

MEDIA RELEASE

Chilliwack School District employees file Human Rights Complaint following Board's failure to censure Trustee Barry Neufeld's homophobic and transphobic statements

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Chilliwack

The Union representing support staff in the Chilliwack School District has filed a complaint with the BC Human Rights Tribunal alleging that their employer failed to protect them from the discriminatory effects of Trustee Barry Neufeld's transphobic and homophobic statements.

The Union, which represents over 800 custodians, bus drivers, tradespeople, clerical staff, and assistants, says that its members' right to a workplace free of harassment and discrimination is not being upheld.

"Like all workers in BC, CUPE members have a right to be safe, included and accepted for who they are when they go to work," Local President Shana Kirkland said.

"LGBTQ members have been sent the message by Mr. Neufeld that who they are is wrong and they should not be welcome in Chilliwack schools. This is heartbreaking for them and the students they work with."

Beginning in November of last year Mr. Neufeld made a number of public statements and online posts stating that educational resources that promote inclusion and acceptance of LGBTQ students, particularly transgender students, should not be used in Chilliwack schools. Mr. Neufeld's statements describe transgender identity as a symptom of mental illness and harmful to society, going so far as to say that allowing children to change their gender is nothing short of child abuse.

The Board of Trustees of the Chilliwack School District has taken no steps to censure Mr. Neufeld for his discriminatory comments.

The BC Human Rights Code protects all British Columbians from discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression, among other grounds, in their workplaces.

The Union has asked the Tribunal to order the District's trustees and senior managers to complete training on LGBTQ rights and to order the Chilliwack School Board to censure Mr. Neufeld for his discriminatory comments. The Union has also asked the Tribunal to award \$50,000 to be paid on behalf of the affected employees to a non-profit organization that advocates for LGBTQ youth.

Canadian Union of Public Employees Local 411 represents over 800 employees of the Chilliwack School District in five departments: assistants (chef assistants, education assistants, supervision assistants, etc.), clerical, custodial, maintenance, and transportation.

For more information contact: Shana Kirkland, President, CUPE Local 411
604-392-1411
unionoffice@cupe411.ca