

2018-47: Bayley vs Victoria Times Colonist

*August 30, 2018 – for immediate release*

The NNC has mediated, and solved with corrective action, a complaint about insensitive language related to people with disabilities.

The complainant, Robin Bayley, objected to an August 12, 2018 article in the Victoria Times Colonist, “Crowds approach Government Street pedestrian-only pilot project with caution”, in which a person was described as one “who suffers from multiple sclerosis”.

The complainant argued the words ‘suffers from’ is an example of discredited language that does not conform to current journalistic standards when referring to people with disabilities.

The news media organization responded by stating that it uses the Canadian Press style guide on language and strives to avoid discredited language. It acknowledged that outdated language sometimes persists, and pledged to consult with staff and wire services about stemming the problem.

The complainant found the response unsatisfactory, insisting that an editor should read and correct every article. The news media organization responded the same day - a Sunday - with an explanation of the workflow in a newsroom and the differing ways that local and wire news copy are handled. The response stated clearly that the goal to adhere to journalistic standards and avoid unacceptable language, and gave a commitment to follow up on efforts to use inclusive rather than traditional language.

The NNC recognizes, as did the complainant, that the news media organization is taking the complaint about the unacceptability of outdated language seriously. The news outlet’s prompt response and the explanation of how the newsroom works, as well as the commitment to speak with staff and the wire services, are indicators that the paper has sincere intentions of adhering to journalistic practice and meeting style standards.

The NNC considers that corrective action has been taken, as the news organization has removed the words from the story in question. As such, no further action by the NNC is required.

This decision is confined to the complaint about the August 12, 2018 article in the Times Colonist, as the NNC does not consider complaints about trends in reporting.

The NNC does not have mandate over Ontario Human Rights Commission issues and declines to comment on that portion of the complainant’s correspondence.