



RESPONSE TO PETITION

Prepare in English and French marking 'Original Text' or 'Translation'

PETITION No.: **421-01873**

BY: **MR. KMIEC (CALGARY SHEPARD)**

DATE: **NOVEMBER 22, 2017**

PRINT NAME OF SIGNATORY: **L'HONORABLE JODY WILSON-RAYBOULD**

Response by the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada

SIGNATURE

Minister or Parliamentary Secretary

SUBJECT

Discrimination

ORIGINAL TEXT

REPLY

The Government believes that all Canadians, regardless of their religions, must be able to practice their religious faith without fear of violence or disturbance.

Section 176 was included in Canada's first *Criminal Code* (1892) and addresses a range of behaviour including the use of threats or force to unlawfully obstruct or prevent a clergyman or minister from celebrating a divine service and wilfully disturbing a religious ceremony. This conduct is punishable by a maximum term of two years imprisonment.

Bill C-51 proposes changes to modernize Canada's *Criminal Code*, including by repealing obsolete or redundant offences. As introduced, Bill C-51 proposed to repeal section 176 because it addresses conduct that is captured by other offences. Members of the public and many stakeholders spoke out against this change and argued that this offence provides valuable and concrete protections to those who engage in religious worship or lead such ceremonies.

In response to these concerns, the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights adopted amendments to retain section 176 in the *Criminal Code*, and modify its language so that it affords protection to all religious and spiritual officiants and services and is gender-neutral. The Government supports the amendment.