

Civil rights group raises concerns about health clinics

The Antigoniish chapter of the Catholic Civil Rights League (CCRL) launched a campaign on Nov. 20 to inform parents that the Strait Regional School Board is considering cutting them out of health care decisions concerning their children. Some board members are arguing for a complete exclusion of parents on the basis that some parents abuse their children and may prevent their children from receiving health care.

"It is not the role of the Strait Regional School Board to provide health care," states the president of CCRL Antigoniish, Donald MacLellan. "It is their responsibility to educate our children and to provide a safe environment for them. Nonetheless, there are legitimate reasons for establishing health clinics, such as for dealing with mental issues such as depression, eating disorders and the like. These goals must be achieved with the inclusion of parents, not exclusion. When parents are deliberately excluded, and are not aware of some of the issues with which their children are trying to cope, harm may result."

The simple solution: written permission. MacLellan continues, "If permission slips are required for an extracurricular school trip or for unexplained absences, why shouldn't they be required for attending something as serious and intimate as a medical? Parents who are okay with it will be able to have their children attend. Those who aren't will have the freedom not to attend. They can even have a break-down of services provided by these health clinics so that parents can opt into the ones they want, but ensure that their child is not exposed to anything objectionable. Everybody wins.

"The SRSB has also received some terrible advice," says MacLellan. "They are taking advice from people who will get jobs in these clinics or from doctors who have a financial stake in the clinics. They are ignoring parents who say they do not want to be excluded.

"Doctor-patient confidentiality is not an issue here," MacLellan says. "The issue is what happens when children are in the care of the school board. If parents think that their child is in a math class, their child should be in a math class and not with someone else that the parents do not know about."

Sandy MacDonald, a lawyer and director of CCRL Antigoniish, states that the SRSB is responsible for what happens to children while in the care of the SRSB.

"There is no legal impediment to the SRSB establishing whatever conditions it deems necessary for access to these health clinics. It controls the property on which the schools are built. It controls who has access. It has the legal and moral responsibility to account for what our children are doing while in their care and who has access to our children. It has no legal authority or obligation to exclude parents from knowing what their children are doing while in the care of the school board."

The Casket
Nov 22/06