

Supply

To ensure an arms length relationship with government the program was taken out of government and administered by the Canadian Council on Social Development. It was given a five-year mandate.

In 1990 the program was renewed for another five years and became affiliated with the Human Rights Education and Research Centre of the University of Ottawa.

This is not an expensive program. It costs very little and is a very cost-effective program. Each year the program would commit up to \$2 million for cases. The program's operating costs are \$750,000 a year. The total annual budget is thus only \$2.75 million. I understand as well that the program's lawyers charge well under the normal fee.

The program has received a total of 951 applications under its equality rights component since 1985, 310 of those applications have been funded. Court decisions or reports have been received on 115 applications, and there are 156 active files.

Eighteen aboriginal applications have received case funding and 22 aboriginal applications have received case development funding.

The language rights component has received a total of 171 applications, 94 of those applications have been funded. Court decisions or reports have been received for 56 applications and there are 27 active files.

The NWT Association des Parents Francophones in Yellowknife has received funding under this component.

Some of the cases assisted by this program have had far-reaching effects. For example, the case in which a Toronto father won the right to child care benefits, and the case in which residents of mental institutions won the right to vote in the last federal election. There have been some landmark cases on minority language rights.

• (1950)

In other words, the government and Canadians have been getting good value for their money. The program has funded parties or interventions in cases that have resulted in judgments of the Supreme Court of Canada that have made new laws, yet the government has cancelled this program. Why?

There are still many questions and issues outstanding and unresolved. What will happen to all those cases that

are in progress? Apparently those applications which have been approved for funding will receive funding only for the level they have been approved at, but what about appeals? If a group loses and wants to appeal or they win and the government appeals, there will be no funding available.

I want to elaborate on this issue by referring to a case the Inuit Women's Association, Pauktuutit, is developing.

Last year, Pauktuutit applied for funding under the Court Challenges Program to prepare for a section 15 challenge to the NWT judiciary's practice of issuing lenient sentences to individuals convicted of sexually assaulting Inuit women. In November, it was notified that that its application had been approved in principle. The cancellation of the program puts its case in some jeopardy. While it will take the case to trial, there is no funding available for an appeal should an appeal be necessary.

The president of Pauktuutit has written to the Minister of Justice to express shock and disappointment at the cancellation of this program. I want to quote briefly from that letter:

Since its inception, the Court Challenges Program has provided organizations such as our own with the opportunity to take on very difficult cases affecting our constitutional equality rights. Without the support provided by the Court Challenges Program, we fear that justice and equality in Canada are sure to suffer.

In her letter, the president of Pauktuutit also pointed out to the Minister of Justice the significance of the case that they are working on. I will again quote briefly:

This is a very important case, one that offers hope to the victims of sexual assault (and Inuit women in general) that the crime will be dealt with as a serious one.

The letter concluded with an appeal to the minister to support the reinstatement of the program. Again I quote:

The Charter of Rights and Freedoms will never be able to fulfill its promise of equality and justice if disadvantaged groups are unable to take their cases to the courts.

I agree with the views and concerns expressed by Pauktuutit and join with it and the many other Canadians calling for the continuation of the Court Challenges Program.

Several other aboriginal groups and organizations have been assisted by the program. The Chippewas of Nawash received case development funding to pursue a fishing licence issue. The Native Women's Association of