

Imposing deliberate destitution on refugees is wrong

Dear editor:

Canadians used to be known around the world for our compassion and generosity, but changes hidden in the Conservative government's latest omnibus budget bill threaten those values.

Every year Canada welcomes refugees who are fleeing violence and persecution in troubled parts of the world to begin their lives anew in our country. Before they are technically accepted as refugees, these refugee claimants are not guaranteed a work permit, and rely on social assistance to survive.

This legislation will allow social assistance to be taken away from this extremely vulnerable group at their time of greatest need. It will deny assistance to refugees even though they have no other means to put food on the table.

That is cruel and goes directly against Canadian values.

The government argues it is simply respecting provincial jurisdiction, but I have not heard of a single province ever trying to get out of its responsibility to make social assistance payments to refugee claimants. The vast majority of claimants go on to become permanent residents; deliberately imposing destitution is no way to help them start their life in Canada.

No wonder the Conservatives buried these changes in a bill that's almost 500 pages long.

These changes come after the Federal Court struck down the Conservatives' policy of denying refugee claimants health benefits, ruling that it was 'cruel and unusual' treatment that puts lives at risk and 'outrages Canadian standards of decency'. Shockingly, the government is appealing that ruling.

It is appalling that the Conservative government is playing politics of fear with the very lives of those who come to Canada with nothing but hopes and dreams. They must back-off their anti-refugee attacks and start upholding Canadian values.

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