



NATIONAL CITIZENS INQUIRY

Saskatoon, SK

Day 3

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EVIDENCE

Witness 13: Nadine Ness

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[00:00:00]

Shawn Buckley

And our next witness is Nadine Ness. Nadine, can you please state your full name, spelling your first and last name for the record?

Nadine Ness

Sure, it's Nadine Ness, N-A-D-I-N-E, Ness is N-E-S-S.

Shawn Buckley

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

Nadine Ness

I do.

Shawn Buckley

Now, my understanding is that you are a former RCMP officer?

Nadine Ness

Yes.

Shawn Buckley

But you had to take medical retirement.

Nadine Ness

Yes, that's correct.

Shawn Buckley

And that is because, and I hope I pronounced this correctly, you have a condition called vasovagal— Do you want to just say it for me?

Nadine Ness

I'll say it: vasovagal syncope. The medical retirement has to do with that, as well as other things. But yes, for those who don't know what vasovagal syncope is, some people have it very mildly where they see blood they faint; some people it's needles. Mine is quite severe, it's a more rare case. Sometimes it's even confined me to a wheelchair where I can't stand for more than a few minutes. One of my triggers is heat—so anytime my face gets warm, my neck gets warm—as well as fight-or-flight response because it can make you get warm, so that can also cause it.

I'm one of those rare, few people that no medical doctor out there would deny me a medical exemption. Because wearing a mask, within minutes, because of the heat, causes me to faint.

Shawn Buckley

And you did have a medical exemption from your doctor.

Nadine Ness

Yes. Yes, that's correct.

Shawn Buckley

Now, you had an issue where you were attending at a retail premise. And something happened with regards to you being confronted about not wearing a mask. Can you share that with us?

Nadine Ness

Yeah, I'll share a little bit too, a little bit before because we have to understand that this specific incident was one of very many. By the time this has happened, I've probably been yelled at, been pushed out of stores, been called names. So when I came into the store, there's always this preconceived belief that I might be yelled at or called names or even worse.

So I went into the store. I had a face shield. So even though I'm exempt from wearing a normal mask, I do wear a face shield because it doesn't trap the heat. For the most part, I can handle it. There's still instances where I have to take it off if I get too warm. But in this particular incident I was wearing a face shield. I went into this store— And I'm not going to name the store because this is not about revenge or calling people out, but I think it needs to be out there that this happened to a lot of people. But I went into this store. And I was a general contractor for my house. So anyone who's built their home, there's a lot of places you have to go to in order to get the products you wanted.

So this particular one, I was in there for about 30 minutes. Gentleman at the door greeted me, very friendly, and I was there looking at the supplies that I was looking for. When I was ready to check out, we were putting through all the supplies, and the manager came out of the office and right away— I knew right away. You can tell: if you're someone who can't

wear a mask, you can tell who's going to be nice to you and who's not. And this particular one, I knew right away. She says, "Where's your mask"? And I'm wearing a face shield, it's not like I'm wearing nothing. And I said "I can't wear a mask. I have a fainting condition. I have a medical exemption, so I can't wear a mask. I wear a face shield instead."

She's like, "Well, a face shield doesn't count; it has to be a mask." I reiterated again, "I have a medical exemption. I faint, so I can't wear a mask." And she says, "Did you sign the form?" I said, "What form?" "When you came in, you were supposed to sign a form." Apparently. The gentleman at the door never told me to sign the form, never said anything about it, probably because I was wearing a face shield. And she was very aggressive and said, "Well, you need to sign it before you leave."

At this point, any confrontation turns on the fight-or-flight. I will also add that this condition for me is made way worse when I'm pregnant and I was pregnant at the time. I was seven, almost eight weeks pregnant. I started feeling warm, so I knew it was coming. And I can usually feel it coming. It's almost like I become drunk in a way, so my cognitive thinking kind of goes away. I was just thinking, "I need to go outside to the cold so I can feel better." So I grabbed the form and I said, "I'll sign your form."

[00:05:00]

And I just did it quickly—not that I wanted to. But by the time I went to pay the debit, my condition had already gotten so worse. And I was fighting it because I didn't want to faint in front of this woman that was being really mean to me. And I ended up losing complete consciousness. And most of the time, I can avoid injury because I know it's coming. But in this particular instance, I was fighting it and so I didn't get to avoid it and I hit the floor really hard. I know I hit it hard because I had a big goose egg, I injured my neck, I injured my back, and when I came to, they were saying, "Call an ambulance."

I'm an experienced fainter, I've fainted over 50 times in my life. So I know how to recover. I just need something cold on my neck or to go outside. And she didn't want to let me leave, for obvious reason. But the worst thing is that she was making it worse because she kept defending their policy and their masks, therefore continuing the interaction—the negative interaction. So it actually made it worse. I eventually was able to convince her that, "Look, I'm okay, I'm just going to go outside, I'll wait for a while. If I don't feel safe to drive, I'll wait for my husband to come."

Now, the part that's really hard about all of this, why I wish this situation would have been avoided: Later that afternoon—and I can't confirm that this fainting episode was the cause of this but I also can't confirm it wasn't—I had a miscarriage later that afternoon. And I had another miscarriage several months later, I don't know if it's related to any potential injury that would have happened then. This leads a little bit to the vaccine and my decision and my husband's decision. So this was not a time where the vaccine was in place yet.

Shawn Buckley

Can I just slow you down?

Nadine Ness

Sure, sure.

Shawn Buckley

Did you end up doing anything about that? Did you file a complaint or take any actions?

Nadine Ness

Yes. So as soon as I got in the car and I recovered, I remember thinking: a lot of people who can't wear a mask, a lot of them can be due to emotional or mental health reasons, anxiety, things like that. And I didn't want this to happen to someone else. So I contacted the head office and I explained to them the situation.

Now, this form directly creates an environment where you have a confrontation with someone, no matter what, if you're demanding them to sign that. It's not just like, "Oh, I have a medical exemption." You have to sign this form. And I brought it with me to put on the record as well. So I made a complaint. And I wanted a copy of that form because I didn't know what I had signed, because at that point I was already so close to fainting.

I will give them credit: they ended up removing that policy. I have met this specific manager since and she's been very kind and friendly to me. So I will give them credit. They learned from their mistake and their bad behaviour and they've been better since. And I'm hoping from that incident that other people didn't face what I faced.

Shawn Buckley

Right. And before we jump to the vaccine issue, I wanted you to share with us about a later pregnancy and how that went and what that experience was.

Nadine Ness

I can share that part, but there's a little bit that needs to be put into why I believe I was treated the way that I was.

Shawn Buckley

Okay.

Nadine Ness

A lot of people in this province know me because I lead a big group called Unify Grassroots. Is it okay if I go into how that was founded?

Shawn Buckley

Sure.

Nadine Ness

We chose to not get vaccinated for— The biggest reason, I didn't know how it would affect pregnancy and fertility. And because we had already had two miscarriages, we didn't want to take the chance. My husband's a doctor, so we're also very much aware of what is out there, what the risk of COVID is as well. But we chose that, for both of us, it would be better just to not risk potentially having more miscarriages, to wait until we had another healthy child. So with that, we decided not to get vaccinated.

Now, the summer came.

[00:10:00]

And I'm going to give you a little bit of a story on how these mandates affected my family, more specifically one of my child.

Shawn Buckley

Bria.

Nadine Ness

Bria. My daughter, who was eleven at the time. She has OCD and anxiety and she's been diagnosed and she's being medicated. So when COVID rules came into the school basically, everything we had told her not to worry about, not to focus on, the environment at the school was now doing the exact opposite. So anyone who has a child with OCD: these mandates in schools were horrific for them.

Now, for Bria more particularly, she also has issues with textile, so masks were very difficult. So she really, really struggled in school with wearing it properly. There was a lot of back and forth and add to that anxiety. So there were several times where I actually had to go pick her up at school because she wouldn't wear her mask. Now, by the end of the school year, it had gotten so bad—her condition had gotten so much worse—that she was deemed medium to high risk for suicide. At eleven.

Shawn Buckley

So the school had done an assessment. And the masking policy for Bria had literally led her to the point where she was a medium to high risk of suicide, and she's 11 years old.

Nadine Ness

I don't know if it's just because of the mask, but I think it was all of it—the continuous sanitizing, the not being able to touch each other—all of that just exacerbated her condition that she already had.

So summer came and they announced they were removing all of that and then in the fall, that everything would be removed. And I was really happy about that. The week before school started, they announced they were bringing everything back. And my husband and I had been very silent as to what we were seeing but, at this point, we realized that it could be my daughter's life if we don't say anything.

The school seems to be so focused on COVID but they didn't think about all the other things that it was doing to our kids. Like, the amount of children that have been diagnosed with anxiety and so many mental health issues is just off the charts. I hear about it all the time.

So a lady asked on a town page, "When's the next school board meeting"? And I messaged her, "Are you worried about what I'm worried?" Because you didn't know which side that they were on. At this point, everyone was afraid to say anything because if you did, you'd get attacked. So it turns out we were on the same side. So I said, "Okay, let's meet at my house. We'll come up with a plan and we'll ask to present in front of the school board."

She knew a few people. So I said, “Okay, I’ll start a Facebook group. I’ll share my address on there so that we can meet at my house.” Well, within 24 hours, we had eight hundred fifty parents that had joined that Facebook group. So you had a lot of parents not happy with this mandate—and that was within our school division alone.

So out of that we did do a presentation in front of the school board. Our presentation was received very well. We even had government officials share it on their Facebook. Basically, we brought to light the risk of COVID to children: the real risk, not the one media will tell you. And then, we also spoke about the negative effects these mandates have on our children.

There were some changes done at the school board levels. They did send like, a survey out. However, they didn’t change the mask mandate. They didn’t change anything to do with the policies. And it was at that point that I decided that it was safer for my daughter to be homeschooled, so I decided to homeschool my kids that year.

Shawn Buckley

My understanding is a lot of people made that choice in your district.

Nadine Ness

Yes. Within our group, we had several hundreds of parents that decided to make that choice. So much so that you heard the following. So for school funding, the funding for the year after comes from the amount of kids that were in the school. So when you heard last year that there was no funding for children in the school, it’s because there were so many kids that were homeschooled the previous years. So now the funding the year after was short because children started returning to school. So it was quite significant to the point where it made the media. They just didn’t say what the real reason was.

Shawn Buckley

Now, you found yourself really at the head of a group of people that are now concerned about what’s going on. And that led you and the group to take other action. Do you want to share with us what you did?

Nadine Ness

Yeah. Because my husband was a physician, a lot of people turned to me and said, “Do you know of any other doctors, any other nurses?” And we became the hub for the doctors and nurses to gather in the province. Actually, we became a hub for every profession. That’s what our group started.

[00:15:00]

We gave a place for people to gather within their profession to fight their unions—because the mandates were coming in, the vaccine mandates.

As someone, for the last year, who had faced so much discrimination and seen so much of the worst in humanity as someone who can’t wear a mask, I knew, when the vaccine passports were going to come, what the public was going to face. Because I saw what it was the following year. I was really determined to do something about it. So our group took part in an application for a court injunction to stop the vaccine passport from coming in.

Now, they'll say that was defeated. That's what the media will tell you. But basically, the judge said, because the passports weren't in place yet or wasn't fully announced, you can't put an injunction on what you don't know fully what it is.

So we could have refiled again, once we knew fully what it is. However, the courts also put a fee to it. So basically they made us pay court costs. So it's almost like it was to deter anyone from doing that again. And I'll say it worked because our organization, we thought about it: we can refile, but then any court costs liability would fall onto us. So because of that situation, we decided not to refile.

Shawn Buckley

So basically it was a court cost of \$5,000 that acted as a deterrent?

Nadine Ness

Yeah. And it's funny too, because media tried to pick that up and make it seem like we had no chance in winning. But really, they never really said why it was struck down. So they kind of buffed that just to discourage everyone I felt. And a lot of people felt discouraged by that.

Shawn Buckley

And now after this experience, you ended up doing a video.

Nadine Ness

Yeah, so as a group, we kept thinking, "What can we do to bring on change?" And by this time, our premier had become really awful to the people who were unvaccinated—I'm sure many of you have watched the videos that we've been playing and replaying—and saying things like, "We've had enough patience," and just really awful things.

I thought: maybe we can convict them a little bit and remind them of who they used to be? And maybe try to bring a little bit of humanity back into our government officials. I decided to do a video basically, reminding them what their guiding principles are and how much they've strayed from that. And that video resonated with a lot of people in this province. It went viral. And in that video, I called on Scott Moe to give me a call. Now, our group had been working on building relationship with government officials already. So they already knew who we were.

That following Friday, the premier called me while I was in the vehicle with my daughter, and we spoke for about an hour and fifteen minutes. It could have probably ended up longer, but my daughter was losing her mind so I had to let him go. And the following Monday, the conversation, or the tone the government was taking with the unvaccinated, did a complete 180 degree. He said the unvaccinated are family, are friends, not right-wing wackos. And the reason he said "right-wing wacko" is because that's what media and Ryan Meili and a lot of news organizations were calling me. Not knowing I actually was a Liberal voter for most of my life. But I was called extremist. That's when the media attacks came.

Now, the media attacks didn't silence me. So the left-wing extremists in the province—and I will call them that because that's what they are—went on a mission to attack my husband.

Shawn Buckley

So let me just back up. So after your conversation with Premier Scott Moe, his language softens towards the unvaccinated. But my understanding is: after your conversation with him, the media went after your group.

Nadine Ness

They went after my group. They went after, I think, Scott Moe as well for having a conversation with me. They attacked our group, myself, but it didn't really stop us. We continued working. And we actually grew quite a bit from that so it was a blessing in disguise. Because now a lot of people in the province knew about us that didn't before.

[00:20:00]

So that was good.

And then I think it enraged some of the people, so then they decided to go after my husband. They wrote several defamatory posts on all social media, all the pro-COVID lockdown groups—my husband's name was listed on all of them. He was called anti-vax, discouraging people to get vaccinated, which is all false. And in fact, our group is not anti-vax. We're pro-informed consent. So if you want to get vaccinated, fine, and if you don't— And most, a lot of the people in our group are actually fully vaccinated.

So they went after him. Now, when I saw all of that, I gave a warning to the person who was posting this. And I will also say: This person was a CBC contributor, so a reporter that was doing all of this. So my faith in mainstream media is a little bit lower because of some of this behaviour.

And then the worst part is: some of the doctors that were very vocal pro-lockdown doctors also jumped into this, shared it, one of them specifically being the previous College of Physicians registrar. Not only did he share it, flame it, he also posted my husband's work location, work phone number, and encouraged people to basically harass him and come after him. From that as well, complaints, or attempts at complaints, were made with the College of Physicians. My husband was also basically— Because I said I would sue people who did defamatory posts, that I would commence legal action, the College of Physicians warned him and said, "While we can't stop your wife from saying what she's saying, we might be able to—" Basically saying because of retaliation, it could be considered retaliation from you.

Now, I'm going to give a disclaimer: My husband did not ask me to be here. He didn't ask me to retaliate for him. In fact, he probably would rather I not be here today for the simple fact that we recognize that me being here today might send the College after him.

Shawn Buckley

So can I just clarify that? There's actually concern, in April of 2023, that if you just share the experience that didn't even happen this year, that there could be repercussions from the College towards your husband?

Nadine Ness

Yes.

Shawn Buckley

Now, my understanding is that the College had an interesting policy concerning the privacy of doctors on their vaccination status. Can you tell us about that?

Nadine Ness

Yes. For those who aren't from Saskatchewan and for those who are, our College of Physicians put out a directive basically saying, if you were an unvaccinated doctor—and these are for unvaccinated doctors only and the ones who aren't in a hospital setting, so fee-for-service doctors; it was almost like it was targeted—that they had to disclose publicly to their patients that they were not vaccinated.

Shawn Buckley

I just want to stop. So vaccinated doctors didn't have to say that they were vaccinated. But if you were unvaccinated, you had to disclose that you were not vaccinated.

Nadine Ness

That is correct. And I have the policy with me as well to disclose to the commissioners.

Now my husband had a huge problem with that for several reasons. He didn't feel it would be positive to the patient-doctor relationship for them to have private medical information from him because it can be used against him to get favours. It could use be used to threaten. The same reason no doctor should normally disclose any personal information. So he decided to put— Is it okay if I read it, because it's on the record?

Shawn Buckley

Oh sure, sure.

Nadine Ness

“Dr. Ness has chosen not to publicly disclose his vaccination status. Are you comfortable seeing him, or would you rather see another doctor?”

So he decided not to post it. Now, when this left extremist attack came, one of the old registrars— And I'm going to name him for the record because I think his name needs to be, because he's still continuing to harass us to this point. Dennis Kendel posted that, “I wonder if he is vaccinated, considering he's supposed to post it.” So he actually asked people to go and confirm.

[00:25:00]

And my husband received a complaint from the College of Physicians basically saying, “We've learned that you're not disclosing your vaccination status. If you do not do so, we will commence an investigation against you.” So they basically weaponized his vaccination status to try to come after me, or him.

Shawn Buckley

So earlier you said— You just volunteered that your group that you belong with, Unified Grassroots, that that group is not anti-vax.

Nadine Ness

No, it's not.

Shawn Buckley

And my question is, why did you feel the need to share that with us?

Nadine Ness

Because it's something we were called on a regular basis in many mainstream media, many radio. And it's funny because we're not unvaccinated in our group; a lot of the people who are fully vaccinated went completely to our defence in all the comments and stuff, so that was really wonderful.

But it just goes to show, we're not someone that's unreasonable. And I'm not saying if you're just unvaccinated, you're unreasonable. I'm saying we're people from all forms of society: doctors, nurses, firefighters, police officers, teachers. We have 450 teachers from the province in our group. We were against this coercion that was happening. We were against this division that was happening. When you create a two-tier society, it's bound to have really negative effect into our society. But yeah, we were called all these names.

Shawn Buckley

Well, it's just so you know why I'm asking you that question is, one thing that has come up time and time again: we've had witnesses in Saskatoon who clearly are against the current vaccine, or what's going on, who just are volunteering, "And I'm not an anti-vaxxer, I'm not an anti-vaxxer, and I'm not an anti-vaxxer." And now you say, you just volunteer, "Well, our group isn't anti-vax." So that term seems to have such a negative meaning and so much power behind it that everyone is afraid of being labelled as an anti-vaxxer, that they're volunteering when we're not even asking that question.

And that's why I brought that up. I was just curious what your response would be. It seems that term has so much power in Saskatchewan.

Nadine Ness

So with that, going forward— So thankfully, in the fall of, I believe it would be 2021—I think that's when all the passports were in play—we were able to get pregnant again. So I recognize, being in a position that I am and voicing the concerns that I voice on a regular basis and exposing a lot of things, there's a lot of people in the medical community that don't necessarily like me or like my politics.

I was very hesitant following what happened next. When I learned that I was pregnant, I— Because of my fainting condition, I also have thyroid issues. But because of that, and I have previous pregnancy complications, I usually see a high-risk doctor. And I have seen this high-risk doctor for all of my pregnancies.

So when I learned that I was pregnant, with the previous two miscarriages, I waited a little bit to make sure I wasn't going to miscarry again. And then I went to my family doctor, who referred me to this high-risk doctor as per usual. Now, the high-risk doctor expressed concerns with me coming into her office because I can't wear a normal mask, I can only wear a face shield. And she actually refused to see me in the office. She said, "We could see

you in the emerg. or in the regular hospital if we really need to. But for now, we'll just monitor you through your family physician."

Shawn Buckley

Now did she explain to you why it might be all right to meet you at emerge. or at the hospital, but it wasn't all right to meet at her office?

Nadine Ness

She said that at their office, they deal with vulnerable patients and that at the regular hospital, I'm not putting those vulnerable patients at risk. Now, as someone who sees a high-risk doctor, I'm thinking, "Well, if she's not worried enough for my pregnancy to see me in person, maybe I don't really need to see her." But I eventually did go see her. But I remember there was back and forth between my family doctor and her because my family doctor was like, "She's too high-risk for me. You should be seeing her," and there was back and forth.

[00:30:00]

Eventually she did. And I think I was almost 24 weeks pregnant by the time I went to see her. The interaction with her was actually positive. I wasn't sure, just because of who I am, but it was really positive, so I will say that. There didn't seem to be animosity. She did talk about the vaccine and I'm like, "I'm pretty sure you know my stance on that." But it was okay.

However, a month before my son was born, I was having concerns that my water had broken so I went in to Labour and Delivery in Saskatoon to make sure it hadn't. And when I first got there, the nurse was super friendly, super smiley, really wonderful. And I got into the room and then eventually she had to leave to go to the nurse's desk.

When she came back, she came back with the doctor and it wasn't the same experience at all. You can sense when someone is— And especially me, I used to be a police officer, I can read people very well. She wasn't smiling anymore. She was extremely cold—wouldn't even look at me. Same with the doctor, quite cold. So I could just assume that they went to the nurse's desk and someone said, "Do you know who that is?" Again, that's an assumption, but the experience that I had from before to after: night and day.

And they did an exam to see if my waters were broken. And I've had that done before and it was the most painful exam that I've ever had—and I have a very high pain tolerance. So much so that I said something. I said, "I don't think it's supposed to hurt this much." And I was bleeding afterwards, which normally you wouldn't for something like that.

And, it turns out my water hadn't broken, so I ended up leaving. But even when I left, she didn't say bye, or when I said bye, she didn't look at me—nothing. And I got into my car and I broke down crying. I thought okay, maybe they can put their differences aside and politics aside and do what's best for the patients? But that was a situation where it was clear that that wasn't the case.

I called my husband and I said to him, "I don't know what you need to do to be okay with this, but I'm not delivering this baby in the hospital. I don't feel safe and I don't think I can feel safe delivering this baby in the hospital." Although my husband's a doctor, he's also

seen a lot of worst-case scenarios when it comes to birthing, so he was extremely against me delivering at home.

Actually, we've never fought in our whole marriage and relationship. And this was the first time where we actually fought about something. He wanted me to go deliver in the hospital and I didn't. And even to this day, I still think: when you're delivering, you're so vulnerable, right? You want to feel safe; you want to feel like they have your best interest at hand. But witnessing what happened to me as well as hearing so many stories from so many people across the province who are unvaccinated, I can't say— Going in there, not knowing who you're going to have, that I would trust even if I was to deliver again.

And I wish that would change.

Shawn Buckley

Can I just interject. So I just want to make sure that people participating with your testimony understand this. You're basically saying, when you're saying you heard things from other people, you're hearing other people tell you that they basically were not treated well in the healthcare system because of their status of being unvaccinated?

Nadine Ness

Not just from patients. I heard from nurses, who heard other healthcare professionals say horrific things firsthand. I was one of the go-to people in the province where people would say, "What can we do about this?" I've heard so many—I can't even tell you how many that I've heard—but I've heard so many. So I will say I'm very biased on this because I hear very much just one side. I will admit that completely. But it's hard not to let hearing those stories affect your perception as someone who's unvaccinated.

I think if I was vaccinated and wasn't Nadine Ness in the province of Saskatchewan, I wouldn't have been afraid. So I think that very much is a big reason as to why I felt I was safer delivering at home, 45 minutes from a hospital, than in the care of health care professionals.

Shawn Buckley

All right, thank you. I don't have any further questions for you. I'll ask if the commissioners have any questions. No.

There being no further questions, so Nadine, on behalf of the National Citizens Inquiry, I sincerely thank you for sharing with us today.

Nadine Ness

Thank you.

[00:35:39]

Final Review and Approval: Jodi Bruhn, August 21, 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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