



NATIONAL CITIZENS INQUIRY

Winnipeg, MB

Day 3

April 15, 2023

EVIDENCE

Witness 14: Todd McDougall

Full Day 3 Timestamp: 09:08:01–09:33:28

Source URL: <https://rumble.com/v2idi8y-national-citizens-inquiry-winnipeg-day-3.html>

[00:00:00]

Kyle Morgan

I think our next witness is Todd McDougall, that's Todd, there he is.

Todd McDougall

How do I look on my own camera there? I'm usually moonlighting here, you know. Activist, journalist.

Kyle Morgan

Can you state your whole name, sir, and spell your name also?

Todd McDougall

Todd McDougall, T-O-D-D, last name, M-C, capital D, O-U-G-A-L-L.

Kyle Morgan

And do you promise to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help you God?

Todd McDougall

Yes, I do. Yeah.

Kyle Morgan

Are you born and raised in Winnipeg? Is that right?

Todd McDougall

Yes.

Kyle Morgan

And I understand you worked a number of years in child care, is that right?

Todd McDougall

Yes, 13 years in child care, working for the same centre, as well.

Kyle Morgan

When did that employment begin there?

Todd McDougall

I got hired in, I think it was the spring of 2008.

Kyle Morgan

So then 13 years would have been to 2021.

Todd McDougall

Yeah.

Kyle Morgan

Now I understand the mandates that were in effect also had some impact on you and just tell us what happened with your employment and how your job ended.

Todd McDougall

Yeah. So it's actually kind of interesting with the combination of lots of things. I also had a son that was born literally the day the global pandemic was announced. So I was in the hospital listening to the nurses, discussing how they felt about the beginnings of the ongoing situation. We were also moving out of an apartment at the time. So there's a lot going on.

April of 2020, my daycare was shut down. Although I was still going to work because my director had made it available to take the opportunity to use the option of having no children around, to be able to do all kinds of things to the Centre that we otherwise would normally not be able to do. All kinds of cleaning, organizing. Lots of different stuff. I wasn't necessarily out of work for April because I was still going, so I could keep money coming in. And helping out with my centre and actually helping out with my community. One of the things I loved so much about my position in the childcare centre that I worked for was that in any one given day, I was assisting not just a school age and preschool centre, but I was also assisting the ongoings of two schools, French immersion and English, a church, and a community club.

Throughout April and into May of 2020, I assisted all of those facilities because nobody was around. I was doing groundskeeping for the community club, for the church, for the daycare. Pretty much doing anything I could to keep busy, to keep active, to keep money coming in and to assist my community as well.

Then that summer, some children started filtering back into the daycare when we reopened. It was not very many at all. Of course, lots of parents were still working from home. So that summer was pretty, kind of, boring. There was small groups of children. I was helping a few of them with their online learning, which was kind of interesting as well. Kind of business as usual, just with a really small crowd.

Then school started up again, sort of in a normal fashion, September of 2020. And things were still relatively okay. I wasn't dealing with a whole bunch of nonsense that made me feel uncomfortable about my job and how I was treating children and how I was being treated by my employer and my fellow employees as well, too. That all took a sharp change—actually, I guess just inside, I think that school year.

That first school year in 2020, September 2020 started off relatively normal. But then as you got into October, they were really getting harsh on the cohorts and the distancing. And then, let's say for my childcare, we couldn't go back to the schoolyard anymore. And then I was getting told to, "Okay, you're playing out in the schoolyard with the children from our centre, but some other children from the neighborhood came in and wanted to go play with our children. You shouldn't let that happen." And of course, I went, "Never for a day. Like are you joking with me right now?" I would laugh in someone's face that said that to me. Like, "Ha, ha, ha. No, I'm not doing that."

Then the masks came in.

[00:05:00]

And that was difficult. Like myself, I found out very quickly that even if I wasn't working in a very physical capacity, having the mask on for 20-25 minutes, half an hour of extended period of time, was certainly changing the way that I operated. Right? This isn't normal. It was affecting me. Then that took a step up to, you know, "Don't be lazy with it." I had my director and my other employees bugging me, "Why is it below your nose?" Then it was, "Wear it outside." And then, so quickly before we even got into November of 2020, it was basically, "Have it on all the time." As soon as you hit our front steps to the moment where you're allowed to walk off site on your own or into some back room or into the washroom on your own, you're going to have it on all day. Inside. Outside. With one kid. With five kids. It doesn't matter. And I took extreme exception to this. Not only just because of how it felt for myself but, of course, largely for children.

Like many others had said here, by this point in time, by September, by October of 2020, we had gone through the beginning of "A Pandemic," right? And whoever had heard of a pandemic, when in history— Like when there was the black plague or the Spanish flu, did it go away and come back again? But it was all still a pandemic? No, a pandemic is— This is affecting the world or whatever area for this amount of time until it is not. That is "A Pandemic." And this was like— Okay, so we had three months of shutdowns and lockdowns and this and that. Then we had a fairly normal summer.

Then we started school again in September. And then it's cold and flu season. So of course, you know, a lot of people in this room spent the last three cold and flu seasons going, "Oh, it's COVID season again." So there was the fears of— Ah, this is going to be a pandemic that is allowed to "come back." And so sure enough, it did. And I'm watching what that was doing to children. Again, seeing this period of time elapse where nothing was happening with children at all. Now they are back at school. They had already started school without all having to be in masks and done it for about a month or so. Now this is creeping into again November 2020.

Kyle Morgan

Now am I right that you started attending some rallies about this time?

Todd McDougall

Yeah, yeah. But anyway, so I wanted to say, it wasn't just me. It was largely what it was doing to the children. I could see very easily how many children, especially of younger ages, that was having a very tough time doing this. I was watching, and this was a big kicker for me: I was watching autistic children. Especially one specific, who I had been doing work with for years.

Let's go back to just the previous school year, before COVID, before the schools got shut down. We were championing—his workers inside the school and us, the childcare workers, as well too—championing the success that had happened with this child. He was right there involved with his peers. He was socializing. He was able to do the majority of what his peer group was doing. I was astounded that as we were watching him regress to not just back to where he was several years prior but even worse. He was far more aggressive and violent towards staff that he was very, very familiar with, in a way that we had never seen before. I couldn't believe it that my staff, including people— I was never trained. No, I got lots of training and did lots of course and seminar work, but I never went to school for child care. I did not do the full three years at Red River College. So I was working with employees that had been doing it for the majority of their adult life. So they're 20 to 30 years older than I, including my director. Of course, the other thing that I couldn't help to throw into that is, you know, much better pay grade.

They had no idea. I was the one that had to sit there and listen to them have round-table discussions about "Why is?" I'll say the name of the autistic child, Toby. "Why is Toby running after us? Why is he hitting us? Why is he beating us? What's going on?" And I went, "Do you know autism? You guys, but this is your job. Have you forgotten what you've gone to courses and done seminar work for?" They're all staring— What is he about to say? "He can't see your face! There's a problem, he can't facially recognize what's going on. He can't read emotions anymore. He's autistic, this is extremely paramount to how he socializes!" They were like, "Oh my god, you're right! And we can't do anything about it!" I was like, "So you're going to let it get worse?"

Yeah, well, Larry, my director said, "Brent Roussin said."

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I phoned Manitoba Child Daycare head office. I was put on speakerphone in a boardroom, as they all apparently, I could visualize this, stood around a table and they said, "We've never heard this before." This was a year in. This was just before I left my job. I called Manitoba Child Daycare head office and said everything I'm saying now. They said, "Could you stop for a moment? We're going to have to put you on speakerphone. No one's ever called us yet about this." In a province of over a million people with a daycare on almost every frigging street corner and growing? Really? My god. Yeah. Shocking.

That's why I started attending the rallies. Prior to that, I was kind of well— I run a media organization called Winnipeg Alternative Media. And for over a decade, in many different capacities, we have attempted to keep free speech and freedom of information alive by doing practically the exact opposite of what the mainstream media does—which is don't

cancel or edit anything and let what we film speak for itself. And that's what I was doing for almost a calendar year, I would say: From the first rally that was held here in Manitoba, May 9th of 2020, up until I think the first one that I finally decided I am not just attending to film. I am here for every other reason as well now, too. Which was early January 2021 in Steinbach.

And immediately I got the repercussions that, of course, I was well aware was going to be coming my way. You know, you attended a rally—you were in a group size larger than public health order—so you have to self-isolate for two weeks. So all of that kind of amounts to why me and child care just wasn't going to work anymore. I could not stand to see what was happening to children, both whether we're talking about autistic and special needs or not. I could not stand the fact that I could not work my job properly anymore. We had gone through January and February, and I had made up every excuse imaginable to not actually do my job and not spend time with the children. Because I couldn't in good conscience anymore, and was doing small repairs and handyman work around the facility for a matter of months, at that point in time. All those options had ran out. I was done. I knew that this wasn't going to get any better anytime soon.

My director— And nobody had any answers for me and frankly, of course, were considering me to be a goofball. You know, like, "What is wrong with you? This is your job to keep the children safe. How can you have these questions?" And I remember one of my last things I told my director was like, "By the way, isn't it funny, I haven't been wearing a mask outside for two months and a parent hasn't said a damn thing." I found that was kind of fun. And the kids didn't rat on me either.

But so, it all just kind of came down. I remember the last phone conversation. This is really sad. After 13 years and being a very, very integral part of that community, once again working hand-in-hand with a church, two schools, a community club, and a school age and a preschool daycare— My last kick at the can there was I had a phone conversation with my director and said— Because I always admitted, I never tried to hide anything. I always said you know, "I don't want to wear the mask and I'm not going to be, and there's going to be lots of times where I'm not going to be when you're not looking at me." I still never got fired because I was one of the longest-standing employees at the time.

I know from firsthand accounts that the majority of the children and the families of that Centre loved me and considered to be one of my favourites. I was a, you know, young male staff. I ran around with the kids. I played rough-and-tumble; I let little boys fall off; I let little boys get in play fights. And then I would, you know, us and dad would high-five afterwards. So I knew how valuable I was and how my director was just hoping that something would change so that she could keep me on. And not go through all this struggle that I was kind of putting down to her.

But our last conversation was on the phone where I once again had to tell her, "Look, I attended a rally again just yesterday, so I guess I'm not coming to work this week." And she went, "No, no, you have to self-isolate, again." And I went, "Yeah, but there's no end in sight here. And so, what happens if I'm going to be attending a rally like every weekend?" "Well, I guess you're not coming back to work for quite some time." "I guess I'm not coming back to work at all." That's how that ended.

I then was not allowed even in the facility to go get my pair of work shoes. About a week later, I decided to go back. I tried calling my director on her personal line. And I called the daycare line several times. Emailed. Then I got there, knocked on the door several times.

Did their little buzzer thing that has a camera and everything, and it's got a full microphone system, as well.

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Of course, I use that a million times a day. You can talk to people; you can say, "Oh, hello," whatever. Nope, nothing at all. One employee opened the door about this much, tossed my shoes on the outside and closed the door. That's 13 years, right there; that was my last final moment on the property.

Kyle Morgan

So now I understand you work at a seed plant. Is that right?

Todd McDougall

Yeah.

Kyle Morgan

So you had to change your whole line of work.

Todd McDougall

Yeah, 13 years doing— And I did try some of the schooling. Like I was doing a little bit, kind of, touch-and-go with Red River. Yeah, so 13 years of that, being a large portion of my life, that took up a lot of like extracurricular, as well. I did lots and lots of extra work there. When there were special events happening at the community club, I was a volunteer, like, it was being as much as I possibly, possibly could. I liked being a part of that community. After 13 years, I was now training new employees that I knew as like six- and seven-year-olds. I knew a lot of these families about as well as I know some of my own family, extended family members, like it was very tightly knit. And you know, it's the kind of thing that I've been so all over the place and so busy the last couple years of my life, sometimes I don't even think about it until a moment like now where— It was kind of shocking to see that my director and other employees and some of the other individuals there, could just let that happen with— It was kind of shocking to see sort of nobody kind of fight for me in a sense or anything like that.

And to lose that, that sense of belonging in a community that I had put so much work into was extremely debilitating. And then to compound that with having to go—okay, well, I need to still figure out a way to, you know, just to maintain, to bring money in and to move forward. So yeah, luckily enough, I had a friend who I'm sure most individuals would know, I'm sure is in the room right now, that being Patrick Allard. Who was like, "Well, you don't really got the skills for the kind of work I do, but I'll give you a shot." And I think I picked up a few things along the way, so that's nice. I could possibly do a few extra repairs around my own house now, so thank you, Pat. But that even had its problems because then me and him both got arrested.

Kyle Morgan

Yes, that's what I wanted to talk to you about that. So I understand you picked up about 10 or 11 tickets for mostly gathering outside in Manitoba. In addition to a mass ticket.

Todd McDougall

Yes. Hugs and handshakes, specifically.

Kyle Morgan

And like others that have testified, you were also arrested in May of 2021. And to be clear, that was as a result of *The Provincial Offences Act* in Manitoba. They issued a warrant to prevent the continuation of an offence, which in this case was gathering outside. Hugging and shaking hands with others.

Todd McDougall

Yeah. Yeah. And, you know, my— Especially after the daycare was, sort of, out of the way. Then, of course, I could throw myself into the mix even a little bit more. And of course, as all these things are transpiring, it's even more fuel to the fire to need to be more involved, right? So then it wasn't just—hey, I'm here already doing the media thing and maybe I'll get up on stage and speak a little bit. Because, of course, my first couple of times finally getting in front of the camera and up on the stage, I was talking about what I was seeing in child care.

But then after that point, it was more like—no, I want to be directly involved. I want to organize. I want to throw into the mix whatever I can using Winnipeg alternative media as a platform and as a mouthpiece. And then going back and using some of the knowledge that I had gained from activism that I had been involved in a decade ago. And I hadn't really been involved in protests or rallies for quite a few years leading up to the beginning of the COVID rallies. But I had organized and been a part of other different rallies from years before. And so, I was now able to bring some of that to the table and was more than happy to do so.

Kyle Morgan

I understand you were in jail for about 24 hours.

Todd McDougall

Yeah, on two separate occasions. Yeah, I was arrested for a breach as well.

Kyle Morgan

Now, on the first arrest, you are released with a condition to follow all public health orders, is that right?

Todd McDougall

Yeah

Kyle Morgan

And that would include the use of masks?

Todd McDougall

Right.

Kyle Morgan

And so, tell us about your next arrest, which happened only a week later. Is that right?

Todd McDougall

Well, see now, there is already a punchline right there, right? Because follow all public health orders, to me, because of doing the research that was— Oh, what was it again? Oh, yeah, on the Province's website, saying that involved in public health order was the option to be mask-exempt,

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and to not have to require specific detailed personal information. You do not need to have a doctor's note. You didn't have to have your doctor on the phone for somebody, that it really should be able to just be left up with— If I'm going to go shopping here and you're— I get the whole thing of, like, this is a private, whatever; the answer is no, you still have to leave. Okay, fine, I'll leave.

But this was a Shoppers Drug Mart, so not a little ma and pa store. Like it's a large company, and I had already had my arrangement with the owner. Anyway, so follow public health order means that I should be allowed to be mask exempt. And if someone's okay with me shopping there because I'm mask exempt, then there should be no problems. Or if they say, "No, you're not allowed to be a mask exempt at this store, this location, then leave." And then you do leave. Then again, should still be end of issue. But not this time around. I'm thinking because I was in the news a whole lot that week.

But yeah, so this was my local Shoppers Drug Mart. I had even worked there a few years prior, so I knew the owner. I knew the manager. And I had already dealt with them because of me shopping there throughout the pandemic, up to that point already, and having the issues with other employees and such. And I had to call this man and say, like, "Look, do you know what the public health order states?" And he said, "Yeah." So I said, "You are aware that myself and others are allowed to claim a mask exemption, not show proof?" Yada, yada, and all that. "And this kind of discourse is allowed." And he went, "Yes, I'm aware." So I said, "Okay, well your employees aren't aware. So that would be a training issue, and that would be on your part." And he goes. "Oh yes. You're right. I will have to have a talk with my employees and make sure that they are not yelling or harassing individuals such as yourself that claim this." So I said, "Okay, great, well if that's going to be the case that means I can keep shopping there? Because you are the closest one to me." I had a newborn at the time, so Shoppers Drug Mart is a pretty key place to go for a lot of your infant needs. I said this to him, so I was, like, "You know, we're spending a lot of money there or I could be spending it elsewhere." "Oh, no, please keep shopping here."

Fast forward to, this is a year later. I've been arrested. I've been in the media. I don't think they actually printed my bail conditions, but it's almost as if they did, I guess. Because for some weird reason, that day, I walk in to get registered mail. Registered mail. So whatever was at the post office there that day, I couldn't get from anywhere else. That was my post office. Registered mail. I go there. I'm thinking, this is the location; I have an arrangement with the manager. I wasn't even thinking about my bail conditions really. Funny looking back on that in retrospect, but good story now.

And so, I go in, and as soon as I get up to the post office, there's nobody around in sight. Just the lady, who I knew from working with her three years prior, staring at me, pointing to her face. And I went, "Come on. I've been doing this with you guys for a year. Go ahead, call up Harvey," the name of the manager. "Go ahead, call him up. I'm allowed to be here. You have my registered mail. Give it to me, and I'll be gone, two seconds." She calls up Harvey. Harvey turns the corner, takes one look at me and berates me. Yells, swears, "You get the 'F' out of here!" Like very, very aggressive. And of course, I apologize. I go, "Harvey, whoa. We've had a normal conversation about this before, calm down. But okay, I'll leave." As I'm getting into a vehicle and getting ready to leave, I turn around at the front door and there's the owner, Tracy, looking at me as if she is my mother.

And I go, oh, no. Because she's standing at the front door right now, this is not going to go well. So yes, sure enough, six hours later, I'd just finished eating dinner. Knock at my door, and it's the Winnipeg Police. And I say, I'm holding a little card and I go— They— "You're going to get arrested for a breach." And I go, "But it says follow all public health orders. And I have a little card right here with the Province of Manitoba logo on it from excerpt, from the website." Showed them this right. And, of course, the female officer lowers her head and goes, "Tell it to a judge." I'm sure we all kind of encountered stuff like that over the last few years. Lot of that has been spoken about here at this table.

Kyle Morgan

Yeah. Mr. McDougall, I'm mindful of the time So you did spend 24 hours again in jail on that occasion, is that right?

Todd McDougall

Yes. Yes. Solitary confinement. Only able to use the washroom maybe once or twice if I knock loud, long enough.

Kyle Morgan

I don't have any further questions for you, sir. I'm going to turn it over to the commissioners to see if they have any questions. Doesn't appear so.

So I thank you very much, sir, for your testimony. We appreciate it on behalf of the National Citizens Inquiry, thank you, sir.

Todd McDougall

Thank you. I'll also mention I know a lot about censorship, too.

[00:25:27]

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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