

BRIEF TO THE JOINT SENATE-COMMONS COMMITTEE  
ON THE CONSTITUTION  
FROM  
THE PLANNED PARENTHOOD FEDERATION OF CANADA



The Planned Parenthood Federation asks the Special Joint Senate-Commons Committee on the Constitution to recommend to Parliament that the Government's proposed charter of fundamental human rights include that of ready access to the information, education and services which will enable all persons in Canada to decide freely and responsibly on the number and spacing of their children.

The Planned Parenthood Federation of Canada is the largest national voluntary agency in this country primarily concerned with the promotion of responsible parenthood. Our ideal is a Canada in which every child is conceived as a consequence of a free, informed, loving decision by its parents. We are concerned not only with the prevention of unwanted pregnancies but also with the diagnosis and treatment of problems of sub-fertility which afflict a significant number of Canadians.

Several international conventions to which Canada is signatory have already recognized as a basic right the access to knowledge and services that will give individuals freedom to control their own fertility. The International Conference on Human Rights held at Teheran in 1978 affirmed the "basic human right to decide freely and responsibly on the number and spacing of their children". The United Nations World Population Conference held at Bucharest in 1974 expanded this right to include access to information, education and services for women to determine their own fertility. A resolution adopted by the World Conference of the United

Nations Decade for Women held at Copenhagen in 1980 "calls upon Governments to take all appropriate measures, including legislative ones, within the framework of national policies, to provide information, education and means to enable women and men to exercise freely the right to determine their family size".

The average number of children, 1.6 per family, (1976) indicates that the majority of Canadians are voluntarily and effectively controlling their fertility, but there are important exceptions. A major concern of the Planned Parenthood Federation of Canada is the sexually active teenager. About 50,000 teen pregnancies occur annually in Canada, and in 1979 nearly one-third of the 65,000 legal abortions performed in Canada were to young women under 20 years of age. Teenagers facing the high health risks of too early pregnancy are doing so often because they have not had access to appropriate information, education and services.

As well as the human costs of unplanned pregnancies, there are heavy financial costs to the public purse. A high percentage of teenagers who carry their pregnancies to term elect to keep their children, and are often dependent on public assistance. Many become the concern of child protection agencies. This is important both federally and provincially because under present arrangements, the federal government reimburses the provinces 50% of the costs of the required welfare assistance and child care services.

We recognize that, except for particular groups such as native peoples for whom the federal government has special responsibilities, the provinces have primary authority over the health, education and welfare services needed to make the right to reproductive freedom a

reality. Both the quality and quantity of such services vary widely, not only as between provinces but also within individual provinces. The entrenchment of the right of reproductive freedom within the federal constitution would provide significant leverage for concerned groups upon the responsible provincial agencies.

PPFC December 1980

File ref: 146 - 5