

Date: _____

The Honourable Dalton McGuinty
Premier of Ontario
Legislative Buildings
Queen's Park
Toronto Ont M7A 1A1

Legal Permission via the Arbitration Act to use religious laws in family matters.

Dear Mr McGuinty,

We are deeply concerned at the prospect of your government adopting the recommendations of Ms Marion Boyd, on the question of allowing religious institutions to intrude in Ontario's judicial system. We urge you to remove family matters from the Arbitration Act, and stop the application of any religious laws to settle family disputes.

We ask you not to implement the recommendations of the Boyd report, *Dispute Resolution in Family Law: Protecting Choice, Promoting Inclusion*. Contrary to the title of the report, her recommendations are promoting exclusion and isolation of religious women. We think all family matters are of public interest and should be resolved under the Family Law Act. This legislation's strong principles, of equality of both partners in a marriage and of shared parenting, reflect the human rights as articulated in the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*. We disagree with Ms Boyd's comments that the laws of Canada are based on Judeo-Christian values and are therefore inappropriate to other faiths. We think that the values of the laws are now firmly based on human rights and not on one specific religious tradition.

We fear that the application of religious laws will contravene the Charter, and wonder why women and families should be fragmented because of their faith? We hold that the same laws should apply to all of us, regardless of race, religion or ethnicity.

The eyes of the world are on Ontario, what you decide will have ramifications for people all around the world who have watched religious extremism trump the rights of individuals. The people of Ontario expect to you show leadership by ameliorating the existing public family law regime rather than throwing money at an alternative system of justice. We unequivocally reject the notion of a two-tier justice system.

What Ms Boyd recommends amounts to substituting qualified judges of the Family Law Courts with private practitioners who do not have to be trained lawyers, let alone have the knowledge and experience of the judges they are to replace in private legally binding arbitration using religious laws. This privatization of family law is a regressive step in the evolution of our judicial system.

Mr Premier, we urge you to follow the lead of the governments of other provinces such as British Columbia and Quebec, who uphold that one law should apply to all citizens and that religion should not be a factor in our judicial system.

Thank you,