



## CONFRONTING ANTIFEMINIST IDEOLOGY THROUGH SECULAR POLICY

A brief for the Standing Committee on the Status of Women

Prepared by Ian Bushfield, Executive Director, November 25, 2025

The struggle for gender equality is inherently a humanist cause, founded on the principle that every individual possesses inherent dignity and the right to self-determination. This connection is not merely philosophical; it is foundational to Canadian history. Dr Henry Morgentaler's fight for abortion liberation was rooted in his humanist conviction that individuals, not the state or religious dogma, must have ultimate authority over their own bodies.

Modern antifeminist ideology constitutes a direct assault on this principle of bodily autonomy, seeking to roll back decades of progress and re-subject women and gender-diverse people to restrictive roles, undermining their personal agency and future development. While antifeminism can be packaged in secular forms, such as those found in the online "manosphere," it remains philosophically tethered to patriarchal, essentialist and hierarchical worldviews traditionally rooted in religious dogma. Religious antifeminism attempts to sanctify a rigid social order, while its secular counterparts rely on a pseudoscientific biological essentialism. Both strains dehumanize women and gender minorities while appealing to an authoritarian rejection of scientific consensus, critical inquiry and human rights.

The continued privileging of religion in our society allows organizations that actively promote these hierarchical and discriminatory views to benefit from public subsidies. This amounts to tax dollars financing the indoctrination of youth into anti-equality ideologies. Rather than focusing on the tangible benefits that these organizations may (or may not) provide to the broader community, the presumption that religious faith in and of itself is a social good is used to promote various dogmas without consideration for their broader implication. Importantly, this assumption is frequently restricted to theistic beliefs: similar benefits are often not available to groups, like ours, that promote secular worldviews. This includes the CRA's policy on advancement of religion requiring "an element of theistic worship,"<sup>1</sup> the clergy residence deduction,<sup>2</sup> the exclusion of humanists from solemnizing marriages in most provinces<sup>3</sup> and property tax exemptions for places of public worship. In tackling antifeminism, we must tackle religious privilege.

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<sup>1</sup> Canada Revenue Agency. (2022 October 25). *Summary policy CSP-R06 Religion*.

<sup>2</sup> Thom, A., Bushfield, I. and Phelps Bondaroff, T. (2021). "An extra burden: The clergy residence deduction." BC Humanist Association Available at [https://www.bchumanist.ca/an\\_extra\\_burden](https://www.bchumanist.ca/an_extra_burden)

<sup>3</sup> BC Humanist Association. (2017 March 8). "Marriage Across Canada" in *The Case for Humanist Marriage in BC*. Available at [https://www.bchumanist.ca/marriage\\_across\\_canada](https://www.bchumanist.ca/marriage_across_canada)

Among the most harmful contemporary manifestations of antifeminist ideology is the propagation of anti-trans rhetoric, often packaged under the banner of "parental rights." Recent legislation, such as that in Saskatchewan and Alberta, that restricts the rights and freedoms of trans and non-binary youth is a profound betrayal of the state's duty of care. These policies weaponize legislative power to strip vulnerable young people of their right to privacy and safety, going so far as to invoke the notwithstanding clause to shield their discrimination from judicial review. For trans and gender-diverse youth, who already face disproportionate risks of anxiety, depression and self-harm, such legislative hostility is a direct assault on their mental health and physical safety. The government should denounce such legislation and consider invoking its power to disallow legislation that undermines the rights and dignities of Canadians.

Further, antifeminist ideology is operationalized through the deceptive network of unregulated pregnancy centres.<sup>4</sup> These anti-choice organizations lure young Canadians seeking medical advice and support, only to subject them to shame-based counseling and medically inaccurate information designed to deter them from exercising their reproductive rights. Research has repeatedly documented that this manipulative practice induces fear, guilt and significant psychological distress, resulting in delayed or forgone healthcare.<sup>5</sup> The fact that many of these organizations maintain charitable status means the government is directly supporting the propagation of antifeminist disinformation that actively harms the health and autonomy of young people.

In October 2024, the Government promised action on charities that promoted anti-choice disinformation.<sup>6</sup> However, such legislation never materialized, and Budget 2025 is silent on these issues. This also follows repeated platform commitments from the Liberal Party of Canada and recommendations in the Finance Committee's Pre-Budget 2025 consultation.<sup>7</sup> Fulfilling this pledge is critical to tackling this misinformation.

## **Recommendations**

- 1. Modernize the Income Tax Act to end the privileged status of advancement of religion**
- 2. Protect trans youth from legislative overreach including through disallowance**
- 3. Revoke charitable status for anti-choice groups**

*Since 1984, the BC Humanist Association has provided a community and a voice for Humanists, atheists, agnostics and the non-religious in BC. Humanism is a worldview that promotes human dignity without belief in a higher power. We promote progressive and secular values and challenge religious privilege.*

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<sup>4</sup> Often marketing themselves as 'crisis pregnancy centres.'

<sup>5</sup> Arthur J, and Downey A, Katelieva A, Jensen O, Mitchell K, Phelps Bondaroff TN. (March 2023). *Examining the Websites of Anti-Choice "Crisis Pregnancy Centres"*. Abortion Rights Coalition of Canada and BC Humanist Association.

<sup>6</sup> Department of Finance. (2024 October 29). "Government of Canada protecting reproductive freedom and covering essential health care costs."

<sup>7</sup> Canada, Parliament, House of Commons. Standing Committee on Finance. (2024). *Pre-Budget Consultations in Advance of the 2025 Budget*. 44<sup>th</sup> Parl, 1<sup>st</sup> sess.