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Attention: Education and legislature reporters

MEDIA RELEASE

Bill 44 Amendments Fail to Address Concerns of Parents, Teachers, Superintendents and Elected School Boards—It's Time to Start Over

Amendments to Bill 44, *Human Rights, Citizenship and Multiculturalism Amendment Act, 2009*, proposed by the Government of Alberta, fail to address fundamental concerns say groups representing Alberta school councils, teachers, school superintendents and elected school boards.

The amendments, introduced yesterday in the Alberta Legislature, purport to “clarify” provisions of the bill, which require advance notice be given to a parent about the delivery of instruction on religion, human sexuality or sexual orientation. The new provisions say that the bill applies to subject matter that deals *primarily or explicitly* with religion, human sexuality or sexual orientation; the provisions also say that the bill does not apply to *incidental or indirect* references to religion, human sexuality or sexual orientation.

“Minister Blackett says he has listened carefully to teachers. He has not been listening. Teachers and the education partners have called on the government to remove section 9 altogether from Bill 44,” said Frank Bruseker, president of the Alberta Teachers’ Association.

“These are issues that parents resolve at the local level, not in front of human rights tribunals,” said Marilyn Sheptycki, who represents over 800 school councils as president of the Alberta School Councils’ Association. “Existing legislation and common sense should be sufficient.”

“The *School Act* already protects a parent’s rights when it comes to what their children are taught at school,” noted Heather Welwood, president of the Alberta School Boards Association. “In every school jurisdiction in Alberta, there are effective ways to resolve these questions at the local level. It’s a mystery as to what problem the government is seeking to solve.”

“The amendments provide even more problems for school boards and teachers,” said Paulette Hanna, president of the College of Alberta School Superintendents. “Who decides what ‘primarily’ or ‘explicitly’ means? What is ‘incidental’ or ‘indirect’? The bill provides a blueprint for teachers and school boards to unwittingly violate the law every day.”

The four education partners believe that the best solution is for the government to withdraw section 9 of Bill 44 and to start over by consulting with parents, teachers and school boards. The education partners have repeated their offer to work with government to ensure parents know they can exclude their children from religion and human sexuality instruction under the *School Act*.

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