



NATIONAL CITIZENS INQUIRY

Toronto, ON

Day 1

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EVIDENCE

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Shawn Buckley

So, our next witness is Mr. Oliver Kennedy.

Oliver Kennedy

Afternoon.

Shawn Buckley

Mr. Kennedy, can you start by stating your full name for the record, spelling your first and last name?

Oliver Kennedy

My name is Oliver Kennedy, O-L-I-V-E-R-K-E-N-N-E-D-Y.

Shawn Buckley

And Mr. Kennedy, do you promise to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth?

Oliver Kennedy

I do.

Shawn Buckley

Now, you are a recreational therapist.

Oliver Kennedy

Correct.

Shawn Buckley

And you've worked 20 years at that job. You're no longer there but you're going to tell us about that. So, tell us what happened.

Oliver Kennedy

So, I worked for my employer for close to 20 years as a recreation therapist, working with seniors and disabled individuals. And in the end, I was terminated from my position for not taking a COVID vaccine.

Shawn Buckley

Now, can you tell me, basically, a little more detail. So, why didn't you want to get the vaccine?

Oliver Kennedy

To me, things felt very rushed. It was something that, being in the healthcare setting, I understand informed consent. And it was just something that at the beginning, when the vaccines came out, it seemed very much like a choice. And even though things were rushed, it was a quickly-produced vaccine. I wanted to do as much research as I could on it. And it just seemed that a lot of the data I was looking for was just not available, either publicly or from my employer when I asked for it. So, that's what sort of led me to vaccine hesitancy, as others have mentioned. And it was just something that I wanted something to be safe in my body, that I understood. And I couldn't find any information really that would allay any of my fears that I had, and nobody could provide it for me.

Shawn Buckley

Now, before it became a mandate at your place of employment, did the culture change? Did people start interacting with you, basically, about whether or not you should be getting the vaccine?

Oliver Kennedy

Yeah. So, I had managers who at first said that there'd be no coercion, no bullying in the workplace, and that they'd see to it that people would get fired if they were bullying people into getting vaccines. But by the end of it, she was coercing me by yelling at me to get a vaccine. And it was very unfortunate, because it was just a period of a couple months between her telling everyone you couldn't bully someone to then becoming the bully herself.

Shawn Buckley

Can you just describe for us briefly what some of that bullying looked like?

Oliver Kennedy

Well, in one case, it was another employee who had just come into work and walked right by me and remarked how the unvaccinated were the reason why we were still in this pandemic. And she knew I was unvaccinated. She didn't see I was sitting there. But at the same time, there were lots of people who would make those small comments and just sort of decide for you that – or decide themselves that – you were the bad person for not doing this. Whereas you were just sort of, as I said, waiting for more information and make an informed decision when you could. But that never really happened.

Shawn Buckley

Did you have an incident with your immediate supervisor where, basically, she shouted something out for all the staff to hear?

Oliver Kennedy

Okay. I didn't know if we were going to go there, but yeah, she just said, “go get a fucking vaccine, Ollie.” And I was shocked by this because she had an open-door policy; it was at a nursing station. And as I left her office, everybody who was in that nursing station was looking right at me and had heard exactly what had been said. And they were shocked. I was shocked myself because, again, after being told nobody will be bullied into getting a vaccine, the very same person who did that was the one telling me to get a fucking vaccine.

Shawn Buckley

Now, the person who said they wouldn't bully you—

Oliver Kennedy

Sorry?

Shawn Buckley

That's the same person who said no one would get bullied?

Oliver Kennedy

Correct.

Shawn Buckley

Okay. So, my understanding is, it was October of 2021 when your employer made it mandatory to be vaccinated.

Oliver Kennedy

Correct.

Shawn Buckley

And then, so you were suspended for a period of time?

Oliver Kennedy

Yes.

Shawn Buckley

And how long were you suspended before you were terminated?

Oliver Kennedy

December 3rd, I believe, was the day I was suspended from work. And then that continued up until, I believe, early February when I was terminated over a Zoom call.

Shawn Buckley

Over a Zoom call. And what was the reason given for your termination after 20 years?

Oliver Kennedy

For willful misconduct for not getting a COVID vaccine.

Shawn Buckley

Now, is there a consequence to being fired for willful misconduct when somebody like you might go to employment insurance for benefits?

Oliver Kennedy

Well, that's what I did. I held off, thinking that they would bring me back to work between December and February. But once they did terminate, that's when I did go and apply for employment insurance.

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And it has been an uphill battle completely doing that. From being told that I'm not looking for work and I'm not qualified – I'm not looking for qualified work because I chose not to vaccinate – that was very difficult. Because, while I was out looking for work as hard as I could, and then to be told that I was limiting my work because I was not getting vaccinated to go find those jobs: it was really difficult to hear an employee from the government of Canada telling me I was being denied benefits for that reason. And in my initial refusal of benefits, I then did appeal the decision. And at this point I was then again denied benefits, to which I again appealed the decision. And recently in March I've just had my Social Security Tribunal, and I'm currently waiting on the decision for that.

Shawn Buckley

Okay. Now, did your decision not to get vaccinated affect you in any way socially?

Oliver Kennedy

I have very few friends now. Out of all my friends, I'd say about 95 per cent of them have decided that I'm not a good person anymore. A lot of the folks that I used to work with and hang out as well won't return my calls, and I'm considered persona non grata. My family for a while did turn their backs on me, and that really hurt. You think you've got someone who's going to be in your corner all the time. The only person who's been in my corner the whole time has been my wife. And it's difficult losing all your friends that way, especially when you're still in chat groups with people where they're calling you all kinds of bad things, while they're listening to a narrative and thinking that they're better than you, because they're simply following what someone else told them to do.

Shawn Buckley

Right. Now, you also had an experience concerning seeking a surrogate, for getting a child. You don't have to talk about that, but you want to talk about it?

Oliver Kennedy

So, my wife and I, we were looking to start a family. And just the way biology goes, we couldn't conceive together. So, we were looking for a surrogate. And that, I'll tell anybody, is an expensive and heart-wrenching process. But I wouldn't discourage anyone if that's the route you decide to go. But to find a surrogate can be a very, very difficult endeavor. You're competing with lots of other people in your same situation. There are no regulations. And sometimes it's the Wild West involving money, commitments, and whatnot. And to find and come to an agreement with a surrogate can be a very arduous process. And for my wife and I over the period of COVID happening, because COVID started just as we were finally getting to the point of finding a surrogate, it's been very difficult.

We lost three surrogates total because of COVID. One was at the beginning, and she was worried about the health ramifications of coming from Alberta to Toronto. And that's understandable. This is someone who was going to do us a very nice and amazing solid – a service. And because of that, the reason she decided not to help us is acceptable: she had her own family to think about.

However, after taking more time to match with other surrogates, we did lose two surrogates after that. Because, when the topic of vaccination came up, when it was in the first week, where the person simply stopped returning our calls, after having matched and started doing legal work, which is very expensive to redo. And it was something that my wife and I thought that we should make sure that this person understood that that's where we were. And while we were wonderful people up until that point, all of a sudden, we were no longer, and weren't getting any communication. And then that did happen again with the second match where, again, we look at each other saying, "we're not terrible people," but this is the way people, I guess, think we are, because of the way the narrative has been painting us.

Shawn Buckley

Now you had an encounter with your doctor. You were trying to get an exemption. Can you tell us about that conversation?

Oliver Kennedy

Yes, so I contracted COVID in December after being suspended. And it was around Christmas time, and my wife and I both had COVID and we both recovered by New Year's. So, while being on suspension, I spoke to my doctor and I said, "Well, okay, I've got antibodies now." And he agrees, "Yes, you've got antibodies and you should be fine." I said, "I'm healthy and I'm ready to go back to work, so can you write me a note then that states that Mr. Kennedy has antibodies much like any COVID vaccine and should be allowed to go to work?" The whole idea of this is what mankind's been doing for how many thousands of years. And my doctor took one look at me and he said, "What do you want, me to lose my license?" Because even though he did agree with me and has agreed with me on many points, we've disagreed on other points as well,

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he agreed that I did not have enough information to make an informed decision. And he said, "What are you going to do?" He says, "If you decide not to take the shot, you're going to lose your job. At the same time, I will not write you a note that says that you do not need a COVID vaccine," because he did not want to lose *his* job.

Shawn Buckley

And then my last question is, what do you think should have been done differently by the government?

Oliver Kennedy

I heard other folks say everything, and I concur. It's just a matter of where do you start. The muzzling and the quieting of people who simply had another viewpoint: whether it was scientific, medical, social, nobody really got listened to. And it was sort of, my way or the highway. And it seemed that that was dictated at so many different levels. The question was, whose way still is it and which highway are we going on. Because between the different directives from provincial, municipal, federal, public health, nobody really knew what was going on. The left hand didn't seem to know what the right was doing. And that was still very apparent, even when I was working. Everybody was sort of, let's see if this works, let's see if that works. And while trying to lead and show that they knew what they were doing, you could see: at some points, nobody knew what they were doing.

And to admit that, I don't think we're ever going to see. But to maybe put safeguards in place so that people have to at least test what they're going to try on us. Because lockdowns, don't think those worked. Vaccine, don't think it worked. And there's so many things that you can look at what people in charge did, and they didn't work. And each time it was an, "oops, well, we tried our best." And sometimes trying your best isn't good enough if you're hurting people. And there was a lot of hurt done to people. And I'm not the worst done by, but at the same time I've been hurt. And I think that if nothing does change, people will keep getting hurt. And so, yeah, I'm not quite sure what more to say. Because, they've done wrong, they didn't get it right. But they still seem to have their head in the sand thinking that, if we keep doing the same thing, we'll get it right.

Shawn Buckley

Thank you. I'll ask the Commissioners if they have any questions. Thank you.

Oliver Kennedy

Thank you very much.

Shawn Buckley

Thank you for your testimony. On behalf of the National Citizens Inquiry, we appreciate your testimony, Mr. Kennedy.

[00:12:49]

