



Date of Submission

To the Office of the Child and Youth Advocate

Attention: Kelly Lamrock, K.C.

Child, Youth and Seniors' Advocate

The New Brunswick Youth Council, supported by the Government of New Brunswick, is a partnership between Partners for Youth (PFY) & Francophone Youth Federation of New Brunswick (FJFNB) that amplifies youth voices on issues that matter to them.

The role of the council is to identify areas of priority and to inform the government on public policy, with a specific focus on youth mental health.

The New Brunswick Youth Council wishes to express their deep concern regarding the potential revision of Policy 713 and its negative implications for LGBTQIA2S (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex, Asexual, Two-Spirit) students. We believe that the process by which children may self-identify or explore their gender identity and/or sexual orientation, as well as the support and inclusive services schools should offer, are crucial for protecting the rights and best interests of these vulnerable students.

Policy 713 plays a pivotal role in fostering a safe and inclusive learning environment for all students, particularly those who identify as LGBTQIA2S. By recognizing and respecting students' self-identified gender identities and sexual orientations, the policy promotes a sense of belonging, which is essential for their academic, emotional, and social well-being.

If this policy were to be revised in a manner that restricts or denies students the right to self-identify or explore their gender identity and sexual orientation, it could have severe consequences for LGBTQIA2S students. Here are some key concerns identified by the council:

- **Increased Risk of Homelessness:** Schools that provide a supportive and inclusive environment can become a safe haven for LGBTQIA2S students, many of whom face rejection or discrimination at home. Policy 713, as it currently stands, allows schools to be places of solace for these young individuals. However, a revision that is not inclusive and affirming could lead to an increase in LGBTQIA2S youth facing homelessness due to a lack of supportive resources.
- **Elevated Suicide Rates:** LGBTQIA2S students already experience higher rates of mental health challenges, including depression, anxiety, and suicidal ideation, compared to their heterosexual and cisgender peers. Policy 713, with its current inclusive framework, contributes to mitigating these risks by promoting a supportive school environment. Any revision that erodes these

inclusive measures could exacerbate feelings of isolation and hopelessness, leading to a rise in suicide rates and suicide attempt rates among LGBTQIA2S youth.

- **Negative Impact on Academic Performance:** When students feel supported and accepted for who they are, they are more likely to thrive academically. The existing Policy 713 encourages educators to create an environment that acknowledges and respects the diversity of gender identity and sexual orientation. However, a revision that dismisses or stigmatizes LGBTQIA2S identities could negatively impact their educational experiences and hinder academic achievement.

As representatives of the youth in New Brunswick, we strongly urge the government of New Brunswick to preserve the integrity of Policy 713 and work towards enhancing its inclusivity. We recommend a collaborative approach involving educators, students, parents, and LGBTQIA2S organizations to ensure that the policy remains effective in safeguarding the rights and well-being of all students, regardless of their gender identity or sexual orientation.

Moreover, we encourage the implementation of additional resources and training programs for educators to foster a more understanding and supportive school environment. Training that addresses LGBTQIA2S issues, mental health awareness, and diversity and inclusion can equip educators with the tools to create a safe space for all students.

In conclusion, Policy 713 is a critical safeguard for the well-being of LGBTQIA2S students in New Brunswick. We believe that revising this policy in any way that undermines its inclusivity will put these students at serious risk of homelessness, mental health challenges, and academic setbacks. We implore the New Brunswick government to prioritize the rights and best interests of all students by maintaining and strengthening the current policy to provide a safe and affirming environment for everyone.

Personal testimonials from youth council members:

Isabelle Shepard

“To me, the decision to review policy 713 by our provincial government is just so obviously wrong, that I don’t know what to say. Why must teenagers explain to the people in power that you can’t just refuse to acknowledge people who don’t fit in their outdated mold? Politicians seem to forget that such a strategy has never worked, nor will ever work, with LGBTQ2SIA+ communities. At this point, data has been collected pointing to the importance of policy 713, people have expressed their discontent, so to me it feels like all that is pushing this review are personal values felt by a few people with too much power. At the end of the day, if you can’t understand why policy 713 is needed for the wellbeing of our youth, remember that you were chosen to act in compliance to New Brunswickers wishes and that failure to do so will not just mean a reduction in support for your next election, but a serious uproar. As a recent high school graduate, I can attest to the strong will of students and teachers to keep policy 713. We will not stand for this review, nor just “let it go”, because for many, gaining an education will become secondary to protecting their rights and wellbeing. It’s become clear, the vast majority of youth are against this review. Not to mention, the Prime Minister of Canada stands with us, so clearly, we aren’t just young and

naive. We ask that if you cannot understand the importance of policy 713, at the very least, tune in to what the rest of the country thinks and stop this devastating review that has already brought shame unto our province and fear amongst young New Brunswickers, and will only have worse consequences once classes start in September.”

Submitted by _____ on behalf of the NB Youth Council

Contact: