

January 25, 2018

Dear Prime Minister/Minister Hajdu,

Re. Changes to the Canada Summer Jobs Grant Program

We the undersigned leaders of diverse faith communities and organizations in Canada, call on the Prime Minister and the Government of Canada to amend the Canada Summer Jobs guidelines and application process so that it does not compel agreement or belief, and allows religious organizations to stay true to their communal identity and beliefs. The new application requires each organization to give non-negotiable and unqualified affirmation of certain beliefs held by the current government.

Canada has a long history of cooperation and collaboration between religious organizations and governments in our health care and social welfare systems, and in many other areas of life.

Faith-based organizations wish to continue to partner with the federal government in delivering programming and services to vulnerable members of their local communities, including children and youth, newcomers to Canada, and people experiencing poverty and homelessness.

However, with the changes to the Canada Summer Jobs guidelines, many organizations will be deemed ineligible because they are unable or unwilling to attest that their “core mandate” and beliefs align with the current government’s position. These groups are being denied equal access to a government benefit solely because of their religious beliefs or conscientious objection.

In managing its programs, the government should respect and accommodate the diversity of values and beliefs within Canadian society and must itself abide by the *Charter* in its treatment of individuals and groups. The fundamental freedoms of conscience and religion, thought, belief, opinion and expression, as guaranteed in the *Charter*, must be respected and affirmed in legislation, regulations and policy.

The promise of a free and democratic society is that there be no religious or ideological tests or conditions to receiving government benefits or protection.

The changes to the Canada Summer Jobs guidelines and application not only violate the fundamental freedoms of faith-based organizations, they also significantly impact the broader communities served by their programs, often the most vulnerable in Canadian society.

Canada is known and widely respected as a religiously plural and multicultural society. Respect for the diversity of beliefs of all Canadians and meaningful engagement with those who hold differing beliefs is essential to maintaining a robust democracy. Please ensure that Canadians continue to benefit from collaboration between governments and faith-based organizations working together for the common good of our country.

Sincerely,

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