



Archdiocese
of Toronto

Catholic Pastoral Centre
1155 Yonge Street
Toronto, Ontario M4T 1W2
T 416.934.0606
www.archtoronto.org

MEMO

TO: Ontario Bishops

FROM: Neil MacCarthy, Director, Public Relations & Communications

DATE: 13/04/2017

RE: Province of Ontario - Bill 84 – Conscience Rights

Your Eminence, Your Grace, Your Excellency

I wanted to provide an update on the Call for Conscience Campaign. The information below has been shared with parishes in the Archdiocese of Toronto. If you would find it helpful to share with those in your diocese active in the campaign, feel free to do so. Thank you for your efforts on this most important initiative.

Call for Conscience Campaign Update

Thank you to all those who wrote letters, made phone calls and/or met with their Member of Provincial Parliament advocating for conscience protection in Bill 84, legislation relating to assisted suicide. Close to 30,000 letters were sent directly to our elected officials and many communities personally met with their local MPP on this issue. Thank you for your efforts!

On April 11, the Ontario Liberal majority on the Bill 84 committee voted to defeat Conservative Party amendments to protect the conscience rights of doctors/nurses. Therefore, no such protection will be in the legislation.

The Call for Conscience campaign also asked the government to establish a client care coordinator system allowing patients to directly access a “telehealth” line where they can be directed to information regarding end of life services including palliative care, pain management, home care and, if they so choose, assisted death. This will be taking place. While we pray that patients will not pursue assisted suicide, the model will eliminate the need for physician referral in most cases. The campaign asked for an approach consistent with what has been set up in Alberta (where conscientious objectors are not involved in any way). It appears the Ontario model will be modified and may still require a physician referral if requested, which remains problematic.

The Conservative Party has stated that they plan to introduce a private members’ bill in May on conscience rights. However, as the Liberals have a majority government, it is unlikely that the private members’ bill will pass. At present, there is a court case against the College of Physicians & Surgeons of Ontario (CPSO) by four doctors who are challenging their effective referral policy. If they win the case against the CPSO, it could force them to change their policy.

Regardless of outcome, there may be numerous appeals and we anticipate a lengthy road ahead.

We will continue to advocate for conscience protection moving forward and encourage you to share your concerns in any interaction you may have with your own MPP. Please continue to pray for all those impacted by issues of conscience and for all those who are sick and suffering among us. Thank you once again for your participation in the Call for Conscience campaign!