



Abortion Rights
Coalition of Canada

Coalition pour le droit à
l'avortement au Canada

Your Voice for Choice

Canada's only national political pro-choice advocacy group

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Thousands Join Forces to Defeat Anti-Abortion Motion 312

Motion would remove human rights from pregnant women

NATIONAL — A groundswell of opposition is building across Canada to a private member's motion that would endanger abortion rights and the human rights of all pregnant women. Motion M-312, introduced by Conservative MP Stephen Woodworth, asks Parliament to examine the current definition of "human being" in the Criminal Code to decide whether it should include fetuses. The goal of the motion is to give legal protection to fetuses. The motion is scheduled for debate on April 26, with a further debate and vote in June or early fall.

"Even though Prime Minister Stephen Harper promises Canadians repeatedly that he won't re-open the abortion debate, this is exactly what the passage of Motion M-312 would do," said Joyce Arthur, Executive Director of the Abortion Rights Coalition of Canada (ARCC). "The motion is a vehicle for religious groups and the anti-choice movement to establish legal personhood for fetuses. If they succeed, they'll try to re-criminalize abortion next."

ARCC has launched an aggressive counter campaign against the motion. As of April 24, 13,300 people have signed its online petition (www.gopetition.com/petitions/oppose-motion-312-rejetez-motion-312.html). Hundreds of official paper petitions are also being signed so that opposition MPs can present them in Parliament. Across the country, people are writing to their MPs and sending postcards urging them to oppose the motion. In addition, various campaigns have been initiated by other groups and websites, including a project to knit wombs and vulvas for MPs to protest the co-opting of women's bodies by the state, and creative outdoor actions by the new and innovative group "Radical Handmaids" (www.radicalhandmaids.com) to protest women being used as incubators – which borrows a page from Margaret Atwood's dystopian novel *The Handmaid's Tale*. On April 25, the Radical Handmaids will be occupying Parliament Hill in Ottawa, Queen's Park in Toronto, and the front lawn of the Victoria legislature.

"It's been awhile since I've seen this level of outrage from women," said Carolyn Egan, a Toronto-based ARCC spokesperson and pro-choice activist since the 1970's. "Women are fed up with

these not-so-subtle attacks on their fundamental rights via private member bills and motions. They're not going to stand idly by and let their rights as human beings be compromised. In fact, if this motion passes, we think it will plunge the Conservative government into controversy and hurt its chances for re-election. At least that would be a silver lining for women and all progressive Canadians."

Arthur explained that M-312 is a waste of time and taxpayer money because the questions it raises have already been answered by Canada's Supreme Court in several rulings. Woodworth's motion is also at odds with human rights treaties and laws from around the world. Fetal personhood would seriously undermine the constitutional rights of pregnant women under our *Charter of Rights and Freedoms*, not just for those who need abortions, but for any pregnant woman. It would invite the prosecution of pregnant women for any perceived harm to fetuses by creating confusion around how child welfare laws and policies apply to fetuses as legal persons. "In effect, giving legal personhood to fetuses would remove personhood from pregnant women," said Arthur.

For further details on these and many other serious problems posed by M-312, please see ARCC's *Counter Arguments*: <http://www.arcc-cdac.ca/action/M-312.html> and our article: *Motion 312: An ignorant affront to global human rights standards*: <http://www.arcc-cdac.ca/action/M-312-affront.html>.

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