



Abortion Rights
Coalition of Canada

Coalition pour le droit à
l'avortement au Canada

Your Voice for Choice

Canada's only national political pro-choice advocacy group

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June 1, 2017

Attention: Mayor and Council
Please Reject Request to Hold Anti-Abortion Event on District Land

Dear Mayor and Council for the District of Houston:

We understand that an anti-abortion group is submitting a request to hold an event on district land in Houston. We would like to ask the District of Houston to please deny this request, for the following reasons.

The anti-abortion view is very controversial in our society because it seeks to re-criminalize abortion and restrict women's rights. The Supreme Court of Canada struck down our abortion law in 1988, ruling that it infringed women's rights to bodily security, as well as life, liberty, conscience, and privacy, under the *Charter of Rights and Freedoms*. All subsequent attempts to restrict abortion or the rights of pregnant women have failed on Charter grounds. Opinion polls show that a large majority of Canadians are pro-choice. Further, anti-abortion initiatives carried out in public usually generate controversy and cause upset to communities. Not only are they seen as challenges to the constitutional rights of women (as well as transgender people who can get pregnant), they are often experienced as discriminatory, patronizing, or insulting to women. The Advertising Standards Council rules against most anti-choice ads because they are inaccurate and/or disparaging to women. (Please see References below.)

For these reasons, our group has petitioned many cities and municipalities in Canada to stop approving such things as anti-abortion flags, proclamations, banners, and advertising, as well as anti-abortion displays and events on government-owned land. Anti-abortion groups are free to express their views in many other ways and locations.

All levels of government are obligated to obey provincial and federal laws, including the Criminal Code, human rights codes that prohibit discrimination including on the grounds of gender, and the Charter. As a government body, the District has a duty to uphold the rule of law by respecting women's legal right to abortion and their Charter rights and equality. The District should foster a community culture that respects women's rights and freedoms by not approving events or initiatives that directly oppose these values or work to undermine our democratic laws. In short, it is inappropriate for governments to give any form of official support to anti-abortion groups because they are dedicated to removing women's Charter rights.

Under your policy, #1053 Event Regulations, it says that "events considered to be controversial" are "Extraordinary Events" that must be presented to Council for consideration before they will be approved. We ask that you follow this procedure, and then reject the request because of the District's obligation to uphold and respect women's Charter rights and the rule of law.

Thank you very much.

Sincerely,



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References:

1988 Supreme Court Morgentaler decision: <https://scc-csc.lexum.com/scc-csc/scc-csc/en/item/288/index.do>

Westcoast LEAF (Women's Legal and Education Action Fund) – 2012 letter to City of Kelowna explaining why City should not approve an anti-abortion proclamation: <http://www.westcoastleaf.org/2012/08/27/letter-re-proclamation-of-protect-human-life-week/> (The City subsequently changed their policy to disallow it.)

Advertising Standards Canada's decisions against anti-abortion ads (Enter "abortion" or "life" in Key Words box):
<http://www.adstandards.com/en/standards/adComplaintsreportssearch.asp>

Recent opinion polls on abortion showing broad support:

- <https://ipsos-na.com/news-polls/pressrelease.aspx?id=7600>
- <http://globalnews.ca/news/2535846/6-in-10-canadians-support-abortion-under-any-circumstances-ipsos-poll/>

Some examples of recent public upset and complaints over anti-choice displays/events/actions/ads:

- <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/ottawa/anti-abortion-flag-march-for-life-1.4110394>
- <http://www.thepeterboroughexaminer.com/2017/05/25/advertising-standards-canada-rules-anti-abortion-ads-on-peterborough-transit-buses-violate-code-canadian-centre-for-bio-ethical-reform-to-ignore-order-to-remove>
- <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/saskatoon/complaints-raised-about-graphic-anti-abortion-flyers-1.3111436>
- http://www.huffingtonpost.ca/2016/04/13/anti-abortion-flyer-2-climate-change-billboards-among-50-ads-deemed-unacceptable_n_9680662.html

Cities that have successfully denied or banned anti-abortion ads/proclamations/banners:

- Grande Prairie AB: <https://www.thestar.com/news/canada/2017/01/03/alberta-judge-upholds-citys-right-to-reject-graphic-anti-abortion-ad-on-buses.html>
- Kelowna BC: https://www.kelownanow.com/watercooler/news/news/Kelowna/16/08/18/Kelowna_mayor_says_no_to_anti_choice_proclamations/
- Williams Lake BC: <http://www.mycariboonow.com/6453/city-to-review-proclamation-policy-after-rejecting-to-proclaim-celebrate-life-week/>
- Calgary AB: <http://www.metronews.ca/news/calgary/2017/04/19/bylaw-change-end-anti-abortion-displays-calgary-overpasses.html> (City of Hamilton ON passed a similar ban in 2014)
- Calgary AB (Bylaw prohibiting delivery of non-commercial flyers to homes, in response to anti-abortion flyers): http://www.calgary.ca/_layouts/cocis/DirectDownload.aspx?target=http%3a%2f%2fwww.calgary.ca%2fCA%2fcity-clerks%2fDocuments%2fLegislative-services%2fBylaws%2f5M2004-CommunityStandards.pdf&noredirect=1&sf=1