



Abortion Rights
Coalition of Canada

Coalition pour le droit à
l'avortement au Canada

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Canadians Oppose “Fetal Rights” Bill

Bill fails pregnant women, compromises women’s rights, endangers abortion rights

NATIONAL — A wave of public opposition is building across Canada against a private member’s bill that would endanger abortion rights by giving a fetus legal status. Bill C-484, “The Unborn Victims of Crime Act,” would allow charges to be laid in the death of a fetus when a pregnant woman is a crime victim. The bill is being debated this week in Parliament, and a vote is scheduled for March 5 to determine whether the bill should proceed to a committee for hearings and a final vote.

“Our group represents the voices of many Canadians across the country who are against this bill,” said Joyce Arthur, Coordinator of the Abortion Rights Coalition of Canada, a national pro-choice group. “An online petition that we started only 18 days ago to oppose the bill has already gathered over 3600 signatures from Canadians.”

The petition can be viewed at www.gopetition.com/online/16893

In contrast, an online petition supporting the bill, started by one of the victim’s relatives, has taken over 10 weeks to garner only about 1200 signatures, many of them apparently from outside Canada. (<http://www.gopetition.com/online/15729>)

“The fact that our petition has grown so quickly shows the alarm that Canadians feel about the negative impacts of this bill on women’s rights,” said Coalition spokesperson Carolyn Egan. “This bill is being backed and promoted by anti-abortion groups, and we have reason to fear that if it’s passed, they’ll use the law as a foot-in-the-door to re-criminalize abortion via future measures.”

In addition, Egan noted that similar laws in the U.S. have criminalized many pregnant women for behaviours perceived to harm their fetuses. “Pregnant women have even been arrested under state laws that exempt them from prosecution, as Bill C-484 does. That’s because these laws set up a confusing and irreconcilable conflict between women’s rights and fetal rights, which encourages law enforcement and prosecutors to take punitive action against pregnant women,” said Egan.

Arthur noted that Bill C-484 fails to address the real problem: domestic violence. “Pregnant women are at increased risk for domestic violence, yet this bill ignores that issue completely, and ignores pregnant women completely,” Arthur said. “The bill’s only purpose is to enshrine fetal personhood under the law, in direct conflict with the Criminal Code, women’s constitutional rights, and many legal precedents.”

The Coalition says that Bill C-484 is not needed, because the options of more serious charges or increased penalties for the crime of killing a pregnant woman are already available to prosecutors and judges. Increased penalties can also be mandated under the Criminal Code’s hate crime law, because its gender clause would cover attacks against women because they are pregnant.

(For more information and evidence on the dangers of Bill C-484, please see our website at: www.arcc-cdac.ca/action/unborn-victims-act.htm)

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