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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
OF ONTARIO

Tuesday 29 March 2022

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE
DE L'ONTARIO

Mardi 29 mars 2022

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1700

PRIVATE MEMBERS'
PUBLIC BUSINESS

PROTECTING ONTARIO'S
RELIGIOUS DIVERSITY ACT, 2022
LOI DE 2022 SUR LA PROTECTION
DE LA DIVERSITÉ RELIGIEUSE
EN ONTARIO

Mr. Oosterhoff moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 89, An Act to amend the Human Rights Code with respect to religious expression/ Projet de loi 89, Loi modifiant le Code des droits de la personne en ce qui concerne l'expression religieuse.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Pursuant to standing order 101, the member has 12 minutes for his presentation.

Mr. Sam Oosterhoff: I believe that all of us in this House have a shared commitment to the protection of our fundamental rights as Canadians. I believe that we share a common belief in the necessity of protecting Ontarians' rights to ensure that they are able to live freely and in peace, while also recognizing the importance of personal responsibility in this province. The way we arrive at promoting and defending these rights and responsibilities varies, depending on our political philosophy, and depending on the road we believe should be followed. The road we believe should be followed can vary given our life experiences, histories and backgrounds.

One of the very crucial and fundamental rights that we have as Canadians and Ontarians is the freedom of religion. Unfortunately, too often religious freedom is considered simply the right to worship, perhaps in your church, synagogue, mosque, gurdwara or temple; or it is thought of as the right to believe what you want in your mind—the space just between your ears—or in the quiet of your personal prayer at home. But it's more than that, Speaker.

I'm a Christian. My belief in the birth, saving death and triumphant resurrection of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is central to who I am, and it informs what I do. My firm confidence and sure knowledge in his return influences how I think about my day-to-day actions and how I strive to love my God by loving his children, my neighbours and the people I interact with each and every day.

And yet, when I walk down the street it's not possible, visually, to distinguish me by my religion from another person who might hold to a very different belief than my Reformed Christian perspective and who indeed might not hold any religious belief at all. But that's not the case for many religious minorities.

At three different schools in the Toronto District School Board, three shocking and disturbing anti-Semitic incidents were recorded in February alone.

We saw the horrifying results of anti-Muslim hate in the London mosque attack, where Muslims at prayer, in peaceful worship, were slaughtered by a man driven by hatred of religion.

Indigenous spiritual practices still do not receive the recognition and acknowledgement that they should in so many aspects of our society. We've seen Sikh soldiers and police targeted for wearing the articles of their faith publicly. And last year, dozens of Christian churches were burned and vandalized across Canada, including right here in Ontario.

Tragically, although we pride ourselves on our tolerance and diversity as a nation and as a province, religious bigotry and hate is on the rise here in our land and in Ontario. A simple Google search will show this truth: "Pages torn from Qu'ran at Peel school board meeting" reads one article. "Hindu temple in Kitchener targeted by vandals" reads another. "Unequal opportunity: what it's like to be a religious minority in the workplace" warns another disturbing analysis, while yet another says, "Religious discrimination against women for what they wear (or don't) is on the rise." All of these incidents are unacceptable. All of these incidents impact people right here in our province. This is why today's legislation is necessary.

Bill 89, the protecting Ontario's religious diversity and right to be free from harassment and discrimination because of religious expression act, is a short piece of legislation. The bill amends the Human Rights Code to specify that every person has a right to equal treatment without discrimination or harassment because of religious expression with respect to services, goods and facilities; accommodation; contracting; employment; and membership in a trade union, trade or occupational association or self-governing profession. It's a short bill, but the positive impact this legislation will have for Ontario's religious minorities is profound.

The Muslim Association of Canada, in their letter of support for Bill 89, wrote, "We welcome the confirmation of 'religious expression' as a protected ground against discrimination in the Ontario Human Rights Code. This is

an important step forward in recognizing the diversity of our province and the various faith communities that have chosen to make it their home.”

Cardinal Thomas Collins, archbishop of the Catholic Archdiocese of Toronto, said, “I would like to offer my support of MPP Oosterhoff’s private member’s bill, right to be free from discrimination and harassment because of religious expression act. As the spiritual shepherd for the Archdiocese of Toronto’s two million Catholics, I believe that it is critical to make every effort to ensure our province is free from discrimination or harassment due to religious expression.”

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The Centre for Israel and Jewish Affairs also shared their endorsement, saying, “The expression of religious freedom benefits all Ontarians and forms a cornerstone value of our society, a beacon to the world that all are welcome and belong in Ontario.” We “appreciate the opportunity to communicate CIJA’s support for the private member’s bill, the right to be free from discrimination and harassment because of religious expression act.”

Adding religious expression as prohibited grounds for discrimination is broadly supported across religious backgrounds here in Ontario, and this addition will testify to our collective support as a Legislature for the rich pluralism and diversity of religious beliefs across our province. Adding religious expression to the Ontario Human Rights Code as prohibited grounds for discrimination will provide a meaningful tool for those who have been targeted or discriminated against due to their religious expression in a wide variety of contexts. This addition goes beyond the understanding of creed as being an issue of private identity, and supports the importance of public expression of faith without fear.

I know that many members on all sides of the aisle share this fundamental belief. On November 25 of 2019, the leader of Her Majesty’s opposition, the member for Hamilton Centre, brought forward an important motion on this issue which I and my colleagues were proud to support. The member for Hamilton Centre said at the time:

“Our vision for Ontario is a province where all people’s talents and abilities are recognized, are welcomed, are celebrated regardless of where people were born, what they believe in, or how or if they worship....

“No one should have to choose between their faith and their career.”

I agree with the Leader of the Opposition on this important matter, and I hope that she will join me today in supporting this bill and providing this tangible improvement to support religious expression in our province.

The former member for Don Valley East, Michael Coteau, also brought forward an important motion on this subject, and memorably said at the time, “I believe that it is incumbent upon us as members of the Ontario Legislature to convey with much clarity to all religious minorities in our province that we stand with them to defend their rights and freedoms.” I strongly agreed with the member for Don Valley East then, Speaker, as I do today.

It’s for these reasons that I look forward to the support of all MPPs in the chamber for this legislation. This change to the Ontario Human Rights Code will provide a robust legal tool for those facing discrimination because of religious expression, demonstrating Ontario’s leadership in protecting minority rights, also for diverse communities of faith.

Speaker, I have brought legislation before this House in the past that spoke about death and dying. The Compassionate Care Act established a framework for a palliative care strategy here in the province of Ontario. But as I said in my speech on those days, that legislation was really also about life, about living well and dying well, and part of so many Ontarians’ lives, and their deaths as well, is their spiritual health. Their spiritual health and their connection with their faith through worship is so important to them at every step; the faith in life after death and the expression of that faith without fear.

Whether it’s a young Muslim teacher in Mississauga wearing a hijab, a Catholic Good Friday processional down the streets of Toronto, a Jewish man walking the streets of Windsor with a kippah, a Christian wearing a cross on the public transit system in Ottawa or a turbaned Sikh police officer patrolling the streets of Sudbury, all Ontarians of faith—or those who have no faith—should be free to express their religious beliefs without fear of discrimination or harassment because of who they are.

Speaker, our protections are good. The inclusion of creed in the Ontario Human Rights Code is important, and I don’t wish to detract from that clause, but it’s not enough. Too few employees in both the public and private sectors know their creedal rights. Too few students and teachers are aware of the protections that they have. Too few employers are aware of their obligations and the need to provide adequate religious exemptions and policies in their places of business. Bill 89 will fix this.

This legislation, if passed, will lead to a stronger and more tolerant society in Ontario, one that celebrates our religious diversity and protects it. It will create space for dialogue and understanding in the public square and ensure that each and every Ontarian, regardless of their background, regardless of how they express their faith, is treated with dignity and respect. We want everyone in Ontario to know that the government of Ontario truly welcomes and deeply respects people of all cultures and religions. Everyone should feel welcome to express their religion, which so many people experience as the most fundamental aspect of their identity.

And this is why Bill 89, the Protecting Ontario’s Religious Diversity Act, 2022, matters, Speaker. It’s why I sincerely ask all of my colleagues in this House to support the legislation today—not for me, but for the young Muslim girl who fears being discriminated against for going out wearing a hijab, for the young Sikh man who dreads being singled out in his employer’s office for wearing a turban and for the Jewish family who face anti-Semitic slurs while walking the streets of their hometown.

We all must join together to stand on the right side of history. We must stand against growing anti-religious

bigotry and hate, and ensure that no citizen in Ontario is harassed or discriminated against because of their right to religious expression. It's for them I bring this forward today, Speaker, and ask for the support of this House. *Soli Deo gloria.*

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Further debate?

Mr. Gurratan Singh: As we discuss, we contemplate and we examine the experience of those from religious minorities, I think it's important for us to take a moment to reflect on it a little bit. What does it mean to protect religious diversity? What is that experience for those who are from religiously diverse backgrounds?

I think so often of my own experience as someone who is visibly a Sikh and how the experiences that I faced growing up are shared by so many other people who are visibly from a religious background. It was tough for me growing up. I faced a lot of bullying; I faced a lot of tough times. It gave me, too, a glimmer of insight into how tough it can be for others, how much worse it can be for others.

I think so often of young kids today who wear a turban, wear a hijab, wear a kippah, wear a cross or identify themselves in any way, shape or form being of a diverse religious background and the experience that can come with that: the anxiety that is faced heading to school and the potential bullying and fights, taunts and teasing that can come along with that; the feeling of fear and despair, coming home, not knowing whether to share the experience with your parents or, out of shame, hiding it.

I think of the attack on confidence it results in to that young person, who then begins to feel like they are less of a person for just wanting to connect with who they are. That thing that gives them strength or gives their family strength, that thing that grounds them to their roots, their spirituality, their culture—that thing then becomes almost a burden. It does become a burden for so many of them, who then, out of shame, want to run from what they actually want to embrace.

It was because of the teasing, because of the bullying, because of the hatred they experienced for their religious diversity that they had then begun to hate that, because that's the only thing that makes them feel like life is okay. If they just run from that thing which was the source of their bullying and their teasing, then maybe it will stop. But we know that far too often it doesn't, because those who want to spread hatred don't care about that particular thing at that moment. They just want to bring you down.

Hate is like a fire and it burns everything in its path. If it's not your religious diversity, then it's going to be your racial diversity. If it's not your racial diversity, then it's your gender or your sexual orientation or all those different ways that we identify ourselves as different.

That's why I think it's so important that we do protect our religious diversity, because what starts as bullying in the schoolyard then leads to that discrimination in the workplace, and then leads to the pain that was once purely emotional—it now becomes something that's economic. It impacts that person's ability to put food on their table, because they didn't get the job that someone else got

because of their hijab, because of their turban, because of their kippah, because of whatever religious way they identify themselves. And the impact of that can then be devastating.

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If we really want to create a nation, a province, a society that is pluralistic, that is diverse, then we need to ensure that it's not just that we allow people to be different, but that we provide them the supports, we provide them the means to celebrate themselves. Because in a world that's not equal, in a world where, if you are diverse, if you have a specific signifier of your religion, we know that this is the fact. We know of the rise in anti-Semitism, the rise in Islamophobia, the rise in anti-Sikh racism, the rise in a variety of hatred across our province, the country and the world, and the result is that community members from these diverse backgrounds are increasingly living in fear. It's sad to say, but it's grounded in fact. When you see things like the Afzaal family in London, Ontario, being wiped out in a single act of hatred and terrorism, when you see synagogues being attacked and defaced, when you see the countless cases of violence that are increasingly happening across our province and our nation, how can these people feel otherwise?

It's why we need to ensure that protections are in place, but further, if we really want to build that society, then we have to create that space, that support, and recognize that the field is not even, that because you make that choice—we say that we live in a society that's free. We should be embracing freedom. We should be creating freedom and liberty, but freedom and liberty means to also examine those who don't have that same access to freedom and liberty because of their choice. Because of their decision to freely practise their faith, we need to acknowledge the institutional and systemic barriers that person will then face—in school, in the workplace, in society as a whole.

It has become normalized that if you wear a turban, a hijab, a kippah, any form of religious signifier, you can go out in an evening and you might get called Taliban. You might go out in the evening and you might get called a terrorist. The racism is so pervasive that it's like, "Well, what did you expect, man? It happens every now and then." That in and of itself is the problem, the fact that it has become normalized, the fact that young people are conditioned and almost told—not almost; they are told. A young Sikh will be told, a young Muslim will be told, a young person from any of these different variety of religious backgrounds will be told by their parents, by their friends, by their peers, by their older siblings, "When you go outside today, be ready." That was a conversation my brother had with me. That was a conversation I've had with others. That's a conversation I've had with myself: When you go out today, you're going to have fun, it's going to be amazing, but be ready.

How am I going to respond to being called a terrorist and Taliban? It's something I think about any time I exit the house. It's a feeling and experience that probably every single person who dons that religious symbol on their head thinks about when they leave the house: What is the

impact, what is going to be the story today? What is going to be the experience today? And it happens, and you deal with it, and very often, though, you're told, "Hey, that's how it's supposed to be. That's what happens. Deal with it, and go home." Sometimes you laugh it off. Sometimes you cry it off. Sometimes you get angry. Sometimes you feel hopeless.

The reality is that far too often we're not pushing to say that it should not happen at all. That's the lived reality of people like this. That's my lived reality. That's the lived reality of probably every single individual who knows that when they exit the door, they're going to face this kind of racism and hatred. So when we talk about protecting religious diversity, that needs to be a part of the conversation. Protection involves education. Protection involves empowerment. Protection involves making sure there is security for someone in the workplace. These are all the aspects that come together as a form of protection.

We're excited at the prospect of further protections coming in in our province to ensure that people from religiously diverse backgrounds are protected, and we're also very, very eager to make sure we get it right in committee. That's something that's really, really important with respect to this legislation that's being put forward. We really want to make sure it's done right and that there's a really important conversation that is done in committee to make sure that we're really protecting communities from religiously diverse backgrounds.

I do want to take a second in the last little bit to highlight some organizations and communities that are doing so much in their own capacity, and how that work in and of itself does help combat this institutional racism that impacts people across the board. I do want to highlight, as I've talked about in the past, the fact that we know that Islamophobia is on the rise and we know that we need to take strong stances to fight Islamophobia. We know that anti-Semitism is also on the rise, and we need to take steps to fight anti-Semitism, as well as anti-Sikh hatred.

I've often talked about the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community and the history of persecution that they have faced and continue to face, and how we also need to stand in solidarity with the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community and every other community that faces any sort of discrimination or persecution, be it here in Canada or anywhere else across the world.

And I also wanted to highlight the organizations that are fighting back through their service. There's an amazing organization in Brampton that's called the Peace and Harmony Forum, and they have done so much work in fighting Islamophobia and creating education around the Muslim community. I just want to highlight some of their amazing members: Shahid Hussain, Abdul Rehman, Aqeel Akram, Farooq Khan and Idrees Khan. These are some really dedicated members who are fighting to make sure that we have the community protections and support.

I got one of the names wrong, so I will say it one more time. I just want to once again highlight the Peace and Harmony Forum in Brampton. It's doing so much to combat Islamophobia and create more awareness around

the Muslim community. I want to highlight some of the members: Aqeel Akram, Farooq Ishaq, Idrees Khan, Shahid Hussain and Abdul Rehman. They're doing just amazing work across Brampton, creating more awareness and fighting Islamophobia.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Further debate?

Hon. Kaleed Rasheed: I'm pleased to rise today in support of Bill 89, Protecting Ontario's Religious Diversity Act. This bill was introduced by my colleague and friend the member from Niagara West. As a member of provincial Parliament, I feel compelled to speak in favour of this important bill, especially given the rise in hate crimes.

This disturbing trend, the rise of hate crimes, has been confirmed in a new report released by Stats Canada. The data points to rising police-reported incidents of hate in 2020, which happens to be the largest number since the data was made available in 2009. The report found British Columbia, Alberta, Ontario and Quebec to be the provinces that saw the biggest increases in hate crimes. Given that our province is one of the top four provinces listed, this should be a cause for great concern.

Mr. Speaker, I just want to say thank you to my colleague for bringing this bill forward in this Legislature. As well, this is something that many members of different communities have raised to me personally, and it is unfortunate to say, but this is an issue that keeps me up at night. There is a problem with racism and it needs to be addressed. Bill 89 speaks to the timely need to take action and strengthen protections for people from hate and discrimination in Ontario.

1730

Our government has zero tolerance for racism, has zero tolerance for hate, and has zero tolerance for discrimination in all forms. This bill is an action that needs to be taken to help build safer communities and a more inclusive Ontario. It is truly unfortunate to be speaking about the rise of hate crimes, because so many people, including individuals like myself, came to this province, to this country for a better life, not only for themselves but also for their families and children, only to face discrimination and violence in their workplaces, schools and communities. It is simply unacceptable, and it needs to be stopped.

Mr. Speaker, my grandfather Major Mohamed Aslam Khan, who served in the Second World War, came to Ontario as a place to raise his children and grandchildren. He told me that he wanted us to give back to the country that treated him with respect. My grandfather inspired me to get into politics, and that is why I am such a strong advocate for promoting diversity and inclusion.

This government has made great strides to tackle racism and inequality, and that is why I am so moved to support this important bill. I know that the passage of this bill would be welcome news for many communities. Hate, racism and divisive rhetoric have no place in this province or country. These communities are what make Ontario stronger and aid in the development of a modern and progressive society, which is something that the people of Ontario expect and deserve.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Further debate?

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: I rise today in support of my colleague the member from Niagara West and in defence of one of our most sacred and treasured freedoms, religious freedoms.

I'm a proud representative of hard-working families in Brampton, and I am proud to serve in Ontario as the President of the Treasury Board. Serving my community, a community made up of people from all walks of life and virtually every part of the world, has been a humbling experience. Just visit Brampton—we talk about Ontario's diversity, Canada's diversity and religious diversity.

Mr. Speaker, my family story is a reflection of an open and welcoming nation. Each day, this story is being written and rewritten in communities across Ontario. We are fortunate to live in a province that affords people from all walks of life the opportunity to succeed. We are blessed to live in a province that protects and promotes religious diversity. My standing here in the House is a testament to that truth. Mine is a made-in-Ontario success story, and our country and province have afforded me opportunities that would have only been a dream anywhere else.

In fact, kids across Brampton and across this province should grow up knowing that expressing themselves in the light of their deepest-held beliefs is a fundamental Canadian value. They should grow up knowing that Ontario is enriched by our religious diversity.

We must continue to encourage Ontarians of every generation to uphold the values that make Ontario such a special place. These are values that transcend our provincial borders, that apply to new Canadians as much as they do to those who trace their heritage in Canada to before Confederation. We must continue to draw on these shared values—freedom, democracy, human rights, the rule of law—because that is who we are. We are fortunate to live in a nation that values these ideals.

But freedom of religion is not simply a Canadian or Western value; it is a fundamental human right, and the free expression of this right is a hallmark of who we are as Ontarians and as Canadians.

Mr. Speaker, one of the most wonderful things about our province and our country is that it is incredibly diverse. Here in Canada, we don't tolerate differences; we celebrate them. We recognize and celebrate that our diversity is a source of our greatest strength, that no matter the colour of your skin, which part of the world you came from, what language you speak, whether you attend mosque on a Friday or synagogue on a Saturday or church on a Sunday, every distinct element of who we are as a people comes together with the mosaic that is Canada.

Religious diversity is not a source of conflict, but a point of unity in our province. Mr. Speaker, for many Ontarians, religion is a central facet of life. The very reason its free expression is guaranteed for all Canadians and is protected as a human right around the world is because it relates to the deepest and most personal elements of who we are.

No Ontarian should be denied the right of full participation in our society on account of their beliefs. No Ontarian

should ever feel unsafe or vulnerable because of their beliefs. And no Ontarian should be asked to hide, turn off or change such a central part of who they are in order to enjoy the full rights of their citizenship and as Ontarians.

Instead, Mr. Speaker, we must continue to draw on our shared values in defence of religious diversity in Ontario. We must keep faith with the principles and traditions that set us apart from the rest of the world. We don't build a more tolerant and pluralistic society by denying the elements of ourselves that distinguish us. We do so in maintaining our diversity within a framework of equality and respect for all people. Mr. Speaker, that is why it is an honour to rise in support of this motion and bill on behalf of the member from Niagara West.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Further debate?

Mrs. Robin Martin: I would also like to thank my friend and colleague the outstanding member for Niagara West, a riding that I've been able to visit several times over the past few years, for introducing this very important bill—yet another important bill from this really thoughtful member.

As Ontarians, we are proud of our diversity. As we say, diversity is our strength, and of course I can't agree more with that expression. Representing the riding of Eglinton–Lawrence, I know diversity well, as do many of us who represent constituencies here in Toronto and the GTHA. Ontario has a long and distinguished history of standing up for rights and freedoms. Decades before the Charter of Rights and Freedoms was enshrined in our Constitution, Ontario was the first province to pass a document outlining citizens' basic human rights. The Ontario Human Rights Code, since that date in 1962, has provided bedrock protections for all Ontarians. As such, I am proud to stand in support of this bill that extends and codifies protection for religious expression for the people of Ontario.

The legislation will support and enshrine the protection of religious expression in law and ensure substantive protection of Ontario's religious diversity and religious minorities. By amending the Ontario Human Rights Code, the bill will ensure that every person has a right to equal treatment without discrimination because of religious expression.

This bill is needed, and it's coming at the right time for the people of my riding of Eglinton–Lawrence. As my constituents are quite aware, there has been an alarming rise in anti-Semitism, and we've heard also about some alarming rises in anti-Muslim, anti-Islam kinds of activities here in Canada—and, frankly, in Toronto specifically. Many high-profile cases of these kinds of racism and anti-Semitism have been happening in recent months and weeks, and that underscores why moving to protect religious expression is such an important thing to do at this time.

However, this bill is not just to protect one faith, or indeed just people of faith. Protecting the rights of all individuals is an important part of protecting the collective rights of everyone. Discrimination based on race, creed and, yes, religious expression is wrong and should not be tolerated. It is for these reasons that this bill has received

widespread support, as my friend outlined, from community leaders of various faiths such as those from the Muslim, Sikh, Hindu, Jewish and Christian faiths. This bill reflects an understanding of religious creed as more than just private identity and supports the importance of public expression of faith without fear. Simply put, a person should not be discriminated against based on their choice to wear a kirpan, a yarmulke, a crucifix or a turban.

Ontario's history is enriched by diversity of religious expression, as residents of various faiths bring their own unique experiences and views to public life. It is important we protect our diversity by protecting religious expression, so Ontarians can continue to share and express their values, and the source for their strength for many of them.

1740 I offer my wholehearted support to my colleague, and I thank him for bringing forward this important bill.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Further debate?

The member for Niagara West has two minutes to reply.

Mr. Sam Oosterhoff: I wish to thank my colleagues in the chamber this afternoon for their speeches and debate around Bill 89.

I appreciated the opportunity to hear from my colleague from Brampton East about the lived experiences of so many young people who fear expression of their faith and who fear retribution and targeting and discrimination as a result of that. I thought his words about the fact that those who want to spread hate are like a fire, that they spread everywhere—I think that rings true, and that's why we need to ensure that we have in place protections like this to prevent the spread of hate and also anti-religious bigotry. I appreciated his words about the need for a pluralistic and diverse society where people have the supports to be celebrated. And I appreciated his kind words this afternoon. I can't imagine what it would be like to walk out the door expecting to be called some of the terrible things that you've experienced. I want to extend my heartfelt sympathy to you and ensure that we are all working to take action so things like that never, ever happen again. We need to prevent that.

I also want to thank my colleague from Mississauga East–Cooksville for his kind words about fighting division and about his grandfather and his desire to come to Ontario because of its welcoming nature. I think we all want to see that welcoming nature be built on. We all admire our province, but we know there's more we can do.

I want to thank the member for Brampton South, because he spoke about the fact that religious expression and religious freedom are a hallmark of who we are as Canadians and Ontarians. We don't just tolerate our differences; we celebrate them. It doesn't matter, as he said, whether you worship at a mosque on a Friday, a synagogue on a Saturday or a church on a Sunday; no one should have to be targeted because of where they worship or have areas of society cut off from them because of those deeply held beliefs.

I want to thank the member for Eglinton–Lawrence for speaking about what she's hearing from her constituents and about the rise of anti-Semitism.

And I want to thank all members for their words and assure them that this legislation is intended to protect the people of Ontario.

As I said, unfortunately, too often religious freedom is simply considered the right to worship, or it is thought of as your right to believe what's in your mind—in the space between your ears—or just in the quiet of your home.

This legislation will ensure that we can have faith without fear here in the province of Ontario and encourage all of the religious minorities in our religious diversity to celebrate their religion with expression.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The time for private members' public business has expired.

Mr. Oosterhoff has moved second reading of Bill 89, An Act to amend the Human Rights Code with respect to religious expression. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? I heard a no.

All those in favour of the motion will please say "aye."

All those opposed will please say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

A recorded division being required, the vote on this item of private members' public business will be deferred until the next proceeding of deferred votes.

Second reading vote deferred.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Pursuant to standing order 36, the question that this House do now adjourn is deemed to have been made.

ADJOURNMENT DEBATE

COVID-19 IMMUNIZATION

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The member for Chatham-Kent–Leamington has given notice of his dissatisfaction with the answer to a question given by the Minister of Health. The member has up to five minutes to debate the matter, and the minister or parliamentary assistant may reply for up to five minutes.

I recognize the member for Chatham-Kent–Leamington.

Mr. Rick Nicholls: The objectives of directive 6 were to set out a provincially consistent approach to COVID-19 immunization policies in covered organizations. Directive 6 was issued by Dr. Moore under the Health Protection and Promotion Act, 2004, section 77.7, on August 17 of last year and implemented 21 days later, on September 6.

The first stated objective of directive 6 is to optimize COVID-19 immunization rates. Well, emerging evidence now demonstrates natural immunity to be superior and longer-lasting as opposed to vaccine-induced immunity. It is a breach of medical ethics to ignore natural immunity and force employees to undergo vaccination unnecessarily that could expose them to an adverse reaction.

Directive 6 allowed for unvaccinated employees to continue to work and to undergo antigen testing at intervals to be covered by the organization. It was immoral that the employers decided on their own and were allowed to further jeopardize staff when they implemented an unnecessary policy of "vaccinate or terminate." Forcing

employees to be vaccinated with a non-sterilizing vaccine still in clinical trials with no long-term safety data was unethical. The vaccine did not shield anyone from transmission. Health care workers were already wearing PPE that was demonstrated to be an effective measure in preventing transmission.

It was employers who took away the right to informed consent, not directive 6. Sadly, other government levels stood by as employers explicitly violated some of the most valued ethical principles of medicine. The Doug Ford government allowed employers to move far beyond directive 6, setting the stage for discrimination, segregation, exclusion and stigmatization and created a dangerous social dynamic—and, Speaker, I know that first-hand. Why didn't the Minister of Health step in and stop these non-medical employers from forcing an invasive medical procedure on employees? The employers' actions were coercive and illegal.

The Health Care Consent Act, 1996, is based upon these four principles: Consent must relate to the treatment, it must be informed, it must be given voluntarily, and consent must not be obtained through misrepresentation or fraud. Employers chose not to follow the resource guide supplied to them from the Ministry of Health. The handbook outlined that organizations were expected to choose content for their educational program that respected the individual's personal choice as to whether to get vaccinated.

The second objective listed in directive 6 is to ensure that individuals have access to information required to make an informed decision about COVID vaccination. It's important to ask: Does the content represent the risks and the benefits of vaccination fairly in a transparent manner? Well, now that directive 6 has been eliminated, we must evaluate the consequences employers had on employees, patients and the health care system as a whole, in a manner that caused the least damage.

Now I will address the precautionary principle. In simple terms, the principle is to be implemented to quickly protect citizens from a threat where there is a lack of scientific evidence to proceed with the most appropriate course of action. It is meant to be used on a temporary, interim basis while data is being collected. In all instances, it is either that we have the science to support the protocols and vaccination requirements, therefore disengaging the precautionary principle but calling into question the legal basis for enforcing vaccination without clear and certain science as to its efficacy—why was the precautionary principle tolerated for 24 months without question?

I understand the safety aspect of much of this, but look, it's still a case of abuse of power, unattended by the Ford government, by employers who took it upon themselves to tell employees to vaccinate or terminate. In most cases, employers are not medical personnel, so what right do they have to mandate the staff who didn't want to be vaccinated? That's a huge overreach.

On a positive note, my Ontario Party will require businesses and organizations that fired or suspended employees without pay for a vaccine non-compliance to

return those workers to their original positions of employment. Finally, the Ontario Party will assist Ontario residents who suffered permanent injuries caused by any of the COVID vaccines in pursuing legal actions against responsible parties.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): And the response?

Mrs. Robin Martin: Thank you to the member for Chatham-Kent. He certainly used the opportunity to wander over a lot of territory which was unanticipated, as we were just having a late show about the question he asked in the Legislature. So that is what I'm going to address.

Our government's top priority has always been protecting the health and safety of all Ontarians. Since the very beginning of the pandemic, this approach has guided our actions, and it continues to guide them as we continue our path of returning to normal.

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Since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, the government of Ontario has always listened to the advice of the Chief Medical Officer of Health.

As you know, we—well, almost all of us, anyway—are not doctors. We are elected representatives. It is the duty of all of us, as representatives, to seek out the best advice on issues that come before us, ask questions, and then do what we decide is best for the people of Ontario, which often means listening to experts, particularly in an area of significant expertise and where new information is emerging on a daily basis, as it was during this pandemic.

Our government has listened, throughout the pandemic, to the advice of the person appointed to advise the government in the event of a pandemic, the Chief Medical Officer of Health—Dr. Williams and then Dr. Moore.

Natural immunity was never disregarded or ignored by anyone in the government, and certainly not the Chief Medical Officer of Health, Dr. Moore. In order to get natural immunity, you have to get COVID-19, and the Chief Medical Officer of Health has long said that it is better if people get vaccinated than get COVID-19, as a COVID-19 infection can result in unexpected negative outcomes. Furthermore, all immunity to COVID-19 seems to wane over time, and re-exposure to COVID-19, particularly if you're not vaccinated, is not the best strategy given the possibility of negative outcomes. In fact, Dr. Moore recently acknowledged natural immunity when he said, "Thanks to our high vaccination rates, and natural immunity that is developing, as well as the arrival of other therapeutics and antivirals, Ontario has the tools necessary to manage the impacts of this virus."

The Ontario Chief Medical Officer of Health and the government of Ontario have always been consistent: Vaccination is the most effective tool to protect yourself and your family. That is why over 90% of Ontarians right now have the protection of an approved COVID-19 vaccine.

With the Omicron peak behind us and its resulting natural immunity, antivirals, and our world-leading vaccination rate, Ontarians are ready to return to a more normal life. This is happening now, as we have seen with

the removal of provincial mask mandates and the ending of the proof-of-vaccination requirement.

GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The member for Ottawa South has given notice of his dissatisfaction with the answer to a question given by the Minister of Health. The member for Ottawa South has five minutes to debate the matter, and the parliamentary assistant may reply for up to five minutes.

I recognize the member for Ottawa South.

Mr. John Fraser: Thank you very much, Speaker, and to the table and my colleagues here, and the parliamentary assistant, thanks for being here for the late show.

I asked a question the other day with regard to the dismissal of Dr. Brooks Fallis, the head of critical care, at the time, at William Osler. What we learned from CTV's W5 show over the weekend was the extent of the political pressure that the Premier and his government have been putting on our hospitals and health care workers. Specifically, what really stood out was Premier Ford's inappropriate interference by calling Dr. Naveed Mohammad, the CEO of William Osler, to complain about the social media of Dr. Brooks Fallis. The sequence of events was clear: a tweet, a phone call, a firing.

We know the Premier called Dr. Mohammad, and we know that Dr. Mohammad felt that his hospital's funding was in jeopardy. We also know that the Premier really doesn't like to be criticized, and witness to that is the number of members who are sent to this side of the House who used to be on that side of the House, at the rate of about one every six months, which I think is probably a record here in Ontario—not a record to be proud of.

What I've asked for, very simply, is that the committee on social policy call on the Office of the Premier and the office of the Minister of Health to appear to explain what happened. I think that's fair. I think that's reasonable. For the minister to say that everything was false—I don't buy that. There's too much evidence pointing to the contrary, and I think it would be fair to the people of Ontario and the people who are served by William Osler Health System to know exactly what happened.

The Premier and the government were being criticized for the pandemic response, which I think was fair. We all should be ready to accept criticism, and we can't try to silence our critics or put pressure on them. We all hear things we don't want to hear. What we should do is defend our position. What we should do is tell people that they're wrong and why they're wrong, and not go around a corner and have somebody else do that for them.

The government just put out a bill today that is about the pandemic response. It's about opening again—"Here are all these measures"—but there's something missing from it that I think the government has been lax on in the

last three or four months. There's no plan there for vaccinations. There's no plan in there to actually get us from eighth place in Canada for vaccinations for five-to-11-year-olds to first place, and there's no plan in there to get our booster shots up to the top in Canada; we're at about 50%. We know that vaccines are the most important thing that we can do to protect ourselves. It's not even in their plan. It's mind-blowing to me that the only mention of vaccines is about manufacturing vaccines, which will happen two or three years from now, which is not what our problem is.

We could be facing a sixth wave. We know that these things come in waves. We know that we'll likely have to do more to get shots into arms, and part of that is building confidence in people. The government is spending millions and millions of dollars on advertising to say "Things are great" and "Aren't we great?" I don't understand it. Why would you not be spending millions and millions of dollars to tell moms and dads, "Vaccines are safe and effective and are going to protect your children, and here's where to get more information"? Why does the government not have somebody whose job it is to make sure that our vaccination rates are the top in Canada—because they're not.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): To reply, the member for Eglinton–Lawrence.

Mrs. Robin Martin: These late shows are becoming increasingly interesting as they wander away from what the question was that I thought we were responding to and into all kinds of other areas, as the member from Ottawa South has discussed this evening.

In any event, I'm going to address the question that he asked in the House. The answer to that question is, as the minister said at the time, simply put, the Ministry of Health and the Office of the Premier have never heard of the individual in question. His allegations are categorically false. William Osler hospital has already acknowledged publicly that at no time has the Premier's office ever given any direction or advice relating to human resources matters at the hospital.

Furthermore, contrary to the claims of this individual, the government has always listened to the experts. The government's response to the pandemic, since the beginning, has been guided and informed by advice from the Chief Medical Officer of Health. Additionally, outside and independent organizations such as the Ontario science table have provided data and support, which have been incorporated into the pandemic response of this government.

This government will continue to listen to the advice of the Chief Medical Officer of Health and do what is needed to keep the people of Ontario safe and healthy.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): There being no further matters to debate, pursuant to standing order 36(c), I deem the motion to adjourn to be carried.

This House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 10:15.
The House adjourned at 1800.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO
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Speaker / Président: Hon. / L'hon. Ted Arnott

Clerk / Greffier: Todd Decker

Deputy Clerk / Sous-greffier: Trevor Day

Clerks-at-the-Table / Greffiers parlementaires: Valerie Quioc Lim, Wai Lam (William) Wong,

Meghan Stenson, Christopher Tyrell

Sergeant-at-Arms / Sergente d'armes: Jacquelyn Gordon

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Andrew, Jill (NDP)	Toronto—St. Paul's	
Armstrong, Teresa J. (NDP)	London—Fanshawe	
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Bailey, Robert (PC)	Sarnia—Lambton	
Barrett, Toby (PC)	Haldimand—Norfolk	
Begum, Doly (NDP)	Scarborough Southwest / Scarborough-Sud-Ouest	
Bell, Jessica (NDP)	University—Rosedale	
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Blais, Stephen (LIB)	Orléans	
Bouma, Will (PC)	Brantford—Brant	
Bourgouin, Guy (NDP)	Mushkegowuk—James Bay / Mushkegowuk—Baie James	
Burch, Jeff (NDP)	Niagara Centre / Niagara-Centre	
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Cho, Hon. / L'hon. Stan (PC)	Willowdale	Associate Minister of Transportation (GTA) / Ministre associé des Transports (RGT)
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Collard, Lucille (LIB)	Ottawa—Vanier	
Crawford, Stephen (PC)	Oakville	
Cuzzetto, Rudy (PC)	Mississauga—Lakeshore	
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Fee, Amy (PC)	Kitchener South—Hespeler / Kitchener-Sud—Hespeler	
Fife, Catherine (NDP)	Waterloo	

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French, Jennifer K. (NDP)	Oshawa	Third Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Troisième vice-présidente du comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative
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Gélinas, France (NDP)	Nickel Belt	
Ghamari, Goldie (PC)	Carleton	
Gill, Hon. / L'hon. Parm (PC)	Milton	Minister of Citizenship and Multiculturalism / Ministre des Affaires civiles et du Multiculturalisme
Glover, Chris (NDP)	Spadina—Fort York	
Gravelle, Michael (LIB)	Thunder Bay—Superior North / Thunder Bay—Supérieur-Nord	
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Hardeman, Ernie (PC)	Oxford	
Harden, Joel (NDP)	Ottawa Centre / Ottawa-Centre	
Harris, Mike (PC)	Kitchener—Conestoga	
Hassan, Faisal (NDP)	York South—Weston / York-Sud— Weston	
Hatfield, Percy (NDP)	Windsor—Tecumseh	Second Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Deuxième vice-président du comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative
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Hogarth, Christine (PC)	Etobicoke—Lakeshore	
Horwath, Andrea (NDP)	Hamilton Centre / Hamilton-Centre	Leader, Official Opposition / Chef de l'opposition officielle
Hunter, Mitzie (LIB)	Scarborough—Guildwood	
Jones, Hon. / L'hon. Sylvia (PC)	Dufferin—Caledon	Solicitor General / Solliciteuse générale
Kanapathi, Logan (PC)	Markham—Thornhill	
Karahalios, Belinda C. (NBP)	Cambridge	
Karpoche, Bhutla (NDP)	Parkdale—High Park	
Ke, Vincent (PC)	Don Valley North / Don Valley-Nord	
Kernaghan, Terence (NDP)	London North Centre / London- Centre-Nord	
Khanjin, Andrea (PC)	Barrie—Innisfil	Deputy Government House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjointe du gouvernement
Kramp, Daryl (PC)	Hastings—Lennox and Addington	
Kusendova, Natalia (PC)	Mississauga Centre / Mississauga- Centre	
Lecce, Hon. / L'hon. Stephen (PC)	King—Vaughan	Minister of Education / Ministre de l'Éducation
Lindo, Laura Mae (NDP)	Kitchener Centre / Kitchener-Centre	
MacLeod, Hon. / L'hon. Lisa (PC)	Nepean	Minister of Heritage, Sport, Tourism and Culture Industries / ministre des Industries du patrimoine, du sport, du tourisme et de la culture
Mamakwa, Sol (NDP)	Kiiwetinoong	
Mantha, Michael (NDP)	Algoma—Manitoulin	
Martin, Robin (PC)	Eglinton—Lawrence	
Martow, Gila (PC)	Thornhill	
McDonell, Jim (PC)	Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry	
McKenna, Hon. / L'hon. Jane (PC)	Burlington	Associate Minister of Children and Women's Issues / Ministre associée déléguée au dossier de l'Enfance et à la Condition féminine
McNaughton, Hon. / L'hon. Monte (PC)	Lambton—Kent—Middlesex	Minister of Labour, Training and Skills Development / Ministre du Travail, de la Formation et du Développement des compétences
Miller, Norman (PC)	Parry Sound—Muskoka	
Miller, Paul (IND)	Hamilton East—Stoney Creek / Hamilton-Est—Stoney Creek	
Mitas, Christina Maria (PC)	Scarborough Centre / Scarborough- Centre	
Monteith-Farrell, Judith (NDP)	Thunder Bay—Atikokan	
Morrison, Suze (NDP)	Toronto Centre / Toronto-Centre	

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Natyshak, Taras (NDP)	Essex	
Nicholls, Rick (OP)	Chatham-Kent—Leamington	
Oosterhoff, Sam (PC)	Niagara West / Niagara-Ouest	
Pang, Billy (PC)	Markham—Unionville	
Park, Lindsey (IND)	Durham	
Parsa, Michael (PC)	Aurora—Oak Ridges—Richmond Hill	Deputy Government House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjoint du gouvernement
Pettapiece, Randy (PC)	Perth—Wellington	
Piccini, Hon. / L'hon. David (PC)	Northumberland—Peterborough South / Northumberland—Peterborough-Sud	Minister of the Environment, Conservation and Parks / Ministre de l'Environnement, de la Protection de la nature et des Parcs
Rakocevic, Tom (NDP)	Humber River—Black Creek	
Rasheed, Hon. / L'hon. Kaleed (PC)	Mississauga East—Cooksville / Mississauga-Est—Cooksville	Associate Minister of Digital Government / Ministre associé délégué de l'Action pour un gouvernement numérique
Rickford, Hon. / L'hon. Greg (PC)	Kenora—Rainy River	Minister of Indigenous Affairs / Ministre des Affaires autochtones Minister of Northern Development, Mines, Natural Resources and Forestry / Ministre du Développement du Nord, des Mines, des Richesses naturelles et des Forêts
Roberts, Jeremy (PC)	Ottawa West—Nepean / Ottawa-Ouest—Nepean	
Romano, Hon. / L'hon. Ross (PC)	Sault Ste. Marie	Minister of Government and Consumer Services / Ministre des Services gouvernementaux et des Services aux consommateurs
Sabawy, Sheref (PC)	Mississauga—Erin Mills	
Sandhu, Amarjot (PC)	Brampton West / Brampton-Ouest	
Sarkaria, Hon. / L'hon. Prabmeet Singh (PC)	Brampton South / Brampton-Sud	President of the Treasury Board / Président du Conseil du Trésor
Sattler, Peggy (NDP)	London West / London-Ouest	Opposition House Leader / Leader parlementaire de l'opposition officielle
Schreiner, Mike (GRN)	Guelph	
Scott, Laurie (PC)	Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock	
Shaw, Sandy (NDP)	Hamilton West—Ancaster—Dundas / Hamilton-Ouest—Ancaster—Dundas	
Simard, Amanda (LIB)	Glengarry—Prescott—Russell	
Singh, Gurratan (NDP)	Brampton East / Brampton-Est	Deputy Opposition House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjoint de l'opposition officielle
Singh, Sara (NDP)	Brampton Centre / Brampton-Centre	Deputy Leader, Official Opposition / Chef adjointe de l'opposition officielle
Skelly, Donna (PC)	Flamborough—Glanbrook	
Smith, Dave (PC)	Peterborough—Kawartha	
Smith, Hon. / L'hon. Todd (PC)	Bay of Quinte / Baie de Quinte	Minister of Energy / Ministre de l'Énergie
Stevens, Jennifer (Jennie) (NDP)	St. Catharines	
Stiles, Marit (NDP)	Davenport	
Surma, Hon. / L'hon. Kinga (PC)	Etobicoke Centre / Etobicoke-Centre	Minister of Infrastructure / Ministre de l'Infrastructure
Tabuns, Peter (NDP)	Toronto—Danforth	
Tangri, Hon. / L'hon. Nina (PC)	Mississauga—Streetsville	Associate Minister of Small Business and Red Tape Reduction / Ministre associée déléguée aux Petites Entreprises et à la Réduction des formalités administratives
Taylor, Monique (NDP)	Hamilton Mountain	
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Tibollo, Hon. / L'hon. Michael A. (PC)	Vaughan—Woodbridge	Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions / Ministre associé délégué au dossier de la Santé mentale et de la Lutte contre les dépendances
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Vanthof, John (NDP)	Timiskaming—Cochrane	Deputy Leader, Official Opposition / Chef adjoint de l'opposition officielle
Wai, Daisy (PC)	Richmond Hill	
Walker, Bill (PC)	Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound	Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Président du comité plénier de l'Assemblée Deputy Speaker / Vice-président

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Wilson, Jim (IND)	Simcoe—Grey	
Wynne, Kathleen O. (LIB)	Don Valley West / Don Valley-Ouest	
Yakabuski, John (PC)	Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke	
Yarde, Kevin (NDP)	Brampton North / Brampton-Nord	
Vacant	Ajax / Ajax	
Vacant	Don Valley East / Don Valley-Est	
Vacant	Elgin—Middlesex—London	

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Goldie Ghamari, Randy Hillier
Christina Maria Mitas, Judith Monteith-Farrell
Michael Parsa, Randy Pettapiece
Peter Tabuns
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Ian Arthur, Will Bouma
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