

Fragiskatos: Group's core mandate key to job grant eligibility

Peter Fragiskatos, MP (LIB) London North Centre
Thursday, January 25, 2018 9:00:22 EST PM

In recent weeks, concerns have been raised about the Canada Summer Jobs (CSJ) program, a federal government initiative that creates high-quality, meaningful job experience for tens of thousands of students across the country.

The program's benefits to our communities are twofold. Because of it, businesses, not-for-profits, faith-based organizations and others have been able to fill important needs. Think of small businesses, churches that run breakfast programs or groups that organize summer camps for kids. In turn, Canadian students have gained vital work experience that has helped in their career development, and allowed them to earn money to pay tuition and other expenses.

That's why our government has nearly doubled the number of summer jobs for young Canadians, from 35,000 to nearly 70,000 a year since taking office in 2015.

But in 2017, our government heard concerns from Canadians about the program. Some funding was being used to undermine the rights of Canadians. For example, funding was used to support organizations that distributed graphic images of aborted fetuses, and organizations that did not welcome LGBTQ2 young people at their youth programs.

That's why, this year, the Canada Summer Jobs application asks organizations to confirm that both the job and the organization's core mandate respect individual human rights and labour laws and do not support discriminatory practices. Indeed, a group whose core mandate — their primary activities — are devoted to work that seeks to remove Canadians' rights, such as promoting racism, gender discrimination, or fighting against a woman's right to choose, will not be eligible for CSJ funding. Women and the LGBTQ2 community have fought long and hard for their rights. Government funding should never go to work that seeks to remove the hard-won rights of Canadians.

And when it comes to organizations that ban gay kids from their youth programs, there can be no dispute. Equality is not something that exists only in the abstract.

Governments must not reward those who would use taxpayer dollars to undermine anybody's rights. To allow public funding to be used for work that seeks to remove those rights would also push back the important progress that has been made in advancing LGBTQ2 rights, an ongoing struggle to which our government remains committed.

Religious and faith-based organizations, on the other hand, add tremendous value to our communities, much of which is focused on compassion and helping those most in need in our society. They are encouraged, welcome and eligible to apply.

While Judaism, Christianity, Islam and other religions may hold any number of beliefs, these are not taken into consideration during application for the CSJ program, which only seeks confirmation of the core mandate. An organization's core mandate is the primary activities undertaken by the group that reflect its ongoing services provided to the community. It is not the beliefs of the organization, and it is not the values of the organization.

In Canada, defending individual human rights, including the values underlying the Charter, as well as other rights, is a fundamental duty of any government and parliamentarian who takes freedom, equality and justice seriously. The new approach to the CSJ program is a manifestation of this deeply held belief and we will continue to fight for it.

Peter Fragiskatos is the member of Parliament for London North Centre.