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From: Fr. Isaac Longworth [REDACTED]

Date: Wed, Jul 3, 2024 at 12:33 PM

Thank you for the role of leadership that you have on the the Community and Protective Services Committee and the City of London Council. I recognize that you have a crucial task in safeguarding our basic freedoms as Canadians, and today I am asking that you please continue to do so, even on a contentious issue like abortion.

When I was in Grade 10, I was walking down the street with my friends and I saw people holding signs that had large pictures of fetal imagery on them, both before and after an abortion procedure. I remember being very shocked by what I was seeing in public, but it also caused me to really look at my own assumptions about abortion and the reality of it. While it was certainly uncomfortable for me to wrestle with my own thoughts and feelings about the issue - nevertheless I realized that those people who were holding those signs, had caused me to think critically about the whole subject of abortion - and I was honestly glad that they provoked such a response in me. That was 16 years ago, but that memory remains with me to this day.

The reason I share this story, is because I understand that there is a motion calling for restrictions on any leaflets or signage with fetal imagery, targeting the pro-life message in particular. A legal challenge has been launched against a similar by-law in the City of St. Catharines because it violates the Charter - which upholds the most basic freedoms that all of us as Canadians share.

No doubt you are well aware of your responsibility under the Charter to not unjustifiably infringe freedom of expression. That Charter guarantee is designed to promote conversations, even when they're challenging or centered around controversial opinions held by citizens.

Canadian courts have consistently made it very clear that our Charter right to freedom of expression extends to all forms of non-violent expressive activity that conveys meaning. This includes, and I would argue - is most necessary - in the cases of expression that may be offensive or disturbing to some people, and most especially if the message is unpopular. This is so important, because in order for democracy to work well, it's important to have difficult conversations about all manner of things. We have challenging but important conversations on issues like climate change, racism, war and peace. Abortion is another contentious issue that is nonetheless important to be able to discuss in order to promote a truly free and democratic society.

To put it bluntly, this motion seems very dangerous, because it makes me ask the question "Why is the City of London targeting one particular group and one particular message for special restrictions?" This troubles me greatly, because in a democracy, the government should not be stifling speech from one side of a debate on a contentious issue. If this bylaw had been in place when I was in Grade 10, then I would not have had the opportunity to really wrestle with my own opinions about abortion, and I would remain immature in my views on the subject. Seeing those signs as a teenager profoundly impacted me and the way I approach politics today, and I'm so happy that people were there that day sharing their views in this manner. I don't want activists of any persuasion, to be silenced by their governments - and this bylaw that seeks to ban fetal imagery on leaflets and signage seems to do just that.

Many people are helped by hearing the pro-life message. While some people are offended by any expressed opposition to abortion, many people want to be fully informed and appreciate that photos of pre-born children are an important part of a challenging conversation.

With all of this in mind, I want to finish by saying that is crucially important that our government not single out one particular movement and one particular message for special restrictions. Can I count on you to vote against by-laws that place restrictions on freedom of expression that we all have - including pro-life Canadians, who have every right to show pictures of ultrasound images in public in order to convince others of their viewpoint? I certainly think that it is the right thing for you to do.

I give my consent to have this letter included in the Agenda and/or as part of the public record. Thank you for taking the time to read my thoughts on this topic. Please vote against any effort to place restrictions on pro-life speech.

Sincerely Fr. Isaac Longworth, CC