

October 30, 2022

Public Order Emergency Commission
c/o Main Floor Security Desk
90 Sparks Street
Ottawa, ON K1A 0A3

Dear Public Order Emergency Commission,

I am writing this letter to share my experiences with the protest in Ottawa that led to the use of the Emergencies Act. It is my hope that my testimony and photographs will shed light on why I believe the circumstances did NOT justify the invocation of the Emergencies Act.

Timeline of My Involvement with the Protest in Ottawa

I was in Ottawa from the evening of Friday, February 4, 2022 to the morning of Monday, February 7, 2022. This was during the second weekend of the protest. I traveled there from my residence in Toronto by rail and stayed at a hotel which I paid for with my own money.

Reasons for My Involvement with the Protest in Ottawa

Unclear benefits of overly strict pandemic-era restrictions

Like many Canadians, by early 2022 I had long been ready for an easing of COVID-19 pandemic restrictions. I had done everything that was asked of me by Canadian society; I received a full dosage of the COVID-19 vaccine (later on, I also received a booster shot), I dutifully wore a mask in both indoor and outdoor public settings, I carried out my graduate school and work responsibilities from home, and I did my best to observe social distancing rules. I even scrapped plans to meet with my family (who live abroad) for Christmas over caution about the virus, which particularly stung after having been isolated for so long. As a recent immigrant to Canada, someone who lived on his own, and someone who still had few in-country friends or acquaintances, the prolonged isolation had a deeply negative impact on my health and well-being. While the harsh pandemic measures made sense to me early in the pandemic, by 2022 I thought we were overdue for an easing of measures, as I could see in many other parts of the world, including my home country, the United States. By that point it was clear to me that the social and economic harms caused by lockdowns—harms that I acutely experienced myself—outweighed any potential benefit in reducing COVID-19 mortality.

This was a position that was supported by the science that was known at the time. In January 2022, the Johns Hopkins Institute for Applied Economics, Global Health, and the Study of Business Enterprise published “A Literature Review and Meta-Analysis of the Effects of Lockdowns on COVID-19 Mortality.”¹ Their meta-analysis of 24 relevant studies of lockdown stringency, shelter-in-place-orders, and non-pharmaceutical interventions concluded that “lockdowns have had little to no effect on COVID-19 mortality. More specifically, stringency index studies find that lockdowns in Europe and the United States only reduced COVID-19 mortality by 0.2% on average.” The authors went on to write, “While this meta-analysis concludes that lockdowns have had little to no public health effects, they have imposed enormous economic and social costs where they have been adopted. In consequence, lockdown policies are ill-founded and should be rejected as a pandemic policy instrument.”

In addition to the evidence that the harms of lockdowns outweighed the benefits, it was also known at the time that while the COVID-19 vaccine could reduce the severity of the illness were someone to catch it, what it could not do is prevent a vaccinated person from transmitting the disease. As US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Director Dr. Rochelle Walensky told CNN host Wolf Blitzer in August 2021, “Our vaccines are working exceptionally well. They continue to work well for Delta, with regard to severe illness and death; they prevent it. But what they can’t do anymore is prevent transmission.”² Given that both those who were unvaccinated and those who were fully up-to-date on their vaccine and booster doses were at risk of spreading the virus, I believed that the unequal treatment of vaccinated and unvaccinated, including denial of entry to schools, grocery stores, places of worship, employment, and means of travel to the unvaccinated, was discriminatory and unjustified.

Vindictive, unscientific actions of the government

With fresh scientific studies and the experiences of other countries easing up on their restrictions indicating that it was time to begin unwinding the years of pandemic restrictions, it shocked me to find that this was precisely the time when the Canadian government decided to introduce newer, harsher measures with justifications that were more questionable than ever. The Canadian government’s elimination of the essential worker exemption from the vaccine mandate in January 2022 made no sense from a scientific standpoint. If a vaccine was essential now, why wouldn’t it have been closer to the start of the pandemic, when Canada had a dramatically lower vaccination rate, and hospitals were struggling their hardest? The

¹ <https://sites.krieger.jhu.edu/iae/files/2022/01/A-Literature-Review-and-Meta-Analysis-of-the-Effects-of-Lockdowns-on-COVID-19-Mortality.pdf>

² <https://www.cnn.com/2021/08/05/health/us-coronavirus-thursday/index.html>

timing of the move struck me as vindictive; it was a way for politicians to take away the livelihoods of people they did not like and quite literally scapegoat them for the nation's ills. This is why, although I myself am not a trucker, I sympathized with and supported their plight.

What I had been desiring from the government was simply a *plan* to ease up on restrictions. Even if the lockdowns and mandates couldn't end immediately, surely the government could draw up plans along the lines of "when infection rates hit X, we can do Y" or "when vaccination rates are X%, we can reopen Y in stages." However, there was nothing of this sort at the federal level. At precisely the time that Canada's national vaccination rates surpassed its peers and other parts of the world were beginning to successfully open back up, the government not only did not follow suit, it adamantly refused to even provide a *plan* to *one day* in the *unspecified future* do so. As the months dragged on, this felt less like a government that listened closely to science, anticipating the moment when it could finally lift the burdens it had begrudgingly but carefully placed on its citizens for only as long as absolutely necessary in order to keep them safe, and more like a government that wanted to cling to its newfound power to stymie the livelihoods of its political opponents for as long as it could.

The trigger: Prime Minister Trudeau's comments

The trigger that got finally got me into the streets was Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's statement on January 26, 2022: "The small fringe minority of people who are on their way to Ottawa, who are holding unacceptable views that they are expressing, do not represent the views of Canadians."³ At this point I knew only a little about the truckers, but my impression was that they, like me, were people who had quietly put up with restrictions for years but were frustrated that the government was doubling down on its restrictions at precisely the time it made least sense to. One of the truckers' views was that they should be exempt from showing proof of vaccination when they cross the US-Canada border—evidently this was also Prime Minister Trudeau's viewpoint in August 2021, when he first reopened the border without such a proof of vaccination requirement. How could something that was uncontroversial even to himself and his own party mere months earlier all of a sudden be considered "unacceptable"? How could he insinuate that wanting to revert even to slightly less stringent, mid-2021 pandemic-era restrictions was now so beyond the pale that anyone who held such a view couldn't even be called "Canadian"? These words were cruel. These words, I knew in my heart, were not true. And so, that very weekend, I joined a protest for the first time in my life.

With a large group of Canadians, I marched through the streets of Toronto. Everywhere I looked, there were Canadian flags held high. We shared a love for our country and a deep

³ <https://globalnews.ca/news/8539610/trucker-convoy-covid-vaccine-mandates-ottawa/>

concern that our government was leading us down the wrong path. Everyone I met instantly recognized the phrase “small fringe minority.” Ironically, it may have been that very wording that provided the extra motivation for all of us to leave our homes, to brave the freezing temperatures, and hold our heads up high in public—to prove that we were not a small group of people at all, that in fact there were many of us, and that each of us represented a living, physical refutation of that sentiment.

I never felt out of place being a vaccinated individual joining protest groups; nor did I find it out of place when I found ourselves joined by people wearing masks to protect themselves from COVID-19. We respected each other’s bodily autonomy and freedom of choice and wished only that our government would return the favour.

Most people we passed by on the street watched us without remark. Many people cheered in support or honked their car horn approvingly as they drove by. Occasionally we saw counter-protestors. “Hate has no home here,” read one of their signs. Agreed, I thought. “Science is real,” read another. Yes, indeed, I thought. If only they knew that the disconnect between science and policy was a big part of why I was out in the streets! “Go back and get your GED, buddy!” one man shouted at me from a safe perch on his apartment balcony. I could have shouted back at him that far from being uneducated, I have a graduate degree from the highest ranked university in the country, but I doubt my words would have had an impact. I was struck by the mismatch between what the counter-protestors assumed I believed and the reality. It troubled me, and still does, how many of my fellow Canadians viewed us as contemptible, stupid, and morally backwards. I have no doubt that the hostile words of Prime Minister Trudeau and many other members of government led to this misinformation and division.

Decision to Travel to Ottawa

While weekly protests in my home city of Toronto were available, I knew that the most impactful protest movement was in Ottawa. After watching hours of livestreams of Ottawa every night that week from real people on the ground among the protestors, I was convinced that the Freedom Convoy was not dangerous, violent, hateful, or insurrectionist in nature, as some people on social media appeared to believe it to be. I decided that the next weekend, I would join in so that I could express my love and support for the truckers.

Had you asked me at the time who the organizers of the protest in Ottawa were, I would not have been able to come up with a single name. I did not know who any of them were. As far as I knew at the time, this protest was a largely decentralized, organic movement of Canadians across the country choosing independently to converge on the one place we

assumed we would be heard by our representatives—the seat of our democracy, the nation's capital.

Experience at the Protest in Ottawa

My experience with the protest in Ottawa gave me first feeling of hope I had in Canada in a long time. The lockdowns, stretching on with no end in sight, had led to a remarkably dark time in my life. Seeing so many Canadians brave the freezing cold and the cruel rhetoric of their naysayers restored an optimism in the people of this country that had long faded. The protestors that I met were, without exception, kind. I was given free coffee and breakfast on the first morning that I showed up to the core of the protest downtown. Later, I joined a prayer group on the lawn of Parliament Hill led by a Christian pastor. Because of the lockdowns, it had been over a year since I had participated in any face-to-face religious activities. I took up the offer presented by one man whose shirt read, “Free Hugs.” After the embrace I told him it was the first time I had been hugged in over a year. I stuck around all afternoon as people took to the stage erected on Wellington Street and shared their stories. I recall several from immigrants who expressed how they came to Canada to flee precisely the same kinds of undemocratic and authoritarian actions that they were now seeing this government engage in.

I did not see or hear of any violence, threats, thefts, assaults, nor even verbal altercations. I never once saw a Nazi flag, Confederate battle flag, or any other symbol of hate. Had I seen one, I have no doubt that I would have immediately confronted the person waving it and excoriated them. The protest was such a positive and peaceful environment, one whose quintessentially Canadian politeness provided me with a deep (and until then unfamiliar) sense of pride in my country, that had anyone attempted to sully that with hate or the use of a symbol of hate as a boneheaded rhetorical tool, I would not have stood by quietly.

What I Wanted as a Protestor

My goal as a protestor was to persuade the government to end, or at the very least articulate a plan to end, the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions. I wanted an end to lockdowns, which I consider to be scientifically proven to have done far more harm to public health than good, and which had done great damage to my own health and well-being for months. I wanted an end to vaccine passports, which I believe are discriminatory and unethical. I wanted an end to vaccine mandates, which I believe are an egregious violation of freedom of choice and bodily autonomy.

My goal as a protestor was not to overthrow the government or commit illegal acts. I was simply a Canadian citizen who spent my own money to travel to Ottawa so that I could stand on public roads and sidewalks for several hours during one weekend. At no time was I personally asked to leave by police, city officials, or even residents of Ottawa. I have utmost confidence that I acted entirely legally and within my Charter-protected rights and freedoms as a citizen of Canada.

My View of the Use of the Emergencies Act

As someone who witnessed firsthand the protest in Ottawa, I can confidently say that the invocation of the Emergencies Act as a means to end the protest **absolutely was not justified**. I did not witness or participate in any behaviors that even remotely could have been said to “seriously endanger the lives, health or safety of Canadians and is of such proportions or nature as to exceed the capacity or authority of a province to deal with it” or that “seriously threatened the ability of the Government of Canada to preserve the sovereignty, security and territorial integrity of Canada.”⁴ Furthermore, it is clear to me that *had* there been an emergency of some kind (which I do not believe there was), it would have been limited to one city or perhaps to one province, but certainly not to the entire nation. I fail to see, for example, how a Canadian citizen thousands of kilometers away in the Yukon could be said to be facing a serious, immediate threat to their very life because of some parking violations on Wellington Street.

I view Prime Minister Trudeau’s invocation of the Emergencies Act as precisely the sort of appalling overstep of power that motivated me to protest his government in the first place. After the initial shock, anger, and hurt wore off upon first hearing of its invocation, I was all the more resolute in my belief that I was on the side of good, protesting an out of control government that had wildly overstepped its boundaries.

The Emergencies Act is supposed to be the final, desperate maneuver, when all other options have failed. The problem was that Prime Minister Trudeau took the last resort before ever attempting the first resort, which would have been to meet with us, the protestors. We wanted to meet with our government, to be heard by our government. That’s why we were there! If only Prime Minister Trudeau and his allies could have met with us face-to-face, they could have learned that we were not the scary monsters they made us out to be.

⁴ <https://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/acts/e-4.5/page-1.html>

Conclusion

I would like to thank the Public Order Emergency Commission for soliciting perspectives from members of the public and for reading and considering my submission. I hope my testimony has been able to illuminate the reasons for why I decided to participate in the protest in Ottawa, show how the event was peaceful in nature, and explain why the use of the Emergencies Act as a response to it was wholly unjustified.

Sincerely,

Joshua Anderson

Canadian citizen and resident

Photos from the Protest in Ottawa

I would like to share with the Commission several photographs that I took while at the protest in Ottawa. I hope that the subject matter of the photos can reassure the Commission that we were not the kind of crowd to desecrate national symbols nor commit acts of terror.

Photo 1. Terry Fox statue decorated with flowers. Taken February 6, 2022 at 2:41pm.



Photos 2 and 3. Banner, flowers, and poem left in front of National War Memorial. Taken February 5, 2022 at 5:13pm.



Photos 4 and 5. Drawings and letters to truckers from thankful Canadian children, part 1. Taken February 5, 2022 at 7:01pm.



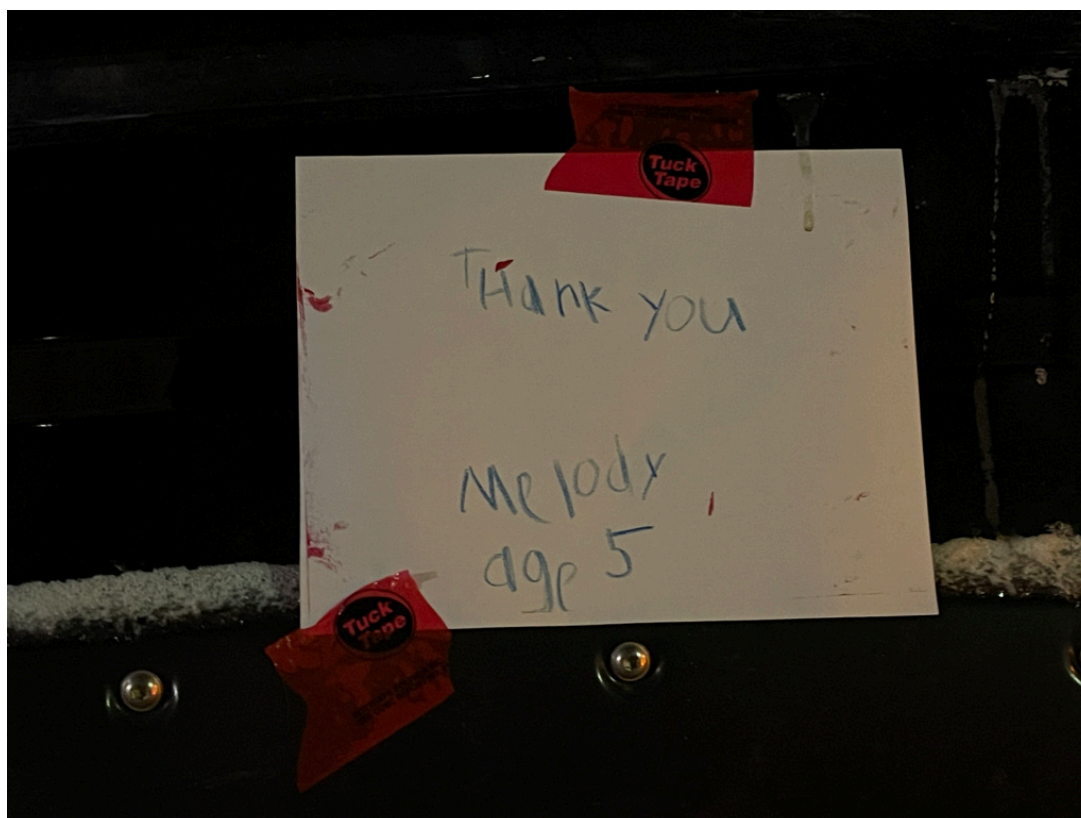


Photo 8. Pro-LGBT sign and flag alongside pro-freedom signs. Taken February 6, 2022 at 2:58pm.

