

NDP should take a measured approach to bullying in schools

Fear and pain leads to over-reaction in the best of us. In response to the tragic stories of LGBTQ children the government has passed legislation and created guidelines to require all schools to alienate parents from their children.

I have been confronting Bill 10 and the Education Guidelines as a mother and a professional while I have also been fighting a very personal battle against Stage II breast cancer. I go public today so I can share an analogy in the hopes of opening hearts, and softening battle lines in this anti-bullying debate.

Cancer is scary, just like having a child who is suffering psychologically is scary. In fact the health of our children is more important than our own, and parents would abandon their very lives for their children.

After chemotherapy I sat down with my surgeon and my request was likely typical of many facing cancer. I said, "Take em' both off, strip all my lymph nodes, and while you're at it, take my uterus and ovaries as well!"

His response was measured. My surgeon explained that even if I do all of these things I am never going to be 100% protected from cancer recurrence. If I do all of these things I am at risk of surgical complications, lifelong disability due to lymphedema and psychological distress because of the physical transformation of my body. I was counselled to choose the least intrusive care, and move

towards more intense intervention if required in the future.

As the Government of Alberta sat down with children and families dealing with LGBTQ difficulties in school they reacted in much the same way I had with my surgeon. They created and passed Bill 10 and Education Guidelines in the hope of ending the risk these youth face. But their approach does damage to family and community, without guaranteeing the safety of children.

First, Bill 10 and the Education Guidelines assume the worst of parents, damaging the parent-child bond by not allowing schools to notify parents of their children's identity struggles in school.

In so doing the school is put in an impossible position of having to choose between following the law and maintaining a healthy and open parent-school relationship, by including parents in discussions that impact the safety and health of their children.

The fundamental beliefs that bring communities together to support one another are muted, as religious freedom is quashed when every school across the province must now allow a Gay-Straight Alliance, even if such a club is hostile to the traditions of the schools or the majority of parents whose children attend non-religious schools.

As for freedom of association, the right to access a school that meets the diverse needs of students, and respects the diverse traditions and cultures of families across our province, this is stripped from the inside out when

schools are transformed by government into one-size-fits-all institutions.

Most importantly, this debate itself resulting from the protective nature of parents, as they confront the heavy hand of government, leaves children in a field of battle with nowhere to shelter from the noisy debate that has ensued.

I had minimal surgery February 26, 2016. There is no guarantee I will not need further intervention, or that cancer will not take my life. There is a very good chance the measured care I received will allow me to live and mother my children for many more years, without further intervention, and without the risk of damage that heavy-handed medical treatment could have resulted in.

A measured approach to school bullying begins at home. Return parents to their rightful position as the primary caregivers of their children, by making parental notification mandatory. Return autonomy to schools so they can accommodate students appropriately and compassionately. If further care is needed schools can, and are legally obliged to, seek outside intervention, which is already in place.

There are no guarantees. But with a measured approach the vast majority of children cared for by families, local schools and communities will grow up to live happy and healthy lives.

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