

# Halton mom not pleased with HCDSB response to uniform concerns

A Halton mother is not pleased with the Catholic board's response to her argument that its policy to permit only one vendor to sell uniforms is oppressive and should be changed.

Maria Lourenco, a mother of two, had delegated at the regular board meeting on June 7 and a staff response was presented at the June 21 meeting.

Board staff's response to the delegation did not address the issues raised, said Lourenco.

Staff say that they can't address the issues because they relate specifically to the current supplier. This is false as only a portion of the report, and only 1 of 13 questions that staff were specifically asked to answer, dealt with the current supplier (R.J. McCarthy's in Oakville).

Lourenco had questioned the

board about its openness in accepting other uniform suppliers, and if the board imposed criteria on where its teachers purchased their clothing. She also inquired as to whether the board could validate McCarthy's claims regarding fair labour practices.

Does the school board have any similar policies for any of its non-apparel purchases? queried Lourenco in her delegation.

In response to Lourenco's claims that McCarthy's is routinely back-ordered, the board countered with statistics that showed McCarthy's had fulfilled 98 per cent of orders they received in 2014 and in 2015, 98.15 per cent of orders.

Many of the questions, many of the concerns raised were specifically about the supplier, McCarthy's, responded Camillo Cipriano, superin-

tendent of education, school services. It's difficult to respond on behalf of McCarthy's.

The delegation's report, however, was shared with McCarthy's representatives, and was to be shared with the Request for Proposal (RFP) committee over the summer, he said.

The HCDSB dictates uniforms must be purchased from its approved supplier, which must meet policies and standards, including ensuring fair labour practices.

The contract with McCarthy's expires this year and Lourenco believes the board should give parents more options going forward.

It starts with the basic issues of a monopoly, so there's no incentives to keep the customer happy, she said.

The mother of two spoke with upwards of 40 other parents representing

14 schools who all took issue with the supplier's location, hours, prices and sizing.

There's a slew of issues and I think that a lot of that stems from the fact that there's no competition, she said.

At the April 19 board meeting, trustees voted narrowly to keep the status quo for a single supplier in its policy.

It's unclear, however, if a motion at a future meeting could reopen the debate on the HCDSB's uniform policy.

Board chair Jane Michael will sit on the RFP committee along with three parents from the Catholic Parent Involvement Committee, Quinn and Cipriano. Michael said fair labour practices, in her opinion, remain as the key issue.

The person that's going to win the

contract has to comply with child labour and social justice, she said.

We can't have our uniforms manufactured by child labour and that's one of our No. 1 concerns.

So far only McCarthy's has been able to guarantee that the uniforms used would not exploit children, who would never get the opportunity to attend school, wrote former HCDSB trustee and chair Alice Anne LeMay in a letter to the board following Lourenco's delegation.

They have inspectors at their operations to make sure standards are very high. If other uniform companies can guarantee this, then they should be considered, wrote LeMay. The presenter (Lourenco) said she had spoken to 40 parents. This is hardly representative of more than 30,000 students.



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