



Abortion Rights
Coalition of Canada

Your Voice for Choice

Coalition pour le droit à
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Canada's only national political pro-choice advocacy group

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For immediate release

September 17, 2013

City of Kelowna Denies Anti-Choice Group's Request to Proclaim "Protect Human Life Week"

KELOWNA — The Communications Supervisor for the City of Kelowna, Tom Wilson, has advised pro-choice activists that the City's proclamation policy was reviewed by Council, and as a result, the application made by the Kelowna Right to Life Society (KRLS) for a proclamation of "Protect Human Life Week" has been denied.

Last year, the group's application for the same proclamation was approved by the City. Pro-choice activists complained, but Mayor Walter Gray would not rescind the proclamation despite a national petition garnering more than 600 signatures, as well as a five-day protest at City Hall.

The KRLS had also applied to fly their "pro-life" flag from City Hall last year, but after outrage erupted in Kelowna and across the country, the flag was not allowed.

Local pro-choice activist Dianne Varga, and Joyce Arthur, Executive Director of the Abortion Rights Coalition of Canada (ARCC), commend the Mayor on his decision this year. "We're glad the mayor recognized that this proclamation would continue to divide the community because of its controversial anti-abortion message," said Arthur.

"The proclamation could not be justified from the point of view of policy," said Varga. "The City's proclamation policy states that an organization's objectives and activities must benefit the community as a whole in order for any application to be approved. Just last week, the Kelowna Right to Life Society displayed graphic photos of aborted fetuses outside a high school, much to the dismay and anger of students and other members of the community. The activities of this organization clearly divide the community rather than bringing people together."

In addition, proclamations are meant to promote awareness of causes that have significance to the city and civic initiatives. “The anti-abortion cause of the Kelowna Right to Life Society fails to meet this criterion in any way whatsoever,” said Varga.

“Although the wording of the proclamation may have sounded harmless, anti-abortion groups can and do exploit official declarations,” said Arthur. She explained that cities must look critically at the groups behind these requests, referring to an incident in August when the City of Regina declared “European Heritage Week,” which the mayor immediately rescinded when he discovered that a white supremacist group was behind the request.

“The underlying intent of the ‘Protect Human Life’ message is instantly recognizable by women who are aware of right-wing attacks on their rights,” said Arthur. “The main purpose of the Kelowna Pro-Life Society is to oppose abortion. The organization has used proclamations in the past as a vehicle to challenge women’s right to access safe and legal abortion, and thereby women’s basic legal rights and equality. The mayor was right to deny the group its proclamation this year because it amounted to discrimination against women.”

“Meanwhile, we’re continuing our efforts in Kamloops, where the City refused last week to rescind its approval of a large street banner likewise declaring ‘Protect Human Life Week’,” said Varga. “We hope the mayor of Kamloops will take careful note of Kelowna’s decision and take down the banner.”

“All cities across Canada need to respect the *Charter of Rights and Freedoms* and human rights codes by not approving cloaked messages from groups seeking to overturn those rights,” said Arthur. “We hope to use our success in Kelowna to educate mayors in other towns and cities.”

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