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戴慧思

Speaking Up for Non-Profit
Organizations February 2009



More Support for Not-For-Profit Organizations

Dear Friends,

I recently spoke in the House of Commons on Bill C-4, An act respecting not-for-profit corporations and certain other corporations.

The legislation imposes increasing burdens on the not-for-profit sector. My NDP colleagues and I will continue to work to make sure your organization's voices are heard throughout the debate of this bill.

I have enclosed excerpts from my speech in Parliament. For the full transcript and more information on the bill, please visit my website at www.libbydavies.ca

Sincerely,

HANSARD
February 9, 2009

Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP):

Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to speak to second reading of Bill C-4, which deals with not-for-profit organizations.

I am very fortunate to represent a riding, Vancouver East, that has a whole diversity of absolutely incredible and amazing not-for-profit organizations, some of which would be under these federal regulations. They perform the most valuable service not only in our local community but nationally.

As we debate the bill we need to pay tribute and acknowledge the incredible value that the not-for-profit sector provides in this country. There has been a very long history in Canada of not-for-profit work. Whether it is in housing, cooperatives, delivery of services, volunteer work, or advocacy, there is a tremendous history in this country of voluntary organizations where people give their all and are literally on the front line delivering services and providing information to the citizens of Canada in many diverse communities.

Over the years the biggest struggle and challenge that not-for-profits have had is the struggle to stay in existence, not from a legal point of view, but from a financial point of view. Government funding has been withdrawn and we have seen government programs cut back, federally and provincially, and sometimes even locally, although most often it has been the local government that has had to pick up the slack.

Our non-profit organizations have had to rely more and more on donations. They are always scrambling for money. The biggest issue facing the sector is the question of stable long-term funding. Long gone are the days when organizations could rely on core funding for their core operations and then expand to whatever programs they were doing. Now every organization, I dare to say, spends probably one-quarter or more of its time writing grant applications, chasing down every small bit of money that they can in order to develop their programs.

HANSARD Continued
Libby Davies MP (Vancouver East)

I certainly have a concern that the bill in its current form will make it very difficult to attract new directors and volunteers in the not-for-profit sector. Maybe it is being put forward from the point of view of transparency and accountability, but it may have the effect of turning people right off and asking why on earth they would get involved in doing this work when there are so many requirements and responsibilities.

Another concern that I have about the bill is that it does not address the relationship between charity status, Revenue Canada and the issue of advocacy. This has been a long-standing debate. There are organizations that are very concerned about the severe limits that are put on them to do advocacy work. Somehow advocacy has become a negative word. It has become a negative component to the work that is done. However, what I see in my community is that the advocacy work, which does not mean that it is partisan, to uphold people's rights, whether it is in legal aid, housing or groups that have been very marginalized, is very important for the not-for-profit sector.

Even when organizations have charitable status, they should be able to do advocacy.

What we should be discussing and what we should be doing, particularly in these economic times when so many people are falling behind and so many people who previously did not rely on organizations like food banks, legal aid or organizations that do advocacy, is helping those people who are now having to turn to those organizations to get the help that they need.

One of the problems that we are facing in our community is the cuts in legal aid.

There are a number of non-profit organizations that deliver legal aid services. In the best of times their parameters were fairly restrictive. There is money that goes from the federal government to the provinces for legal aid. This is very much a part of our judicial system and all Canadians should be guaranteed the right to access and opportunity to legal representation.

However, as these cutbacks have just come wave after wave, we are now facing a situation in B.C. where low income communities are being hit particularly hard. The organizations that are there, whether it is the UBC Law Student's Society that provides legal aid or the legal aid system itself, they are now under severe pressure trying to meet the demand as more and more people, who may have previously had their own resources to deal with the judicial system, are now unable to do so. That is a very serious situation.

In looking at this bill I know that other colleagues of mine in the NDP are very concerned about this bill. We are concerned about the scope of the bill. We are concerned about how far reaching it is and how it may dampen enthusiasm and the involvement of people. When we read the bill, the things that are required of people individually, as well as the organization in question if it falls under the mandate of this bill, are quite incredible.

If we ever put a price tag on the work that is being done in the voluntary sector we would be talking about billions of dollars. Certainly if these services and programs were being delivered directly by government, we would be talking about billions of dollars. We should recognize that the work that is done by not-for-profits in our communities is something that we benefit from. It is part of a strong civil society. It is part of a strong democratic society.

SERVING OUR COMMUNITY

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