

WILL WE WITHSTAND FORD'S NOTWITHSTANDING CLAUSE USE?

Regardless of where you live and how you identify politically, Premier Doug Ford's decision to ram through his plan to slash Toronto council from 47 wards to 25 via section 33 of Canada's Charter of Rights and Freedoms should trouble you.

While the so-called notwithstanding clause has been invoked by other provinces in the past - twice by Saskatchewan and numerous times by Quebec - it has never been used in Ontario. And that's not a bad thing given that the purpose of section 33 is to allow Parliament or a provincial government to override certain sections of the charter, specifically sections 2 (fundamental freedoms) and 7 through 15 (legal and equality rights) inclusively, to further its legislative agenda.

Since the ruling by Superior Court Justice Edward Belobaba that struck down Ford's council-cutting legislation, on the grounds it violated the rights to freedom of expression for election candidates and voters under section 2b of the charter, the matter has become the subject of some debate.

Former PC premier Bill Davis has come out against using the clause, as has former prime minister Brian Mulroney, who happens to be the father of Ford's attorney general, York-Simcoe MPP Caroline Mulroney. The list of supporters of Ford using the clause include former Saskatchewan premier Brad Wall and former B.C. premier Christy Clark.

That said, there's no disputing Ford has the legal right to use the notwithstanding clause, just as no one can argue the province doesn't have the authority to pass whatever laws it wants in relation to municipalities. Belobaba himself acknowledges this in his ruling, but he also takes considerable issue with the fact the changes were imposed during an election campaign already underway.

By now, we know the premier is fond of throwing the word democracy around, but between suspending charter rights to get his way and the scene that unfolded in the public gallery at Queen's Park last week, where some protesters were led out in handcuffs, our nascent PC government looks an awful lot like something else.

Ford also likes to imply he has carte blanche owing to the fact that 2.3 million voters supported his party, and yet this ignores the fact over 3.3 million people voted for somebody else.

Ultimately, what makes this whole episode so worrying is that Ford has indicated he would have no qualms with using the notwithstanding clause again. It begs the question: if he's willing to ignore some of our rights for the sake of a relatively trivial goal such as this, what's the next issue that will lead him to conclude the charter is nothing more than an impediment to his belligerent will?

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SCHOOL CAN BRING A NUMBER OF STRESSORS

WORKING ON GOOD HABITS FOR MENTAL WELLNESS IMPORTANT, WRITES MCGREGOR



MELANIE MCGREGOR
Column

"So, how was school today?"

Many of us with young people in our lives have likely asked this question (and received concise answers like "OK," "fine," or "boring") more times than we can count. Now that school is back in, it's important to think about going beyond the usual questions to support students' mental health and wellness.

School can bring a number of stressors: homework, social relationships, different learning styles and special needs, quizzes, tests, and trying to balance it all with the number of other things going on in young people's lives. Back to school should not just be about new pens and notebooks, but also

working on good habits for mental wellness and building resilience to cope with challenges.

So what can we do to support youth and encourage positive coping?

- Ask specific questions about thoughts, feelings, and strategies. Something like "How are you feeling about your test tomorrow?" can help us see how a young person is coping. Revisit discussions and recognize positive coping - something like, "I know you were stressed out about your test and your studying schedule really helped. Well done."

- Validate and encourage. It can be tempting to dismiss problems that may seem trivial to us, but focus on the young person's feelings and not just the problem. Talking openly can help him/her accept and work through the feelings and cope in positive ways now and in the future.

- Show the importance of

self-care. Go for a bike ride after school one day where you can chat and catch up or have a surprise trip to get ice cream when you can take time away from technology and other demands. Talk about the importance of a balanced diet and getting enough sleep and exercise and how these can be built into down time and self-care.

- Know what supports are available. Check out what is offered at school or in the community if a young person needs more help with coping strategies. And normalize those needs by explaining that we all struggle from time to time and it's OK, and important, to talk about not being OK.

For more support, talk to your family doctor or contact us at the CMHA.

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