



NEWS RELEASE

British Columbia Civil Liberties Association
September 24, 2009

For immediate release

Library agrees to re-examine decision barring suicide discussion from meeting rooms

Vancouver, B.C. – Following a presentation from the BCCLA last night, the Vancouver Public Library Board has agreed to revisit a decision by VPL management to bar the right to die group Exit International from presenting in library meeting rooms.

“Exit International had proposed to have a discussion with seniors and the terminally ill about their right to die with dignity and ways to have control over their own time of death,” said Jason Gratl, Vice-President of the BCCLA. “Nobody is encouraging suicide at this workshop, nor are they providing the tools to commit suicide, both of which would be illegal. This is information that is already available on library bookshelves.”

An e-mail from Chief Librarian Paul Whitney received by the BCCLA last night after the meeting indicates that the staff of the library have been directed to seek further legal advice and report back in two weeks. Exit had hoped to host the workshop at the library on the evening of November 3.

“This is a proposal that citizens be able to gather at the library and discuss material in books that are freely available to be borrowed from the library without restriction,” said Gratl. “We would hope that the library would recognize the importance of its role in facilitating these kinds of discussions, even about very difficult topics.”

MEDIA CONTACTS:

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NEWS RELEASE

British Columbia Civil Liberties Association
September 23, 2009

For immediate release

BCCLA to present to Vancouver Library Board tonight on pro choice group presentation

Vancouver, B.C. – The BC Civil Liberties Association will be presenting to the Vancouver Public Library Board this evening on the issue of Exit International wishing to hold a workshop in the library's meeting rooms based on Exit's *Peaceful Pill Handbook*. The BCCLA will be asking the Library Board to overturn the Chief Librarian's decision not to permit the room booking.

When: Wednesday, September 23, 2009

Time: 5:00 p.m.

Where: Vancouver Public Library Main Branch, Library Square Conference Centre, 350 Georgia Street West, 7th floor, Morris J. Wosk Boardroom

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NEWS RELEASE

British Columbia Civil Liberties Association
September 21, 2009

For immediate release

BCCLA asks VPL to overturn right to die presentation ban

Vancouver, B.C. – The Vancouver Public Library is inappropriately restricting free speech by preventing a right to die group from discussing suicide methods with members of the public says the BCCLA.

“In Canada, people have the right to hear information that others may find objectionable,” says Jason Gratl, Vice-President of the BCCLA. “The library, as a public facility, needs to provide equal and non-discriminatory access to its facilities for presentations of all kinds of information. If the library won’t provide space to engage in these difficult discussions, who will?”

Exit International is an Australian-based international right to die group whose book, *The Peaceful Pill Handbook* is a bestseller on the website Amazon.com, but is banned in Australia. When the group attempted to book space for a lecture at the Vancouver Public Library, they were refused access. The library administration advised the group that, based on the library’s interpretation of the description of the planned program on Exit International’s website, the talk would likely violate the Canadian Criminal Code.

“Nobody is promoting or encouraging suicide at the VPL,” said Gratl. “Open and public discussion about death and dignified means of dying may make us squeamish, but they are not unlawful.”

The proposed Exit International presentation is in two parts. The first part discusses the politics of the right to die issue and is open to the public. The second half of the presentation is only open to those with terminal illnesses and those who are 55+ and discusses in detail methods of committing suicide. The Library has objected only to the second part of the presentation.

MEDIA CONTACTS:

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PRESS RELEASE

Vancouver Library Called Upon to Allow Right to Die Meeting

Australian based pro-choice group, Exit International, has called upon the Vancouver Library to allow the group to hold both a public meeting and a right to die practical workshop on its premises after the Library withdrew the group's booking

The original booking was cancelled by the Library amidst allegations that "the workshop appears to involve direct counselling for persons who are seriously ill regarding methods of committing suicide" thereby breaching Section 241 of the Criminal Code of Canada. According to Exit founder and director, Dr Philip Nitschke, the workshops are about providing Seniors and people who are seriously ill with accurate and concise information about their end of life options.

"At our meetings, Exit does not encourage people to suicide anymore than we encourage people not to suicide. Rather what we do, is to have a sensible discussion about these issues and to answer people's questions. Rational adults (average age 75 years) are quite capable of making their own decisions, but they can't do this without access to good information."

Of the Library's decision to cancel the meeting, Dr Philip Nitschke said: "we are very surprised by the Library's reaction to our meeting plans. The Canadian Criminal Code is exactly the same as in Australia and in the 12 years of holding such events, we have had very few problems."

In October 2008, a tour of the UK had to be cancelled after a raft of venues refused to take bookings for the meetings. In May 2009, the group finally undertook a series of UK meetings amidst a barrage of controversy from Christian groups and others within the right to die movement.

"If we broke the law in Australia, we would clearly not be able to continue functioning but that is not the case. In coming to Vancouver we were not planning to do anything different and this is why we are so surprised by the Library's actions, especially since this country has a Charter of Rights, something which Australia lacks".

Dr Nitschke said he hoped the Vancouver leg of the planned Nth America tour would still go ahead and he did not want disappoint the group's Canadian members who have waited a long time for an Exit workshop to be held in their own country.

"While our book *The Peaceful Pill Handbook* is banned in Australia and NZ it is popular in Canada and it would be ironic if the only way Canadians could access end of life information is by reading it in a book, rather than having an open discussion - where is the free speech in that?"

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Exit Websites: www.exitinternational.net & www.peacefulpill.com

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