

Anti-bullying bill a front for ‘sex ed’ agenda, groups say

Campaign Life Coalition's Jack Fonseca, far left, the Evangelical Association's Thomas Rondo, centre, and Mendel Kaplan, of the Council of Orthodox Rabbis, came together on Tuesday to oppose the government's anti-bullying legislation.

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By [Tanya Talaga](#) Queen's Park Bureau

A church versus state battle is erupting at Queen’s Park.

Some Christian and Jewish groups are denouncing Premier Dalton McGuinty’s anti-bullying legislation, calling it a front for his “radical sex education” agenda.

The Institute for Canadian Values held a news conference Tuesday, condemning the premier for a section of the new anti-bullying legislation that allows for all publicly funded school boards to “host gay clubs.”

The Institute’s president is Dr. Charles McVety, a politically savvy evangelist who was against proposed changes to the provincial physical health and education curriculum last year. Those changes included discussing same-sex couples with Grade 3 students.

“We don’t understand why this keeps coming back,” McVety said.

But speaking in Windsor, McGuinty denounced his critics by strongly saying Catholic schools “will have gay-straight alliances.”

“Are there gay children attending Catholic schools in Ontario? Yes. Are there gay teachers teaching in Catholic schools in Ontario? Yes,” McGuinty told reporters.

“The purpose of our accepting schools act is to send a strong signal to all Ontarians, of all faiths and backgrounds, all places of origin, culture, ethnicities, in our province and our publicly funded schools — schools will be warm and accepting of all our children, regardless of their sexual orientation as well.”

The anti-bullying legislation, created after recent high-profile youth suicides including that of Ottawa teen Jamie Hubley, was introduced by the Liberals last week. The 15-year-old said he was bullied due to his sexual orientation.

“I fully expect Catholic kids will use the word ‘gay,’ ” said McGuinty. “I fully expect Catholic teachers will use the word ‘gay’ and as a Catholic premier in Ontario, I am going to talk about gay kids.”

Progressive Conservative MPP Frank Klees sponsored the press conference at Queen’s Park and while a handful of Tory MPPs were in attendance, PC Leader Tim Hudak distanced himself from McVety’s views.

“There should be, in all our public schools, some committee to help students who are being bullied for sexual orientation — also for disability, race, religious background, what have you,” he said, adding that includes Catholic schools.

But there is a time and place for everything, said Rondo Thomas, of the Toronto-based Evangelical Association, but there is no “time and place” in an 8-year-old’s mind to try to make them conceptualize something beyond “tying their shoes.”

“The anti-bullying legislation that Mr. McGuinty is proposing constitutes a violation of our religious freedoms that are guaranteed by the Charter of Rights and further to that, it violates the common law of separation of church and state,” he said.

The backlash to introducing this bill could be “quite severe,” he said.

Thomas even evoked the premier’s mother into the mix. “The premier’s mother said to him, ‘Dalton, I didn’t raise you this way,’ ” he said.

However, the premier’s office later told the *Star* they had no idea what Thomas was talking about.

The premier is misguided on the anti-bullying legislation and it really is an attack on faith-based schools, said Jack Fonseca of the Campaign Life Coalition. Mendel Kaplan, of the Council of Orthodox Rabbis and one of the religious leaders holding the press conference, agreed.

Fonseca accused McGuinty of trying to force Catholic schools to act against the wishes of the bishops. “That is a violation of Catholic rights in Ontario,” he said.

Kaplan said he believes “the legislation encroaches on our religious freedoms.”

Fonseca also attacked McGuinty’s faith, calling him a convenient Catholic during election time when he needs votes.

“Dalton McGuinty is unfortunately not a great Catholic on the moral issues. He supports abortion on demand, taxpayer funding of abortion and he supports gay marriage,” Fonseca said.

But the Liberals shot back at the institute during question period.

There is nothing “radical” making sure every student has the tools to succeed in school, said Education Minister Laurel Broten.

“The official Opposition needs to be clear where they stand — there is no room for division.”