

## **Respect for diversity is a founding principle of New Brunswick society**

April 3, 2023

The following statement was issued by the New Brunswick Human Rights Commission:

Since 1967, the New Brunswick Human Rights Commission has upheld the values of equality, dignity, inclusion, and the human rights of all persons in our province. Established by the New Brunswick *Human Rights Act*, the Commission works to protect and promote human rights in New Brunswick. The Commission fulfills this legal mandate by addressing complaints of human rights discrimination, and by educating the public and all stakeholders about their rights and obligations under the *Act*. Morally, the idea of human rights rests on the premise that all of us belong to the same human family – thus, irrespective of different identities and personal characteristics, by virtue of a shared humanity, each person deserves to be treated equally, and with dignity and respect.

Human rights in New Brunswick have evolved progressively over the decades, keeping pace with changes in our society, aspirations, culture, politics, and with national and international human rights developments. When the *Act* was promulgated in 1967, the intent was to give New Brunswickers better protections against discrimination based on race, color, ancestry, national origin, place of origin, and religion. At that moment in our history, persons identifying with those six grounds were perceived as most vulnerable to discriminatory treatment.

As mindsets evolved, new rights holders continued to find recognition. Discrimination based on sex (including pregnancy), disability, age, social condition, political belief, sexual orientation, and others was successively prohibited under the *Act*. Each protected ground represents a personal characteristic that makes some persons different from what mainstream society may perceive as standard or normal. Multiculturalism has taught us that the unique differences that define various groups in society invigorate our social tapestry and enrich our communities. In 2017, as part of the *Act*'s 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary, Gender Identity or Expression was added as a protected ground, recognizing the rights of transgender and gender diverse groups to equal protection against discrimination, and against violations of dignity, equality, inclusion, and respect.

The Commission has monitored with concern recent news stories describing incidents of hate and misinformation against the LGBTQ2S community in relation to drag reading events organized at public libraries in the province. This manner of public intimidation violates essential human dignity, contravenes the spirit of the *Act*, and diminishes respect for human rights in our province. Furthermore, New Brunswick public libraries provide a service to the public, which is an area protected under the *Act*. Public libraries, therefore, are obligated to ensure that the service they provide is in accordance with the *Act*, and promotes the values of the equality, dignity, and inclusion of all persons, irrespective of their personal characteristics. The Commission reminds all New Brunswickers that every person in New Brunswick is entitled to equal protection of the law, and has equal rights to dignity, respect, and inclusion. By

respecting the dignity and difference of others, we respect their humanity, and their rights as human beings – these values being the benchmarks of a free, equal, and democratic society.