

**STATEMENT OF DR. EUSTATHIOS TOURLOUKIS (the parent/applicant) TO BE  
READ AT THE PRESS CONFERENCE**

My name is Steve Turloukis. I am a dentist, a husband and a father of two. My children attend an elementary school within the Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board, and my wife is a teacher within that same school board. I am also a committed Christian. My family and I are faithful members of our Greek-Orthodox Church.

As committed Christians, my family and I have sincerely held religious beliefs which guide our views on certain issues, such as marriage, family and human sexuality. As such, it is important for my children to be taught about these issues from a Christian perspective. As a Christian, I hold the sincere religious belief that I am required, by God and the Greek Orthodox Church, to raise my children according to biblical principles and the tenets of the Christian faith.

As my children's primary caregiver and guardian, I must ensure that my children abstain from certain activities and behaviours and those activities may include engaging in classes or lessons which promote or encourage views which are contrary to our faith.

In the spring of 2010, I attended a meeting at the Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board's head office where the board's Equity Policy, as well as some of the teaching materials to be used, were introduced and explained to parents. During that meeting, and amidst an angry crowd, parents were assured that the school board would provide religious accommodation when sought. Several weeks later, I received a copy of a document provided to teachers, which was not intended for public release, containing scripted answers to shut down possible objections from parents regarding the Equity Policy. At that point, I wrote the school board and requested that my children be permitted to abstain from certain classes and activities. The board responded by refusing to provide the religious accommodation I was seeking.

I responded by pointing to their own Equity Policy which specifically required that the school board provide religious accommodation and again requested accommodation. I was then invited to meet with the Principal of my children's school as well as the board's Equity Principal. I accepted the invitation.

During this meeting, which lasted over an hour and a half, I was repeatedly told that to permit my children to leave the class during certain lessons would somehow be discrimination against other children. The solution offered to me was rather insulting. It was suggested I should leave the school board and enroll my children in private school or try homeschooling. Therefore, to accommodate the religious beliefs of my family in a manner that has been previously endorsed by the Ministry of Education –by opting out of certain lessons – would somehow be to discriminate against some children. However, telling my family that we were no longer welcome in the school system because of our beliefs was **NOT** considered discriminatory. I was stunned by the hypocrisy.

Following that meeting, I wrote the school board, asking that I at least be provided with advance notification of classes which would cover material dealing with marriage and human sexuality. I received no response, and after three weeks, I wrote the board's superintendent asking her for a response, which I received. My request was again denied.

In early July, I wrote the board, asking if they would reconsider their position and provide me with the religious accommodation I was seeking. The school board wrote me to advise that they would have a formal response to me before the beginning of this school year. To my great disappointment, the Board did not follow through on that promise. We've already gone through the first week of school and I only received a response Friday September 7<sup>th</sup>, which once again, denied my religious accommodation. The school board, it seems, has no interest in working with my family. This does not seem consistent with how the board has treated other groups. It has found ways to accommodate these other groups. Why not accommodate my family? Does our being Christian somehow disqualify us from receiving equitable treatment? Despairing, I went to the Parental Rights In Education Defense Fund for help. Having exhausted all opportunities for constructive dialogue and informal dispute resolution, I feel that I have no choice but to seek redress through the courts.

I did not want it to come to this. I did not want to commence legal proceedings against the school board, where my children go to school and where my wife and many other family members work, but I could not simply permit the school board to violate my family's right to religious freedom and religious accommodation – longstanding Canadian rights. My hope is that the courts will affirm my constitutional and human rights to religious belief. In a school system that prides itself on being inclusive, I hope my children and other children of religious families will not only be included in the school system, but welcomed as equally valuable members of Canadian society.