied. As I stated in a May 2023 letter to WAGE Minister Marci Ien:

“Although Priests for Life Canada has charitable status under ‘advancement of religion’ they are not just a religious group – they are an anti-choice group that works *primarily* to oppose abortion, medical assistance in dying, 2S/LGBTQI+ rights, and other human rights, as shown by their website. ... The issue is not whether they are literally protesting in front of abortion clinics. The key issue is that they will use the money to advance their vision and programs, most of which aim to build, equip, and mobilize people to oppose abortion, medical assistance in dying, 2S/LGBTQI+ rights, and other human rights. This directly violates requirements of the Canada Summer Jobs program...”

To conclude, I ask that you please maintain the current eligibility requirements for the Canada Summer Jobs Program, because their positive effect has been to bar applicants whose primary mandate and activities are to oppose human rights, in addition to any group that would directly use CSJ funds to discriminate or undermine human rights.

Thank you very much.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "J Arthur". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

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