



The Catholic Women's League of Canada

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January 28, 2026

The Hon. Sean Fraser
Minister of Justice and Attorney General
House of Commons
Ottawa, ON K1A 0A6

Dear Mr. Minister,

On behalf of The Catholic Women's League of Canada and its more than 55,000 members nationwide, I am writing to express the League's collective opposition to the proposed removal of the religious exemption contained in Section 319(3)(b) of the *Criminal Code* as set out in the amendments proposed under Bill C-9, the *Combatting Hate Act*.

While the stated intent of Bill C-9 is to address hate propaganda, hate-motivated offences, and the intimidation or obstruction of access to community spaces, the League is firmly concerned that the removal of the long-standing "good faith" language may have unintended and adverse consequences. Specifically, eliminating this provision would remove an important legal safeguard that has historically protected individuals and communities of faith who engage in sincere religious expression.

We respectfully question the necessity of repealing the good faith religious defence, an established protection designed to ensure that legitimate religious discourse is not unjustly criminalized. The objective of strengthening protections against hate-based conduct can, in our view, be achieved without removing language that has withstood judicial scrutiny and proven effective in balancing competing rights.

Further, Bill C-9 proposes amendments to the *Criminal Code* that would introduce criminal penalties for violations as defined within the bill. While the League does not suggest that faith-based organizations intend to engage in conduct captured by these provisions, we are concerned that broadly interpreted definitions may result in a chilling effect on religious expression. Fear of potential legal repercussions could unduly restrict the ability of faith communities to articulate sincerely held beliefs.

The Catholic Women's League of Canada unequivocally supports efforts to eliminate all forms of hate-based activity in society, consistent with our commitment to upholding the inherent dignity of every human being. At the same time, we strongly support the preservation of religious freedom of expression, as currently protected through the good faith provisions of the *Criminal Code*.

Accordingly, we respectfully request that the proposed amendments to Bill C-9 not include the removal of the "good faith" wording, thereby ensuring that this essential protection remains intact with Canadian law.

Sincerely,

Betty Colaneri
National President