

## HILTON-O'BRIEN: Parental rights legislation in Alberta? How about it, Mr. Minister?

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In the wake of Saskatchewan and New Brunswick adopting parental rights legislation for schools, a number of parents have written to Alberta's Education Minister, Demetrios Nicolaides, asking him to do the same.

Nicolaides' response directs people to speak to their local school board about concerns, noting the Education Act requires notification when instructional materials, instruction or exercises "deal primarily and explicitly with religion or human sexuality."

The minister is partly right: the Act does say this. The problem, however, is this requirement is very easy to circumvent. In fact, the Alberta Teachers' Association (ATA) circulates a pair of books that successfully dodge the legislation cited by Nicolaides — even running workshops about them at every teachers' convention.

In doing so, it turns the minister's bland assurance into a bald-faced lie. The current system is not enough to deal with the abuses created — new legislation is needed.

The books in question are called the *Prism Toolkit*, with one edition aimed at grades K-6 and another [for grades 7-12](#). The books offer an extensive apologetics for gender activism and provide lesson plans that [intentionally incorporate](#) sexual material into every subject, from Kindergarten to Grade 12.

One example is "Why Homophobia Leads Us Into Sin" on page 89, which

portrays radical gender ideology as a Biblical teaching for a Religion class. In fact, the *Toolkit* encourages activist teachers to "enculturate" sexual material into every subject, in the way Catholic education wishes to include Christianity in every school subject.

In the *Toolkit*, the ATA explains clearly and simply how to bypass legislation requiring parental notification. It notes — as the Minister does — parental consent is needed if the lesson deals "primarily and explicitly" with sexuality. The solution is to make sure the lesson is 'primarily' about some other topic.

If sexual material is included in the lesson, but not as the 'primary' or 'explicit' goal of the lesson, then the parents need not even be informed. In other words, the Minister's reassurances are useless.

As Theresa Ng pointed out years ago, the *Prism Toolkit* may be a [violation of Alberta's educational standards](#).

But how does a school board deal with it?

The ATA has official clout: It is enabled in Alberta Legislation. It effectively controls teacher accreditation in public and Catholic schools. It also has the active support of the bureaucracy: the Prism Toolkit acknowledges support from Alberta Education, and most of the senior school board bureaucrats are former teachers. In addition, it claims 43,500 members, whose dues total \$65 million dollars per year — plus the value of the grants and contracted training programs. It dwarfs any

school board — it has more power than the governing United Conservative Party.

They even offer legal advice (even if they shouldn't.) The Prism Toolkit suggests that schools are legally liable for "engaging in professional malpractice" if they don't follow the ATA's directives (page 10.)

The intimidation is real — school boards can't be expected to deal with this without legislative support.

The problem of parental consent is also more widely spread than educational material.

We have previously seen Alberta's pediatric gender identity clinic is willing to accept referrals from schools [without the consent of parents](#). We might wonder what other procedures might be offered to minors — and whether other government services might be circumventing parental consent. We need legislation that is broader than requiring teachers to tell parents when their children change their pronouns.

This leaves us with a problem.

The United Conservative Party is supposed to be — at least nominally — in favour of parental choice. But the minister's assurances tell us that he can't yet see how easily radical activists have swept statutory protections aside. If he treats the issue with such cavalier fashion, what assurance do parents have this government will defend parental authority in other fields?

That's why a group of parents have produced a motion for the floor of the United Conservative Party's Annual General Meeting in November.

It calls for a Bill of Parental Rights which would see legislation to recognize parental rights (not merely

grant them as though they were within the government's gift to bestow or withhold) and make sure they are in charge of decisions regarding all services the Government of Alberta offers for their children. It's a simple, practical idea and we hope that UCP members will support it.

As for Minister Nicolaides and the rest of Premier Smith's government, we hope they will support — and implement — that policy. Bland reassurances aren't enough.

*John Hilton-O'Brien is the Executive Director of Parents for Choice in Education, [www.parentchoice.ca](http://www.parentchoice.ca)*