

Gays Launch 'Homophobia' Accusations at Evangelicals in Anti-Bullying Debate

Evangelical attorneys are taking the issue of school bullying to court on Tuesday, but the issue of alleged "homophobia" seems to be muddying the waters.

Don Hutchinson, vice president and general legal counsel of the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada (EFC), appeared before the Standing Committee on Social Policy hearing of the Ontario Legislature in Ottawa on Tuesday morning. The Committee is also hearing from members of the public on Bills 13 and 14, which are proposed school anti-bullying laws.

Although the EFC supports anti-bullying initiatives in Ontario schools, Hutchinson argues that Bill 12 is deeply flawed because it offers junk statistics or American statistics that have been used to inform the Ontario legislation. But EFC is also focusing on how the term "homophobe" has been misused to label and ostracize many who have expressed concern about Bill 13.

An Alliance for Family Values study reveals that 90 percent of people don't want Ontario to adopt Bill 13, which would allow groups like Gay and Straight Alliance in schools. Yet the "homophobe" accusations are growing louder.

"It has reached the point where journalists calling our office seeking comment on Bill 13 relate that it is near impossible to find anyone to offer a critique of the bill as potential interviewees are afraid of being labeled 'homophobes,'" explains EFC Legal Counsel Faye Sonier.

"The fact that some citizens are concerned about the Act's flawed definition of 'bullying,' or that the bill focuses on

selected forms of bullying over others, or that it doesn't properly recognize denominational school rights does not render a person a 'homophobe.' Leave that term for extremists who act in hateful ways, and not toss it around recklessly any time a person does not endorse a policy initiative that in some way relates to LGBT issues."

While not yet defined in Canadian law, the Oxford Dictionary defines the word "homophobia" as "an extreme and irrational aversion to homosexuality and homosexual people." Evangelicals do not have a fear or irrational aversion toward gays and lesbians, Hutchinson says, but do at times find themselves in disagreement with public policy positions activists from the gay community express.

"This label has become the contemporary slur intended to silence the voices of those in our free and democratic society who might disagree with the public policy agenda of a select group of activists," Hutchinson says. "This slur is intended as an insult directed at the very nature and character of the person or organization that dares to disagree. It has no place in public discourse, dialogue or debate and certainly no place in the legislatures, public squares or public schools of our province or our nation."