

Anti-abortion group suing UTM Students' Union after being denied club status

A pro-life student group at University of Toronto Mississauga is suing the school's Students' Union (UTMSU) over allegations it was denied club status due to its stance on abortion.

The Justice Centre for Constitutional Freedoms, a Canadian non-profit legal organization specializing in constitutional law, filed the court action in Superior Court Friday claiming it is defending the free expression of Students for Life, a pro-life student group that is being denied registered club status by UMTSU.

None of the allegations in the court action have been proven in court.

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UTMSU president Ebi Agbeyegbe told The News the Union won't comment on any pending legal action.

"We are proud to represent 13,000 undergraduate students at UTM and we will address this matter in the appropriate forum," he said in an email.

The Notice of Application claims UTMSU refused to renew the club status of Students for Life for the 2015-16 year, effectively barring the student group from using the student centre and accessing student union resources. As a result, Students for Life hasn't been able to join other campus clubs in setting up a table during clubs' week, a key event for recruiting new members.

The action alleges the Union's decision to deny club status is "contrary to the principles of natural justice and procedural fairness... tainted by a closed mind and bias, and... not made in good faith."

UTMSU had granted club status for Students for Life in the 2014-15 school year, but changed its mind specifically because of Students for Life's "stance on abortion," the action claims.

"It appears that UTMSU sees diverse opinions as good for most topics, but not abortion," said Calgary lawyer John Carpay, president of the Justice Centre for Constitutional Freedoms.

Students for Life is asking a judge to rule the Students' Union's decision as void and order UTMSU to give Students for Life club recognition.

According to the court documents, Russ Adade, UTMSU vice-president, said in a report to his Board of Directors last summer that Students

For Life, "which has been recognized by UTMSU in the past, was not recognized for the up-coming school year due to their stance on abortion, in terms of being pro-life and using their platform to tell women what they should do in those situations."

Later in the fall, Adade said in an email to Students for Life that "you are telling folks, especially women, what to do with their bodies... you folks can't put them down for making a decision that doesn't fit with your mandate," the lawsuit claims.

When contacted by The News today, Adade said he couldn't comment on any of the allegations.

Last November, UTMSU changed its previous rationale for denying club status to Students for Life, namely the club's stance on abortion, according to the notice of application.

Adade instead told Students for Life that the reason their club was denied status was "violations and discrepancies we found within your constitution in relation to the clubs handbook and UTMSU operational policy as it pertains to clubs."

Students for Life immediately made the required changes to their constitution, but alleges UTMSU has continued to deny club status using "chicanery" and legal loopholes.