

SANCTITY OF LIFE WILL REMAIN OUT OF CATHOLIC BOARD POLICY

ROLAND CILLIERS
rcilliers@metroland.com

A trustee made a fairly short-lived attempt to bring back a controversial policy from the past.

Oakville trustee Helena Karabela put forth an amendment at a recent board meeting to change the Halton Catholic District School Board's (HCDSB) policy around school fundraising activities.

The ultimately-defeated amendment stated that no school fundraising efforts could be directed to an organization that supports advocacy, programs, financing or material support for abortion, euthanasia or human embryonic stem cell research.

Charities that could be included under that label include Toronto's Hospital for Sick Children, as well

as the Canadian Cancer Society and Halton Women's Place.

The direction was similar to a controversial amendment from 2018 also supported by Karabela and was widely known as the Sanctity of Life policy.

"If we say we uphold the tenets of the Catholic faith on sacredness of life, we need to make sure that we are not giving money, not even one dollar, to any charity or non-profit that does not uphold the sacredness of life. If we did, then we would be in danger of funding and promoting evil actions," said Karabela.

In 2018, the similar Sanctity of Life motion led to student protests, a court case against the board, months of debate and even condemnation from a former education minister before it was ultimately



HCDSB photo
HCDSB TRUSTEE HELENA
KARABELA

quashed by trustees later that year.

That motion generated attention for the HCDSB throughout the province and is widely credited as being key to the turnover seen at the board table between the current term and the previous one. Ka-

abela is the only trustee from that term who was re-elected.

"All life is beautiful. It is wrong to kill a human person. It is wrong to prevent human life from being born. It is wrong to experiment on a human person in their earliest stage of development, and it is wrong to assist a vulnerable or sick elderly person with suicide. It is for these important reasons that I am amending this policy to include the statement as a guiding principle," said Karabela.

The amendment to add the principle was strongly opposed by the majority of trustees at the table. Opponents labelled the move as an attempt to get attention, said it was a thoroughly debated topic that the community already said they didn't want, and was an overreach to at-

tempt to control what students did with their charitable donations.

Oakville trustee Nancy Guzzo said she would never agree to something like this and the fundraising policy is written to give school communities the latitude to put their support where they choose.

"Frankly, I am quite disappointed that this is making an appearance here and that this was done specifically here at the board meeting and not at policy to grandstand. And it is extremely disappointing, and I would never, ever support anything like this," Guzzo.

In a statement following the meeting, Karabela said she was not at the previous policy meeting and bringing forward the amendment at the board meeting is part of normal procedure.

Other trustees connected their opposition to the amendment with personal experiences.

Burlington trustee Brenda Agnew said her son had been supported by organizations that this policy would forbid the students from donating to.

"His life and the life of others like him are no less important than anyone else's. And if we're not able to support the research and initiatives that keep some kids like my son alive and thriving, it's something that I don't want to have a part of," said Agnew.

Karabela, Tim O'Brien and Vincent Iantomasi voted in favour of adding the sacredness of life wording.

Agnew, Guzzo, Patrick Murphy, Peter DeRosa and Janet O'Hearn-Czarnota voted against the addition.



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