

Statement by Lou Iacobelli, Chairperson, The Parental Rights in Education Defense Fund

Date: June 23, 2016

Location: Superior Court house, Hamilton, ON

As chair of The Parental Rights in Education Defense Fund (PRIEDF), we believe we have reached a new low in Ontario when it comes to parental rights and freedom of choice in education. Both the Wynne's Liberal government and the Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario (ETFO) have decided to make a case against parental rights. The Attorney General of Ontario will argue in court telling a judge to outlaw parental rights in the province. Parents should be outraged.

The courageous Hamilton father, Mr. Steve Turloukis, initiated a lawsuit, in September 2012, against the Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board. The legal action was commenced after the school board refused to give him advance notice of controversial sex education lessons. He was told both to his face and in writing, that he would not be allowed to withdraw his children from such lessons, even if it undermined his family's religious beliefs, as practicing Greek Orthodox Christians. After years of stall tactics by the school board, the father is finally scheduled to have his first court hearing tomorrow.

This new-found position against parental rights by Kathleen Wynne is a total reversal of the long-standing Ministry of Education policy which has always held that a parent could withdraw their child from **ANY** lesson they found objectionable. It even contradicts a letter signed by Kathleen Wynne herself on April 17, 2008, when **she** was Education Minister. She wrote in that letter, and I quote: "Should the component of any course conflict with a religious belief of the parent (of minor-age children)... the right to withdraw from that component of the course shall be granted, on the written request of the parent". I have copies of that signed letter from then Education Minister Kathleen Wynne here with me for those of you who'd like one.

Furthermore, since the new Liberal sex ed. curriculum was introduced in 2015, both Premier Wynne and the Minister of Education repeatedly tried to pacify parental concerns over age-inappropriate lessons by telling reporters over and over that parents would be allowed to opt-out their children from any lessons they find controversial. Those promises by Kathleen Wynne and her Minister of Education can be found in many a news article.

So, the spectacle witnessed today, whereby the Wynne government has intervened to **PREVENT** a father from being able to excuse his children from lessons that offend his family's religious beliefs, is absolutely astonishing. Folks, today, the Liberal government today asked a judge to take away this father's parental rights. Inexcusable! If Kathleen Wynne and the HWDSB prevail, the State will have a judicial precedent authorizing it to take away everyone's parental rights. That tyranny must not come to pass. A truly democratic government would be defending, rather than asking the court to condone the total violation of parental rights, which are even guaranteed in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

The Fund was formed after observing that the fundamental right to raise and educate children in a manner consistent with a family's religious and moral beliefs was being increasingly challenged. PRIEDF exists to assist parents in obtaining legal counsel to defend their inherent rights as the primary educators of their children.

The government and the school board are using taxpayer money in an effort to undermine and do away with parental rights. This morally and legally wrong. As chairperson of PRIEDF, I believe we must to take action to defend these rights before they are gone for good both for our children and ourselves.