



NATIONAL CITIZENS INQUIRY

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Day 3

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EVIDENCE

Witness 12: Kyra Pituley

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[00:00:00]

Kassy Baker

Hello, Kyra. Can you, please, state your name and spell it for the record?

Kyra Pituley

My name is Kyra Pituley. K-Y-R-A, last name P-I-T-U-L-E-Y.

Kassy Baker

Now, Kyra, do you promise and swear to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth?

Kyra Pituley

I do, yes.

Kassy Baker

Okay. Now, I understand you're here today to tell us about your experience as an unvaccinated student during the pandemic and also to tell us a little bit about your personal experience with the Freedom Convoy in Ottawa. Is that right?

Kyra Pituley

Yes.

Kassy Baker

Very good. Let's start with a little bit of your background. How old are you?

Kyra Pituley

I'm 15 years old.

Kassy Baker

And where are you from?

Kyra Pituley

I'm from Manitoba and live outside of the city.

Kassy Baker

What grade are you currently in?

Kyra Pituley

I'm currently in grade 9.

Kassy Baker

Now, when the pandemic started in 2020, what grade were you in?

Kyra Pituley

I was in grade 6.

Kassy Baker

And how long had you been going to the school that you were then attending?

Kyra Pituley

Since before kindergarten.

Kassy Baker

Okay. Now, what was school like in 2020? Can you give us a bit of a description?

Kyra Pituley

Before March, it was normal, I guess. I got to see all my friends and hang out with friends outside of school and sports. And just live a life as a 12-year-old.

Kassy Baker

And what about after March 2020?

Kyra Pituley

That's when the schools shut down and we were online until June of that year. I didn't get to see any of my friends for that entire duration that we were online. I didn't even leave my house, I guess. Just very, like, distanced from other people.

Kassy Baker

And what about your education? What was it like learning online?

Kyra Pituley

In the first year we didn't have to do school; it was an option. I did do school for the rest of that year, but I know most people didn't.

Kassy Baker

Were you able to get answers to all of your questions, as I am sure all students have at some point while they're going to school?

Kyra Pituley

Most of them, yes.

Kassy Baker

Very good. Before the pandemic and actually, during the pandemic— I understand that you are very active in sports, is that correct?

Kyra Pituley

Yes.

Kassy Baker

What sports do you play?

Kyra Pituley

I play hockey, ringette, and volleyball.

Kassy Baker

Were there any COVID precautions brought in that allowed you to continue playing those sports throughout the pandemic?

Kyra Pituley

Um, not as much to allow me to play but to restrict me from being able to play on my teams.

Kassy Baker

Sure. So of course, the vaccinations didn't come out until 2021. So through 2020 were you able to participate in sports relatively normally, or were there any differences from before the pandemic?

Kyra Pituley

In 2020, there was regular season started for hockey and ringette in September. And by the end of November, beginning of December, it was shut down for everyone. No one was able to play.

Kassy Baker

And then, sports activities resumed sometime in the spring of 2021, is that right?

Kyra Pituley

Yeah.

Kassy Baker

Now, if I understand properly, and you can correct me if I'm wrong: your age group would have been eligible for vaccination in the fall of 2021. Is that correct?

Kyra Pituley

Yes.

Kassy Baker

Okay. Now, did you choose to become vaccinated at that time?

Kyra Pituley

No, I did not.

Kassy Baker

And how did you come to that decision? Was it a family decision? Was it your decision? What led to that decision?

Kyra Pituley

It was more of a family decision. My parents had done some research about it and we didn't really know much about it. And it was also kind of a personal choice as well. I didn't want to get it because of things that we've researched about and just information that we found out.

Kassy Baker

Information such as what?

Kyra Pituley

Like, you didn't really know the effects of it, and it did come out so quickly that no one was really sure what was in it.

Kassy Baker

Now, up until that point, as far as you're aware, were you up to date with your vaccinations? Had you received other vaccinations throughout your childhood and adolescence?

Kyra Pituley

I was up to date on everything else besides the COVID vaccine.

[00:05:00]

Kassy Baker

Had you ever had a negative reaction to a vaccination?

Kyra Pituley

When I was younger—I believe I was around one and a half—I had received the flu shot. And I had a severe allergic reaction to it, which doctors later found out that it was the H1N1 strand that I had reacted to.

Kassy Baker

And so, when you had a severe reaction, as you've described it, were you required to go to the hospital because of it?

Kyra Pituley

Yes.

Kassy Baker

And what were your symptoms? What were the reactions?

Kyra Pituley

I don't remember at all, so I'm just going off of what I've been told. I had stopped breathing. I'm not sure for how long, but the paramedics came to the house and then I was brought to the hospital.

Kassy Baker

So it was quite a serious reaction?

Kyra Pituley

Yeah.

Kassy Baker

From what you've been told. Very good. But as you've advised, other than that, you've stayed away from, I think you said it was an H1N1 vaccination at the time?

Kyra Pituley

The strand in the flu shot, yeah.

Kassy Baker

That's right. All right. So aside from that, you were still up to date with your other vaccinations.

Kyra Pituley

Yeah.

Kassy Baker

Okay. How did the vaccine mandate affect your participation in sports?

Kyra Pituley

I was kicked off of both of my teams—volleyball and hockey, or ringette. Sorry, I was playing ringette that one year. In 2021, I had started ringette and I was playing normally up until— I think it was around December that I had been fully kicked off of my team.

In September, that's when the season started. And in October, the restrictions were put out that parents weren't allowed to be in the facilities— Or anyone over 18 weren't allowed to be in the facilities without showing proof of vaccination. And I was taking my younger siblings in and out of practices and myself as well because my parents weren't allowed to come to the arenas. And up until there was an age restriction put out to get the vaccine, I wasn't able to bring anyone to their practices anymore.

Kassy Baker

Was there any way that you did not require to be vaccinated? For instance, could you have been tested and continued to play on these teams?

Kyra Pituley

There was the option to test. You weren't allowed to test from at home. You would have had to go into your local pharmacy, and we had chosen not to because you would have had to test two or three times a week and the tests, I believe, were \$40 each.

Kassy Baker

So the cost of continual testing made that prohibitive for you to continue participating, is that right?

Kyra Pituley

Yeah.

Kassy Baker

Okay. Throughout this time that you were not allowed to participate in the extracurricular sports, were you allowed to participate in gym class in your school?

Kyra Pituley

No. I was allowed to participate in gym, I guess. I mean, everyone had to wear a mask, regardless of your vaccination status. But as soon as the bell rang for lunch, you had to show proof of vaccination to be in the gym area. And myself and not very many others had to sit outside of the gym, alone, basically, because we weren't allowed to attend the activities in the gym because we didn't show proof of vaccination.

Kassy Baker

So, just to clarify— Over the lunch hour, they would have activities in the gym that students who were vaccinated could participate in, is that right?

Kyra Pituley

Yes.

Kassy Baker

But because you were unvaccinated, you were required to sit in the hall or outside of the gymnasium.

Kyra Pituley

Yep.

Kassy Baker

So if you were in the gym for a class, that was acceptable. But for lunch that was not acceptable, is that right?

Kyra Pituley

Yes.

Kassy Baker

Okay. I understand that you were in two separate ringette leagues at the same time and can you tell us a little bit about how rules varied from one league to the other?

Kyra Pituley

In one league, there was a requirement that you had to either show proof of negative test or proof of vaccination. And the other league, it was more strict that you had to provide those requirements. It was more, I guess, more strict. The one league was more laid back. Like, later on in the season is when they started to require it more. So in October, that is when the one league got really strict on the vaccinations and showing the negative tests. And I hadn't provided the proof of vaccination or negative test.

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And we had played this one team in a tournament, in one league, that I was allowed to play in. And a week later we played the same team, but in a different league, and I had been

kicked out of the arena because I didn't show the proof of vaccination or proof of negative test.

Kassy Baker

So just to clarify, one week you were able to play a particular team in one rink, and one week later you were unable to play the exact same team because it was in a different rink, is that right?

Kyra Pituley

Yes.

Kassy Baker

Okay. Can you tell us about the last game of ringette that you played that year?

Kyra Pituley

The last game I had played, or was supposed to play, I had went into the rink. My team had said that I wasn't going to be able to play after a certain period of time, but the exact date wasn't given. So I went to this game not knowing if I was able to play but came prepared to play. And when I got into the rink, one of my teammates had actually went out to the coach and, I guess, ratted me out that I was there. And the coach came into the dressing room and asked me to leave, that I wasn't able to play.

Kassy Baker

And was this in front of your other teammates?

Kyra Pituley

It was in front of the entire team and both of the coaches that we had.

Kassy Baker

Okay. And how did that experience make you feel?

Kyra Pituley

It upset me a lot. As soon as she asked me to leave, it was just very straightforward. There was no, like, forgiveness of anything. There was nothing. I had called my dad to come pick me up because— If anything happened, he would come pick me up if I had to get picked up or whatever. And he had pulled my coaches aside to talk to them. I'm not really sure what happened in that conversation because I had to step away, because I couldn't even handle standing next to them.

Kassy Baker

Okay, because you were upset. Is that right?

Kyra Pituley

I was very upset, yes.

Kassy Baker

Okay. Were there any other activities, that were not related to school or sports, that you were unable to participate in?

Kyra Pituley

I wasn't able to go out with my friends. There was a group of us going to an event around Halloween-time. And I wasn't allowed to participate because at that time, anyone over the age of 13 had to show proof of vaccination and I didn't have that.

Kassy Baker

Were there any other students who were, similarly to yourself, not vaccinated that when you were excluded from these events or when you were unable to attend the gymnasium at school, you were able to socialize with during those times?

Kyra Pituley

During COVID, we were grouped into cohorts. So there was two classes per cohort. And in my cohort, there was myself and, I believe, two others who weren't vaccinated. I'm not sure about the other classes because we weren't allowed to mix groups, so we had to stay in our own cohorts.

Kassy Baker

So you would sit outside with these two or three, in total, other students that also weren't allowed in the gymnasium, is that right?

Kyra Pituley

Yes.

Kassy Baker

All right. Now, I understand that, in January of 2022, you actually participated in the Trucker Convoy in Ottawa. Can you tell us a little bit about how you became involved with that?

Kyra Pituley

One night, we were sitting on the couch—me, my dad, and my stepmom—and we had heard about this convoy. And we dug into it a little bit more and found out what was happening and later on in that week that it was coming through Winnipeg. And we didn't have a truck because my dad is a truck driver and he was driving his truck, so we couldn't use his. So we found a truck of our friend's that we were allowed to drive and we joined the convoy in Headingley, I believe, on the 25th of January.

Kassy Baker

And when you say “we,” who are you referring to?

Kyra Pituley

Me and my stepmom, Steph.

Kassy Baker

And when did you arrive in Ottawa?

Kyra Pituley

We got to Ottawa Saturday, the 29th of January.

Kassy Baker

And what was your impression of the convoy when you arrived?

Kyra Pituley

Well, when we arrived in Ottawa, all of the trucks were, I guess, pointed towards one certain street. I don't remember the name of that street, but along the river behind Parliament. All of the trucks were just at a standstill there. And we were sitting there for around, I want to say, half an hour, 40 minutes. And we had been travelling with another truck that we met, there was two people in it. And Steph went over to them and asked— We were going to go find a way up to downtown from Parliament and we asked them if they're coming or not.

[00:15:00]

My mom handed me her phone and she said, “Get me here.” And there's a lot of one-way streets in downtown Ottawa that we had to find our way through, and we ended up being two blocks from Parliament, on Metcalfe and Albert.

Kassy Baker

And did you attend Parliament after that?

Kyra Pituley

Yes. The first or second night, we went up to Parliament Hill just to see what was happening up there, and it was a really cool experience to be a part of.

Kassy Baker

And why was it a cool experience? What was happening that you thought was interesting or exciting or made you glad to be participating?

Kyra Pituley

Over the past, I guess, two years at that point that COVID had affected the entire world, I felt a sense of normalcy to be around people again who weren't wearing masks and people

who, like, were just good spirit. We could go up and talk to anyone, and they would hold a conversation. You can go over to talk to the truck drivers and, just, everyone was so friendly.

Kassy Baker

And while you were on Parliament Hill or participating in the activities that were taking place there, what impression did you have of those that were participating? Was it positive? Was it negative? What did you see?

Kyra Pituley

I saw a very positive, like, attitude from everyone. I felt no one had any bad intentions to do anything that was not in a good way, I guess. Like, no one had the intention of doing anything bad.

Kassy Baker

Did you ever witness any instances of the participants acting cruelly towards any other individuals or acting illegally?

Kyra Pituley

In the very beginning, like, the first two weeks that we were there, it was all a very positive experience. There was no one, like, any sort of bad actions towards anyone.

Kassy Baker

And how long were you in Ottawa all together?

Kyra Pituley

Twenty-two days.

Kassy Baker

So what caused you to leave Ottawa?

Kyra Pituley

The Friday, I believe it was the 18th, there was more outside law enforcement that was brought in to downtown Ottawa who were trying to push the people out of the streets with force. Like, there was police officers holding batons and they had shields, and it was not a very good feeling to see that happening.

Kassy Baker

Did you see it, personally, happen? Were you there as that was happening?

Kyra Pituley

Personally, no, I was not. My brother, my dad, and Steph were all up there, though.

Kassy Baker

And when did you return to Manitoba?

Kyra Pituley

We got back in Manitoba, or we got back home February 21st.

Kassy Baker

Is there anything else that you would like to mention about that experience that I haven't asked you about?

Kyra Pituley

I don't think so.

Kassy Baker

Well, that concludes my questions. Are there any questions from the commissioners?

Commissioner Kaikkonen

Thank you for your testimony. You mentioned that some of the students didn't do their online education. When they went back to school post-COVID, did you notice a difference in grade standards, grade outcomes, the students' knowledge? You finished your online, but some of them didn't.

Kyra Pituley

I had moved schools at the end of grade 6. So at grade 7, I had actually moved out to Manitoba with my dad and I was attending a new school. So I wasn't really with the people who I had done online the previous year.

Commissioner Kaikkonen

Thank you.

Kyra Pituley

Can I add one more comment?

Kassy Baker

Sure can.

Kyra Pituley

When I was in Ottawa, I was doing online school from the day after I left to around the middle point that I was in Ottawa. And my teachers were very good with sending me work up until a certain point. And I don't know if this had anything to do with me being in Ottawa, but if parents would take their kids on a vacation, let's say, to Disneyland, they would be getting their work and they would be communicating with teachers very well.

And at one point, my teachers had actually stopped sending me work and stopped communicating. So I was reaching out to them about getting work and it came to the point where my parents were emailing and calling the school about getting me more work because they had just stopped sending me it altogether.

[00:20:00]

And the administration of my school had suggested that I be enrolled in Homeschool Manitoba because I was gone. And because I wasn't attending school for two weeks that I had to enroll in Homeschool Manitoba.

Kassy Baker

And when you returned, were you able to continue on with your school?

Kyra Pituley

When I returned to school, yes, I was able to. I had a bit to catch up on because I wasn't sent it, but I still continued as normal.

Kassy Baker

Very good. Are there any further questions from the commissioners? Very good. On behalf of the National Citizens Inquiry, we thank you for your testimony.

[00:20:47]

Final Review and Approval: Margaret Phillips, August 10, 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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