



**Called to Celebrate Grace...
Deep Spirituality, Bold Discipleship, Daring Justice...**

March 8, 2024

The Honourable Tim Houston
Leader of the Progressive Conservative Party of Nova Scotia
PO Box 726
Halifax NS B3J 2T3

Dear Mr. Houston:

“That all may be one” is the motto of the United Church of Canada, and we believe that this principle is particularly pertinent in the context of practicing politics in Nova Scotia. As a leader of a political party, we are writing to you to express our profound concern about the proliferation of wedge politics aimed at polarization - casting individuals or groups as the “other”. We urge you to transcend this divisive approach and instead foster a political discourse that addresses critical policy issues with respect and open debate.

As an Affirming Church committed to inclusivity, we are deeply troubled by the use of transgender people as a wedge issue, often framed under the guise of parental rights, women’s safety, or fairness in sports. This has been happening internationally, nationally and in some provinces and we do not want to see this happen here. We implore you to speak against this practice and support the transgender community.

Transgender Canadians are a vulnerable group and statements by politicians that seek to make them the other is deeply irresponsible. Currently transgender people are “more likely to have experienced violence since age 15, and also more likely to experience inappropriate behaviours in public, online and at work than cisgender Canadians.”¹ A recent national survey of 2SLGBTQI+ people indicated that transgender women and transgender men report being denied employment opportunities due to their gender identity at a higher rate than their cisgender peers.² We need words and actions that lower risks to the transgender community.

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Calls for the delay or cessation of gender-affirming treatments for trans youth are particularly irresponsible, given their vulnerability. A study in the June 6, 2022 issue of the Canadian Medical Association Journal, indicated that transgender adolescents have 5 times the risk of suicidal ideation and 7.6 times the risk of ever having attempted suicide compared to cisgendered, heterosexual adolescents. However, the study noted that gender-affirming care has been shown to improve mental health among transgendered youth so much so that their rates of suicidal ideation were similar to their cisgendered peers.³

For the betterment of our province, we hope that you will reject wedge politics and seek the common good in a respectful manner. We also request that you will stand against creating “others” amongst us, especially the trans community, supporting their right to a life lived safely without discrimination as their authentic selves.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Wanda Baker-Hayward". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Wanda Baker-Hayward
Board Chair
Grace United Church

¹ *Experiences of violent victimization and unwanted sexual behaviours among gay, lesbian, bisexual and other sexual minority people, and the transgender population, in Canada, 2018* found at <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/85-002-x/2020001/article/00009-eng.htm>

² *2SLGBTQI+ Action Plan Survey – Quick Stats* found at <https://women-gender-equality.canada.ca/en/free-to-be-me/federal-2slgbtqi-plus-action-plan/survey-findings/quick-stats.html>

³ *Suicidality among sexual minority and transgender adolescents: a nationally representative population-based study of youth in Canada* found at <https://www.cmaj.ca/content/194/22/E767>