

September 17, 2018

A Call to Action

We need people in positions of power and influence to step up and act against the misinformation and the hate speech directed at the youth and their families of this province who live in fear every day.

Those of us out here without significant resources, are exhausted after more than a year of defending and explaining the SOGI 123 teacher resources. One year is long enough and I am tired. I am tired of the same conversation over and over again.

For many parents in Langley and throughout the Fraser Valley, this conversation began in September 2017 when a group of parents organized a community meeting regarding what they called the apparent “broad spectrum” of sexual orientations and gender identities that were addressed by SOGI 123. Their meetings inspired me to create a Facebook group to offer a supportive voice in our community.

In November 2017, I attended a rally supporting Barry Neufeld in Chilliwack and was shocked by what I witnessed: the height of an organized campaign of misinformation and fear mongering. Complete with aggressive fundraising that culminated in a table covered in cash filled envelopes. I kept thinking about what kind of climate their messaging would create for transgender students.

Our group was called Langley Parents for Inclusivity (now BC Families for Inclusivity) and we gathered to support the LGBT youth and the children of LGBT parents in our community. I could only imagine what it must have felt like to be the kids at the center of this debate? Together, we became a voice in support of SOGI 123.

Little did I know this issue would consume one full year of my life. Advocating for these kids and their families became our full-time job--- I say “our” because I didn’t do this work alone. A group, now over 1000 parents and concerned citizens have been speaking out on behalf of LGBT kids and their parents---many of whom do not feel safe to speak out themselves.

Over the past 12 months, messages of support from Minister of Education Rob Fleming and BCTF President Glen Hansman have been shared. While these messages have meaning, we wait for action.

While flyers containing inaccurate information regarding SOGI 123 have been handed out to businesses, parents on school grounds or distributed online, we wait for action.

While labels of “sex activist” or “child abuser” have been hurled at anyone supporting SOGI 123, we wait for action.

We continue to watch the proliferation of misinformation from a well-organized group seeking money and influence.

This conversation has moved from outside the classroom and into our communities. People have felt the need to leave their Churches, have experienced strained friendships or familial relationships.

This conversation has empowered people in our communities to engage in bigoted behaviour and for some parents to fear for the safety of their transgender children. This issue has also created a divide, one that impacts the community outside the classroom.

I am so tired of fighting back against this tide of discrimination.

I am tired of organizing and funding information sessions without any support because the school board couldn't take the project on last year, while "tensions were too high".

I am tired of organizing the multiple supportive rallies held at School Boards throughout the Valley or outside the BCTF Office.

I am tired of the endless hours of advocacy, the countless media interviews, the multiple meetings with community stakeholders.

But, through my tiredness, I am being motivated to continue when I think about the tears shed this past year, while reading messages from parents or grandparents thanking me for speaking out. Tears shed while reading a letter written by a transgender high school student that summarized the sheer hell high school life had been.

I have flown to Ottawa, at my own expense to attend a meeting with Special Advisor on LGBTQ2 issues MP Randy Boissonnault, after form letter responses weren't enough.

I am disappointed that my meeting last year with Minister Rob Fleming did not result in any significant response to the proliferation of misinformation regarding SOGI 123.

I am not seeking a pat on the back or sympathy; I have been honoured to be a voice for those parents that cannot speak themselves for fear of their child's safety. I am not the parent of transgender children and I simply cannot fathom fearing for my child's safety, simply for being themselves. These children shouldn't need to live a "stealth" existence because some adults feel uncomfortable.

This isn't a school board issue; this is a civil rights issue and matter of humanity---as in, where is the humanity or human dignity? I am tired of feeling like, we as parents, have been doing the job of the government.

Where is the action and where is the leadership by those elected to do the job? Where are the inclusive Church Leaders, while religion is being used as both a weapon and an excuse for discriminatory behaviour?

A marginalized community should not have to bear the weight of fighting discrimination.

This situation is not improving and now we are facing a municipal election. An election where candidates solely focused on eliminating inclusive resources are seeking election.

Let's be honest, for those organizing the anti-SOGI efforts, this has everything to do with furthering a political agenda. This is something many of us predicted one year ago and our kids in public schools will pay a price.

Enough is enough. There needs to be a consistent effort, across all school districts to inform and educate parents on what SOGI 123 looks like in the classroom. Websites are great, but there needs to be dialogue in our communities. There are too many outside sources that have been doing this job and now the misinformation has replaced fact.

Those in government or at School Districts cannot be afraid to take the lead.

Kind Regards,

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