



LEAF FAEJ WOMEN'S LEGAL EDUCATION AND ACTION FUND

FONDS D'ACTION ET D'ÉDUCATION JURIDIQUES POUR LES FEMMES

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AUTISTIC CHILDREN HAVE EQUALITY RIGHTS TOO

WOMEN'S LEGAL EDUCATION AND ACTION FUND (LEAF) AND THE DISABLED WOMEN'S NETWORK CANADA (DAWN) TO ARGUE AT THE SUPREME COURT OF CANADA FOR THE RIGHT OF AUTISTIC CHILDREN TO RECEIVE HEALTH SERVICES

Toronto – On Wednesday and Thursday, June 9th and 10th, LEAF and DAWN will appear before the Supreme Court of Canada in the case of *Connor Auton v. British Columbia*. This case challenges the B.C. Government's refusal to fund health services to ameliorate the effects of autism. LEAF and DAWN claim that this refusal violates the equality rights of children with autism that are guaranteed in the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*.

Autism is a disability that affects an increasing number of children in Canada. This case has the potential to set a precedent regarding the provision of health services to autistic children across Canada.

LEAF and DAWN will argue that not addressing the effects of autism risks creating lives of isolation and institutionalization for both male and female children. However, the negative effects will be compounded for girls with autism. For example, women with autism who are institutionalized are likely to experience one of the most serious forms of gendered disability discrimination - the physical and sexual abuse that is prevalent in institutions.

The crux of the inequality in this case is the exclusionary and marginalizing effects of the state failing to respond to autism. Autistic persons who do not fit societal norms experience the stigmatization of mental disability and are banished to the margins of society. LEAF and DAWN will argue that state failure to respond to autism conveys the message that children with autism are just not worth society's time, effort and resources. State neglect is discriminatory because it devalues the relative worth of such children, and subjects them to social isolation.

The B.C. government has argued that it cannot afford to provide the health services at issue to children with autism. LEAF and DAWN will argue that it is always cheaper to discriminate, but that government's budgets cannot be balanced on the backs of the most disadvantaged in society. LEAF and DAWN will argue that the guaranteed equality rights of children with disabilities must be respected, and that their equality rights are not for sale.

Counsel for LEAF and DAWN are Dianne Pothier and Fiona Sampson. Counsel will be available for statements at the Supreme Court of Canada, Ottawa, on Wednesday and Thursday, June 9-10th.

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