



NATIONAL CITIZENS INQUIRY

Truro, NS

Day 2

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EVIDENCE

Witness 13: Bliss Behare

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[00:00:00]

Ches Crosbie

Mr. Behare, you affirm that you will tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth?

Bliss Behare

Yes.

Ches Crosbie

Thank you.

Alison Steeves

Can you tell us your full name, where you're from, and your occupation?

Bliss Behare

I'm Bliss Behare, I'm 18 years old, I'm from Baie Verte, New Brunswick, and I'm a seasonal kitchen worker.

Alison Steeves

And when did you graduate from high school, Bliss?

Bliss Behare

I graduated June 2022.

Alison Steeves

So you were in high school during the height of the pandemic roughly, early 2020 to spring 2022?

Bliss Behare

Yes.

Alison Steeves

Can you tell us a bit about what your life was like before that time—before the pandemic started?

Bliss Behare

Prior to COVID, I was really active in my community both within school and outside of it. I campaigned for the Green Party. I organized and spoke at protests for the environment. I was part of art groups and I performed at music festivals. Within school, I was part of band, choir, eco groups. So between those social activities and school, that was mostly what my life consisted of.

Alison Steeves

So then in 2020, when we begin to hear about COVID-19, were you concerned?

Bliss Behare

I was never concerned for myself, given that I'm a young healthy person, but I was possibly concerned for my parents as they're middle-aged.

Alison Steeves

And when the vaccines came out, did you choose to take any of the available vaccines?

Bliss Behare

I did not.

Alison Steeves

How come?

Bliss Behare

I've always been raised to be skeptical about vaccines, so to me it's a case-by-case situation. And having seen that the process was rushed, I wanted to wait at least a year to see the rollout of the vaccine. But before I had time to make my own decision, it was mandated. And once it was mandated, I knew I would never accept the shot because I would never accept a forced medication.

Alison Steeves

What sources did you consult in making your decision?

Bliss Behare

There were a few sources. I did consume both mainstream media and also alternative views on YouTube, such as doctors like Vinay Prasad, and I spoke about that with my

parents and all that information. I also spoke to my nurse practitioner, and I asked her about risks because I'm transgender and I take testosterone and I'd heard about young men having higher cases of myocarditis. So I was concerned about that, and she dismissed that and told me there was absolutely zero risk and that I should just get it. So I found that discomfoting, and so given all those different forms of information, I made my decision.

Alison Steeves

Why did you find that discomfoting?

Bliss Behare

Because I know that there is at least not zero per cent risk, and it was at least more than that, So I wanted her to at least give me more information, but she wouldn't really speak upon the matter much.

Alison Steeves

So in fall 2021, around the time that Nova Scotia announced that there would be a vaccine passport for several services and other things, what grade were you in?

Bliss Behare

I was in Grade 12.

Alison Steeves

And did you observe any impact in school life, in the atmosphere in school, in the school setting at that time after the announcement?

Bliss Behare

Yes, so nothing was really noticeable, people didn't want to talk about it, but once the mandates were in place—once unvaccinated students were banned from extracurricular activities—the issue was just brought forth right to the front of the stage. And it sort of outed unvaccinated students to all the rest of their peers.

Alison Steeves

And did that sort of create any tension in the school?

Bliss Behare

It did for me. I didn't know any other unvaccinated students, but I wanted to avoid being outed so I dropped out of school and switched to online classes.

Alison Steeves

Were you registered in any activities at that time, for the fall?

Bliss Behare

I was registered for theater, art club, music, so yeah, a few things.

Alison Steeves

And outside the school? Anything outside the school?

Bliss Behare

Nothing at that point.

Alison Steeves

And so you dropped out of school to avoid being outed because you were worried about how you would be treated if people knew your status?

Bliss Behare

Yeah, I knew that I would meet a lot of negative reactions, so I did want to avoid that.

Alison Steeves

And exactly when did you drop out?

Bliss Behare

I would say sometime in October.

Alison Steeves

And can you list sort of what type of activities you had intended to do, or that you would normally do around the fall at that time?

Bliss Behare

Yeah, there was a lot of things. Usually, I would have been preparing to perform at the music festival for the Royal Conservatory of Music. I was probably going to have another art show that was outside of school.

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I was going to participate in theater and likely organize eco protests as well, so kind of the regular things I would have always done.

Alison Steeves

And so you were not allowed to participate in any of those things at this point.

Bliss Behare

Yes.

Alison Steeves

And what was that like? How did that feel?

Bliss Behare

It was very isolating, and it was just incredibly lonely.

Alison Steeves

At this time, what were you seeing in the media or on social media about vaccine-related topics or people who choose not to take the vaccines?

Bliss Behare

I saw a lot of hate and contempt for unvaccinated people. Every once in a while, when I'd scroll through, I would see videos that said unvaccinated people deserve to die, that they are idiots, that they're just unlikable people that take up space. One person said they were glad that we were banned from things because they didn't want us to be around, so things of that nature.

Alison Steeves

And was this sort of in the main internet or were you seeing any of this sort of coming from the mouths of people you knew?

Bliss Behare

It was primarily online, yeah.

Alison Steeves

And how did that make you feel?

Bliss Behare

For me personally, I was pretty hypersensitive, so I felt physically shaken. Even sometimes for two days, I might have a migraine or feel very nauseous sometimes.

Alison Steeves

Yeah, just witnessing sort of the types of things people were saying.

Bliss Behare

Yeah.

Alison Steeves

Did your decision not to take the vaccine have an impact on any particular relationships in your life? Friends or family?

Bliss Behare

I would say that it had an impact on every single relationship in my life except that with my parents. But besides that, everyone looked at me differently and could hardly look me in the eyes, frankly. So a lot of interaction was cut back because of it.

Alison Steeves

Do you have any specific examples?

Bliss Behare

So there was one person who I had reached out to after I dropped out of school to meet up with. I told her that I was unvaccinated because I knew it would come up anyways, but she told me that her mom banned her from seeing me.

Alison Steeves

After you told her you were unvaccinated, she—

Bliss Behare

Yeah.

Alison Steeves

And how did that feel?

Bliss Behare

That was really disheartening because I know that most young people didn't want to know me at that point because of my status. So I was excited to hear that she didn't judge me on the matter, so it was really disappointing to learn I lost another friend.

Alison Steeves

So she had originally known and was fine with it, but then later on had told you that she was no longer allowed to hang out with you.

Bliss Behare

Yeah, that's what she told me.

Alison Steeves

Have these measures impacted other aspects of your life?

Bliss Behare

I would say it impacted every aspect except physical. So primarily, social aspects were the hardest, such as losing all the groups that I was a part of. But also financially because my father was put on leave without pay. So as a family, we struggled. And as far as my future, that was also impacted as far as university and just any sort of future plans that I had after high school.

Alison Steeves

And why were those impacted?

Bliss Behare

I was generally banned from universities, and any connections I'd made with people, say like in the art or music world, was cut off.

Alison Steeves

And can you describe a specific day or instance that was particularly challenging in all of this?

Bliss Behare

One of the hardest days for me was when my mom and I were discussing university opportunities. And I was on and off negative about it, but I generally really love education, so I was excited, and we discussed a particular university and we're starting to get inspired by it. But then we went online to look up the COVID policies, and we found that I was banned not just from the physical classroom, but also banned from online classes. So that was disappointing.

Alison Steeves

So at this point in time, with everything up in the air, no indication of when these requirements are going to end, what was your outlook? How were you feeling about the future?

Bliss Behare

I felt like I was in despair. I felt very bleak. I really felt, especially considering there was more threats and more possible exclusion, I felt that there would never be an end to it. And because I felt that way, because I felt like our future, not just personally on my note but as a country, our future was bleak, I did feel fairly suicidal because it seemed that it would never end.

Alison Steeves

Now that many of the measures have lifted and they're sort of less focused on COVID, would you say your life has returned to normal, or would you say that you experience any ongoing impacts?

Bliss Behare

In some ways it definitely has gone back to normal, which I'm grateful for. I have a job; I'm going to college and those were things that I wanted. But internally as far as my mindset, I think I'm changed forever.

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I think I may never ever trust my government again or trust any institution in Canada unless I see justice and restitution. But I'm still grateful for the physical things that have changed, such as the mandates lifting.

Alison Steeves

And I wanted to ask, is there any particular activity that was particularly painful or difficult for you to be excluded from, or were there any particular instances of not being able to participate?

Bliss Behare

The hardest for me was music because for me, and for most people, music is about playing music with each other and collaborating, and it's a very beautiful experience. So my tutor who I had who taught me clarinet for about seven years said we can no longer do in-person classes together. That was very rough for me especially. Also, I couldn't perform at the music festivals or anything like that, too.

Alison Steeves

That was that tutor's personal choice or was it a requirement?

Bliss Behare

For my tutor it was personal choice.

Alison Steeves

Is there anything else you'd like to add?

Bliss Behare

I guess, I would just say that, although in those moments I felt that there was really no hope, having seen the convoy and having seen movements like this, like the National Citizens Inquiry, I am given a lot more hope.

Alison Steeves

Thank you, Bliss. I'll turn it over to the Commission.

Thank you.

[00:11:38]

Final Review and Approval: Jodi Bruhn, August 3, 2023.

The evidence offered in this transcript is a true and faithful record of witness testimony given during the National Citizens Inquiry (NCI) hearings. The transcript was prepared by members of a team of volunteers using an "intelligent verbatim" transcription method.

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