

AGE OF PROTECTION

BILL C-22 AN ACT TO AMEND THE CRIMINAL CODE (AGE OF PROTECTION) AND TO MAKE CONSEQUENTIAL AMENDMENTS TO THE CRIMINAL RECORDS ACT



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The Catholic Women's League of Canada has a long history of working to protect children. In the case of sexual consent, Resolution 2003.09 Age of Consent for Sexual Activity requested that the legal age of sexual consent be raised "...from 14 to 18 years in order to safeguard children from sexual exploitation and abuse." In the summer of 2006, a proposed resolution on protecting the child regarding sexual consent was submitted to the national resolutions committee. This proposed resolution was not presented at the 86th annual national convention since the League already had adopted a resolution on this topic, thus establishing League policy on the matter. Furthermore, Bill C-22 *An Act to amend the Criminal Code (age of protection) and to make consequential amendments to the Criminal Records Act* was tabled and received first reading on June 22, 2006, in the House of Commons. Therefore, the proposed resolution was sent to the legislation standing committee for further action.

By the time members read this article, it is hoped that Canada will have a new law to protect children from sexual predators. If not, then members need to lobby the federal government to pass Bill C-22 as quickly as possible. As of October 30, 2006, Bill C-22 received second reading and was sent to the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights. Information on the bill can be obtained at www.parl.gc.ca/legisinfo. This website provides information such as the text of the bill, its status and speeches made in support. Information on the status of the bill in committee can be found by contacting the clerk of the committee at JUST@parl.gc.ca.

While the League would prefer the age of protection to be 18 rather than 16, and definitely not 14 as in current legislation, the proposed legislation is a step in the right direction and needs to be supported. Note the language change to "age of protection" from "age of consent" as in current legislation. The reason for the change is that the focus of Bill C-22 is the protection of youth from adult sexual predators, not the criminalization of sex between minors. Parents, educators and religious leaders, not the government, are responsible for the promotion of a chaste lifestyle among teenagers. The government's duty is to protect vulnerable members of society.

Currently, with the age of consent being 14 in Canada, a very vulnerable group, teens between the ages of 14 and 18, are not protected from adult sexual predators. Some recent court cases, notably the Michael Simonson case, show how vulnerable Canadian children are. This person was prosecuted under U.S. law but could not be under Canadian law since the victim was over 14.

With the Internet offering increasing opportunities for pedophiles to prey on unsuspecting teens and children, with burgeoning trafficking of children for the sex trade and sex tourism, with children as young as 10 being sexually abused (which some erroneously refer to as child prostitution) on the streets of our communities, we need laws to protect children from exploitation. Bill C-22 seeks to provide that protection for Canadian children under the age of 16. †

ST. JOSEPH PARISH COUNCIL KINDERSLEY, SASKATCHEWAN

During the month of October 2006, St. Joseph Parish Council and parishioners participated in the Ribbon of Signatures Campaign. Support was overwhelming! Member Jackie Jackson created a beautiful bow out of the signed ribbon.

On October 21, 2006, member Debbie Wagner was given the opportunity to present this ribbon and a written letter of petition to Minister of Justice and Attorney General for Canada The Hon. Vic Toews and local Member of Parliament Gerry Ritz.

The Hon. Vic Toews was the guest speaker at a luncheon in North Battleford and he graciously accepted the petition. The written petition asks that the federal government close the artistic merit legal loopholes in the current pornography laws, change the "age of consent" wording to "age of protection," and raise the age of protection to 18 years of age.

