

The Catholic Women's League of Canada Delegation Visit to Federal Government November 2018

National Chairperson of Resolutions Cathy Bouchard, with National President Anne-Marie Gorman and National President-Elect Fran Lucas

“I am a believer in women, in their ability to do things and in their influence and power. Women set the standards for the world, and it is for us, women in Canada, to set the standards high.”

Nellie McClung

One of the unique and special relationships that The Catholic Women's League of Canada has is the opportunity to meet with elected parliamentary officials and advisors. Since 1974, a delegation representing the League has brought members' voices and concerns to “the Hill”. National President Anne-Marie Gorman, President-Elect Fran Lucas and I, in the role of national chairperson of resolutions, formed the delegation in November 2018. The following resolutions were discussed directly or indirectly with various federal government representatives including:

- 2018.01 Attestation Requirement on Canada Summer Jobs Program
- 2018.02 Setting a Standard for Products Marketed as “Flushable”
- 2018.03 Legislate Designation of Hospice/Palliative Care Services in Facilities to Exclude Medical Assistance in Dying
- 2017.01 Full Implementation of the Supreme Court Decision in *R. v. Gladue* for Indigenous Offenders
- 2017.04 Protection from Coercion of Conscience for Healthcare Professionals
- 2016.04 Amend the *Canada Health Act* to Identify Palliative Care as an Insured Health Service
- 2013.01 Building Relationships and Partnerships with Canada's Indigenous Peoples
- 2011.02 Children of Missing and Murdered Aboriginal Women
- 2001.04: Water Quality in Canada

Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada

We met with Policy Advisor Annie Aningmiuq and Special Assistant (Ontario Region) Ana Fularczuk to share the League's actions in building relationships with Indigenous sisters.

During the discussions we were advised that the federal government has been working to lift all long-term public system drinking water advisories on reserves by 2021 and have succeeded in providing access to clean water to be shared in communities. This information speaks to resolution 2001.04. For ongoing information please refer to canada.ca/water-on-reserve.

In response to resolution 2011.02 we were advised that a final report on the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls will be released in June 2019. The ministers feel strongly about ongoing support for Indigenous women and children.

Members are encouraged to continue addressing resolution 2013.01. Through personal relationship building, they can help to address what and where the needs are, and stand with Indigenous sisters and brothers.

Health Canada

We met with Chief of Staff Monique Lugli and reviewed resolutions 2018.02 and 2018.03. She was interested to learn about the problem regarding the lack of standards for “flushable” products.

Most of the meeting time was spent talking about resolution 2018.03, hospice/palliative care and the parameters around assisted death. Ms. Lugli spoke about Health Canada’s collection of quarterly data regarding people requesting the services. In addition, she informed us that the Canadian Council of Academies (CCA) was tasked with examining the issues around mature minors, advance requests and requests where a mental disorder is the sole underlying medical condition, and advised that the CCA reports would be tabled in the House of Commons shortly. Ms. Lugli expressed that many people facing imminent death want to die at home, advising the legislation on medical assistance in dying is very strict and would remain so. Pressure experienced by Health Canada from lobbying to include more groups eligible for medical assistance in dying is considerable. There is much room for expansion of hospice/palliative care services.

We next met with Vice Chair of the Standing Committee on Health Marilyn Gladu and her assistant Emily Thibert. Ms. Gladu was responsible for introducing private member’s Bill C-277 *Framework on Palliative Care in Canada Act* which received overwhelming support. The act provides for the development of a framework designed to support improved access for Canadians to palliative care provided through hospitals, home care, long-term care facilities and residential hospices, and touches on resolution 2016.04. Unfortunately, it appears there is no additional funding for palliative care in the updated budget. More information is available at canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/health-care-system/reports-publications/palliative-care/framework-palliative-care-canada.html

The topic of medical assistance in dying was also discussed with regards to resolution 2018.03. Since the meeting with Ms. Gladu, three reports were presented on the subject and may be viewed at scienceadvice.ca/reports/medical-assistance-in-dying/. It was noted that the first resolved clause, as with many of the League’s health-related resolutions, does not apply to action by national council. The federal government allocates money for health to the provinces and cannot direct how it is distributed. Ms. Thibert noted that when funding comes from provincial governments to support services in hospitals, even if operated by religious organizations, they have authority. The concern goes back to provincial councils for action.

Regarding resolution 2018.02 and “flushable” products, the League was encouraged to bring the concern to a member of parliament to present it as a private member’s bill. Somewhat of a lottery, the members only get the opportunity to present once per session. It was recommended the League find someone passionate about the subject, perhaps through the environment department, to see if she would write and present it as a bill.

Department of Justice Canada

We met with Senior Policy Advisor Audrey DeMarsico. During the discussions regarding resolution 2018.03 and resolution 2017.04 regarding conscience rights and medical assistance in dying, Ms. DeMarsico advised there is nothing in the *Criminal Code* to say that a physician must recommend someone for medical assistance in dying. No law can infringe on the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*. Conscience rights of a physician, health provider or institution must be challenged at the provincial level. Ms. DeMarsico encouraged provincial councils to make appointments with provincial governments and provincial college of physicians and surgeons to discuss the issue.

Regarding resolution 2017.01 on Gladue reports, Ms. DeMarsico advised the *Criminal Code* says in all circumstances, information collected and presented to the judge has to be taken into consideration. Provinces administer the federally provided funding for criminal legal aid and general social transfer and are responsible for the administration of justice. She indicated that she would look into where the funding comes from to train judges, legal teams and lawyers. The federal government provides financial support through the Indigenous Courtwork Program to participating provincial governments and through Access to Justice Service Agreements with territorial governments. The drafting of Gladue reports is an eligible expense. Additionally, some legal aid plans pay for the preparation of Gladue reports. For more information about the Indigenous Courtwork Program visit justice.gc.ca/eng/fund-fina/gov-gouv/acp-apc/index.html.

With respect to resolution 2011.02 we asked Ms. DeMarsico to check if there was a victims' fund for groups to work with families/women to get support for short and long-term help. She indicated she will inquire and advise if there is data to show improvement for the money spent on these subjects. The topic of funding under the Federal Victims Strategy (FVS) was discussed. FVS focuses on increasing access to services and support for victims and survivors post harm. The federal government can reliably report on the impact and on the experiences of family members and survivors who have taken part in the funded activities (ceremonies, healing circles, family gatherings) and services (police-based liaisons, Family Information Liaison Units [FILUs]).

FVS initiatives include project funding to support culturally responsive and accessible victim services for Indigenous people and families of missing or murdered Indigenous women and girls across Canada; national "knowledge exchanges" (some are focused specifically on Indigenous issues i.e. specialized victim services for families of missing or murdered Indigenous women or on general victims and survivors issues with an Indigenous lens); pan-territorial training, fact sheets and guides to supporting children and vulnerable victims in northern communities; research; creating communities of practice; and federal/provincial/territorial collaboration and coordination through the Victims of Crime Initiative. Early results and feedback from stakeholders indicate that the various FVS policy and program activities have had positive results.

FILUs, with direction from family members, research court files, hospital records, coroners' files, municipal police archives, and vital statistics to gather information that families previously felt was unavailable to them. When information is not available due to privacy regulations or ongoing investigations, FILUs have been able to explain to families why the information cannot be shared, helping them understand the justice system and other processes. To date, FILUs have created a

cross-jurisdictional network with federal leadership, coordinating information and support across Canada. This has been a critical network as many family members do not live in the city or the region where their loved one went missing or was murdered.

FILUs provide opportunities for family members to move forward in the healing journey, strengthen family relationships and assist families to cope with grief and trauma. They also provide an opportunity for organizational and systemic change. Through FILU liaison work, agencies at all government levels and across jurisdictions are learning how their actions and inactions have a significant impact on families. Finally, FILUs provide an opportunity to build trust by redefining the relationships between family members, police, medical examiners and other government agencies.

Community based projects (ceremonies, healing circles, family gatherings) have increased access to Indigenous-led and informed support and services for Indigenous victims of crime and families of missing or murdered Indigenous women, increased opportunities for family members and victims to create natural support networks, increased access to culturally-grounded grief and trauma counselling and reduced feelings of isolation among families and victims of crime. Visit www.justice.gc.ca/eng/rp-pr/cj-jp/victim/rd8-rr8/p5.html for more information.

Individual Member of Parliament and Organization Visits

We were fortunate to meet with members of parliament (MPs) that showed support and interest in the work of the League. One such visit was with MP Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park-Fort Saskatchewan), who previously served as deputy critic of human rights and religious freedom. Mr. Genuis has developed a reputation as one of the most outspoken members of parliament, has drawn attention to international human rights violations and has called for a return to Canada's historic principle-based foreign policy. Mr. Genuis also serves as a co-chairperson of the Canada-Holy See Parliamentary Friendship Group, a cross-partisan body of MPs and senators working to build up the relationship between Canada and the Holy See. He asked the League to spread the word on issues of importance through social media. Discussions included resolutions 2018.01 and 2017.04.

For many years, delegates have met with The Hon. Rob Nicholson (Niagara Falls), former minister of justice and attorney general of Canada and a strong supporter of the League's work. He indicated that resolution 2018.02 on "flushable" products was sound and that municipal, provincial and federal governments should work on it. The Hon. Nicholson suggested to share information on social media regarding resolution 2018.03 on conscience rights to bring awareness when members hear of people being coerced into medical assistance in dying. Regarding resolution 2018.01, the Canada Summer Jobs Program attestation, The Hon. Nicholson, like Mr. Genuis, indicated that many government programs could have an "attestation" attached to them in the future.

When asked the most effective way to get ideas and concerns to government (at any level), The Hon. Nicholson suggested personal visits to elected representatives. The more the visits, the greater the impact. He also suggested the League connect with like-minded groups that are as effective as coalitions. Letters sent by constituents to an MP must be answered. Personalized letters

are better than form letters. It is considered that one hand written letter is equivalent to 1,000 people/votes.

Opportunities to meet with representatives of the Canadian Organization of Life and Family (COLF) and the Canadian Catholic Conference of Bishops (CCCCB) occurred. In the meeting with COLF Executive Director Michel MacDonald, resolutions being brought to government were reviewed. Mr. MacDonald noted the ongoing concern of physicians' conscience rights being over ridden, changing the concept of medicine while putting the country at risk. COLF has many resources available on its website to assist with member education on a variety of issues.

CCCCB Assistant General Secretary Robert Di Pede met with us. Discussions focused on the document entitled *Protecting Minors from Sexual Abuse: A Call to the Catholic Faithful in Canada for Healing, Reconciliation, and Transformation*. Unanimously adopted by the bishops of Canada on September 27, 2018 during the annual plenary assembly, the bishops have familiarized themselves with its contents, considered how to ensure its implementation in the dioceses/eparchies, and discerned how best to inform and educate clergy, members of religious communities and lay personnel. More information is available at ccb.ca/site/eng/media-room/5000-the-canadian-conference-of-catholic-bishops-releases-new-document-to-protect-minors-and-vulnerable-adults-from-sexual-abuse.

Additional discussions included resolution 2018.01 regarding the Canada Summer Jobs Program attestation and Development and Peace – Caritas Canada partner projects.

It is always a blessing to speak with people in Ottawa and share the policies and concerns of the League's membership. Anne-Marie, Fran and I look forward to the next visit, making an impact with members' voices on Parliament Hill.