

Dad loses case over 'false teachings' in schools



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The Ontario Court of Appeal has rejected a Hamilton dad's five-year quest to have the public school board warn him in advance about discussions about homosexuality and other lessons and conversations he considers "false teachings."

Steve (Eustathios) Tourloukis wanted to be alerted any time his children would be involved or exposed to a list of topics he considered an attack on his Greek Orthodox religion.

Those topics included sex education, sexual conduct like oral sex, homosexual or bisexual conduct and relationships.

The list of topics also included "environmental issues and concerns," placed "above the value of Judeo-Christian principles and human life," according to the appeals court.

In November 2016, a Superior Court judge in Hamilton rejected Tourloukis' court challenge to make the Hamilton-Wentworth

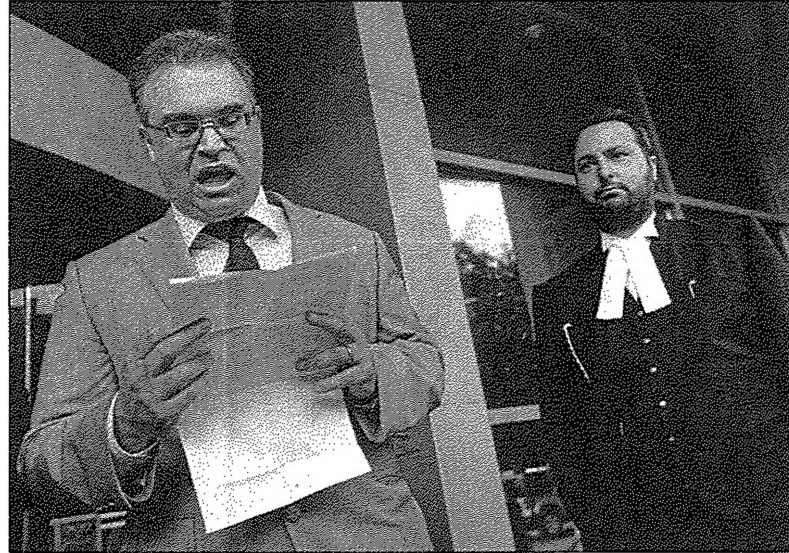
District School Board comply with his wishes. The judge stated the board's refusal to grant the request "was not unreasonable."

Tourloukis, with financial assistance from the Parental Rights in Education Defense Fund, appealed the decision on the basis of freedom of religion guaranteed under the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

The Appeal Court issued its written decision Wednesday after hearing the matter in June.

The appeal was dismissed on the grounds that Tourloukis "failed to establish any interference with or violation of his religious freedom" and that the board's denial of his wishes "was reasonable and proportionate in light of its statutory mandate to promote equity and inclusive education."

The court noted Tourloukis' children "attend a non-denominational public school with a mandate to provide an open, accepting and inclusive educational experience for all children."



FILE PHOTO

Steve Tourloukis speaks outside a Hamilton court in June 2016.

The court also said the dad declined the board's proposal that he withdraw his children from sex education. It added Tourloukis' demand to have advance notice about a "false teaching" is an "exercise that would undermine the message of diversity and in-

clusion which is woven throughout the integrated curriculum."

However, the Parental Rights group says the decision still affirms "that parents — not school boards — are primary educators." It references a paragraph in the 46-page decision that says parental

rights in decisions about education "is primary."

Tourloukis' lawyer, Albertos Polizogopoulos, said neither he nor his client would comment on the decision at this time.

Public board chair Todd White said the board is satisfied that its interpretation of religious accommodation and "fair application of human rights" was upheld.

"Our board still goes to great lengths to approve religious accommodation. We don't want to send out the message that we're not open to those requests ..."

The problem with Tourloukis' request was that the topics he objected to "worked their way" into everyday topics in school — and it violated the diversity the board is obliged to uphold, White said.

Tourloukis, a dentist, started his challenge when his children were at Gordon Prince elementary. His wife is a high school math teacher in the same board.