



“Chairman Wiggam, Vice Chair John, Ranking Member Kelly, and members of the House State and Local Government Committee, thank you for the opportunity today to testify on H.R. 194. I am Michael Thiessen, founder of the Liberty Coalition of Canada.

Liberty Coalition Canada was founded by several clergies in January 2021 as a formalization of activity to externalize and assert the ideas presented in the Niagara Declaration (www.niagaradeclaration.ca), which was drafted by Joe Boot, Aaron Rock, Michael Thiessen, and Andre Schutten. LCC quickly became a national movement, with representatives joining from all over Canada.

Liberty Coalition Canada exists for three main reasons:

- 1) We arm Canadians with a clarion Christian conservative analysis of current events to diagnose the breakdown of liberty in Canada. We use transparent and trustworthy curation of information, along with long-form discussion, to re-train Canadians on how to think honestly, openly, and correctly about Canadian issues.
- 2) In partnership with our constitutional lawyer, James Kitchen, we commit to supporting Canadians who are facing unjust and illegal discrimination for exercising their lawful freedoms.
- 3) We advocate for human rights and constitutional freedoms with legal backing.

Religious persecution of Canadians has been escalating in recent years. A few examples include:

- The razing and vandalization of church buildings encouraged by government and elected officials.
- Preventing churches from gathering by locking the church and barricading the property
- Huge fines and imprisonment for pastors who dare to hold worship services.
- Not allowing pro-life candidates to run or hold office in the federal Liberal party.
- Not allowing an evangelical Christian university to offer a law school because its strict code of conduct includes abstinence from sex outside of heterosexual marriage.
- A new law (Bill C4) that declares it a myth that “heterosexuality, cisgender gender identity, and gender expression that conforms to the sex assigned to a person at birth are to be preferred over other sexual orientations.” This law also forbids pastors from counseling people to turn away from same sex relationships.
- Employers and judges ignoring fundamental the freedoms of conscience and religion as defined in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms

We are representing the many thousands of Canadians who have suffered violations of religious liberty through the actions of our provincial and federal governments. Here are their stories:

Steven VanLeeuwen, Town Councilor and Deputy Mayor

He was removed from his position of Deputy Mayor for opposing vaccine mandates and lockdowns, which negatively impacted small businesses and churches in particular. As a member of the End the Lockdowns National Caucus, he was accused of breaching the Code of Conduct for Council Members. However, the Municipal Conflict of Interest Act covers decisions in which a member has a pecuniary interest, which he did not. The province's principal lockdown instrument, Ontario Regulation 82/20, evolved through 72 versions between March 2020 and June 2021. Nobody disputes the adverse effects of lockdowns, including intimate partner and child violence, suicide, substance abuse, delay of surgeries, job loss, and food insecurity. The Premier of Ontario called these outcomes a "massive cost to people." Since the government cannot quantify the effects of the lockdowns, they cannot hold a councilor in violation of the Code for expressing the view that the lockdown measures exceed the harm caused by Covid. In Canada, elected representatives should not be penalized for holding the view that public policy is shaped by socio-economic and religious considerations in addition to medical expertise. The Legislative Assembly's motto for the constitutional role of the Official Opposition is *audi alteram partem* (hear the other side).

Kim Vanberkel, Registered Nurse

Kim's faith in God has guided a holistic approach to caring for patients for 24 years. She encourages them to make decisions based on their own values, fulfilling the Scripture of treating others as oneself. She believes that she is accountable to God for how she cares for her body, which is his temple. The bi-weekly testing of the unvaccinated falls well within the "Every Reasonable Precaution" of the Occupational Health and Safety Act and clearly exceeds that of the vaccinated. To further coerce the unvaccinated is religious discrimination.

Rachel Belo, Registered Nurse

From the start of Covid, Rachel worked in the ER, putting in extra hours and complying with the use of PPE and bi-weekly testing. Her request for a religious exemption, signed by a clergyman, was denied. She was put on unpaid leave and, under duress, eventually got the vaccine. She believes free agency is a sacred God-given gift. She upholds the Mormon church's 12th Article of Faith, which is to sustain the law. She believes the government mandates are unlawful in that they violate the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, the Occupational Health and Safety Act, and the Nuremberg Code. As such, they are incongruous with sustaining the law of the land.

David Sion, Plastic Surgeon

Dr. Sion's operating privileges were suspended in September 2021. As a devout Jew, his family's history of surviving the Holocaust profoundly shapes his creed. Judaism involves following a way of life embodied in a set of moral, civil and religious obligations known as the

Halacha, which forbids endangering one's life. A cautious "wait and see" approach is an overarching theme in Jewish law. In the complete absence of long-term safety data, it is impossible for *anyone* to know if the Covid-19 vaccines are safe. The right to be treated equally and to practice a creed of one's choosing, without pressure or coercion, are unambiguous and fundamental human rights which are protected by the Charter of Rights and Freedoms and the Ontario Human Rights Code. The Ontario Human Rights Commission explains that **"the existence of religious beliefs and practices are both necessary and sufficient to the meaning of creed, if the beliefs and practices are sincerely held and/or observed."** The courts favor a broad and generous interpretation of the Code and assign priority to its principles when there is a conflict with other laws.

Christopher Olson, Pilot

When Chris requested a religious accommodation, the airline demanded a letter from his religious leader in obvious contradiction of the Supreme Court of Canada, which states that freedom of religion consists of an individual who sincerely believes **"irrespective of whether a particular practice or belief is required by official religious dogma or is in conformity with the position of religious officials."** (Syndicat Northcrest v. Amselem, 2004, SCC 47) Even though he supplied a letter from his minister, his request was denied without any explanation. He was put on unpaid leave and since the government's Employment Insurance deems his leave "voluntary," he is uninsured and bereft of income. The union stated his request was denied unjustly and has filed a formal grievance as per the Canada Labor Code.

Scott Harrison, Technical Operations Officer

Scott worked on a Canadian Forces Base when vaccines were mandated. He provided a letter from his priest detailing that he would not get vaccinated because he believes that the vaccine is an abomination, as it is derived from aborted fetal cell lines. His wife, who worked for the government, also faced leave without pay.

Caleb Mulder, Infantry Soldier

Caleb's religious exemption was denied by the Canadian Armed Forces. To avoid the stain on his service record of an involuntary "5f" release, he opted for a voluntary release. Caleb holds to the 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith, which obligates him to care properly for his body and exercise wise judgment. He believes he should not submit his body to unnecessary risk from the vaccine when he already possesses natural immunity from the virus.

Isaac Langdon, Hockey Player

Halfway through a four-year contract with the Kitchener Rangers, which nowhere stipulated vaccines, Isaac asked for a religious exemption, believing he should not be coerced into putting something harmful into his body. He has had to give up his dream of pursuing a career in professional hockey.

James Bennett, Food Inspector

James, the sole wage earner for a family of four, asked for a religious exemption when his employer demanded that he choose between vaccination or unpaid leave without Employment Insurance. He submitted to rapid testing three times a week, even though he only went to the

office once a week. The notification that his request was denied left him no time to get union representation. James believes in the sanctity of human life and in protecting unborn children from medical experimentation in the development or production of vaccines. He was informed “for your awareness” that many common drugs used fetal cell testing. Knowing such information after the fact in no way changes his firm religious belief regarding vaccines.

Jenevieve Bennett, Student

Just before final exams, she learned that proof of vaccination would be required. She requested a religious exemption, which the university denied because it concluded that “the connection to abortion is too remote to warrant accomodation,” even though this is her sincere religious belief. She was de-registered from courses with no explanation or refund.

James Reid, Student

James is a recovered drug addict who found God and enrolled in a skilled trades program at college. Based on his strongly held religious beliefs (part of the same faith that aids his recovery on a daily basis), he requested a religious exemption from the Covid vaccine. He attached a letter from his pastor who wrote that their church is a signatory on two confessional statements, or creeds, on ethics, vaccination, and the jurisdiction of the civil government: 1) *The Warrenton Declaration on Medical Mandates, Biblical Ethics & Authority* and 2) *A Christian Declaration On Freedom From Vaccination Coercion*. James says he never believed someone in Canada would ever have to choose between his freedom of religion and his right to an education.