SECTION 1

NEWSLETTER · FALL 2026

A new chapter for Section 1

In this issue:

- A letter from Peter and an introduction from Section 1's first Executive Director
- S.I.D.E. is now in classrooms, from Brussels to Ottawa
- Meet our Youth Ambassadors, Scarlett and Railyn
- Imperfect Ideal arrives November 10
- What's ahead this fall
- One F.undamental. explained: reasonable limits



A letter from our founder

Peter L. Biro

Dear Friends,

It gives me enormous pleasure to be writing to you today because this month, we have some pretty big news to share – at least it's BIG for us! At the beginning of September, Section 1 began an exciting new chapter in its story. Thanks to the transformational support we received from generous and visionary donors, we were able to bring one of the most dynamic, smartest, most accomplished leaders on board as our new AND FIRST EVER Executive Director! I can't wait for you to have the opportunity to meet her and to engage with her in furtherance of our mission, to prepare the next generation of democracy defenders for the requirements of civic stewardship and leadership in our Free and Democratic Society.

Please welcome Dani Law to the Section 1 family! You can read her mini-bio **here**, but that really won't tell you the important stuff. What a dynamo she is. What a smart, mission-oriented, get-stuff-done person she is. What a committed democracy lover and community builder she is. And what a great human being she is. Dani comes to us from two decades in the corporate sustainability space, leading on issues ranging from climate change and environmental due diligence and human rights – including DEI and Indigenous Reconciliation in the financial services sector – to mental health and community engagement as an element of corporate social responsibility.

Dani hit the ground running when she joined us and already she has made a positive difference!

Together, and, with support from stakeholders like you, Section 1 will be making inroads in the areas of education policy advocacy, civics education and the enhancement and further development of our S.I.D.E. (Students in Democracy Education) initiative which is already being piloted in various school settings.

In the past several months, Section 1 has been very active, sponsoring an important conference on hatred, racism and democracy, collaborating with other civil society organizations on various initiatives, including seminars and fireside chats focusing on democracy and on human rights, conducting research and writing on the state and health of our democracy, and appearing before groups of students, community service organizations and business groups, to talk about democratic decline and about what we can and must do to revitalize and better defend our liberal democracy so that it will be sufficiently resilient to stand up to the extraordinary technological, economic, environmental and social stresses and challenges it will face in the coming months and years.

With Dani at the operational helm, we have rolled up our sleeves and we are working with greater focus, intensity and dedication than ever to make the difference we set out to make on the date of our founding back in the fall of 2018.

We hope that you will see the value, for Canadian civil society, of what we do and of what we aim to achieve in the months and years ahead, and that you will stand with us in our effort to deliver for our youth – our future leaders and our fellow citizens.

With warmest wishes,

Peter L. Biro



A letter from our Executive Director

Dani Law

Dear Friends,

I'm delighted to be writing to you as Section 1's first Executive Director. Thank you to Peter and to everyone who has carried this work for the past eight years, I feel incredibly honoured to help build on that foundation.

For twenty years, I worked in sustainability and social impact in Canada, the UK and China. Over this period, I have come to see that none of that work can succeed without strong democratic foundations. We can't debate solutions to climate change if we can't first agree on the facts.

Today, with AI and misinformation reshaping what we see and believe, our shared understanding of what's true feels more fragile than ever. As a mother to one of those children, I think about this often. Teaching them to ask questions and seek the truth is one of the most important things I can do for them.

My path to this role began with business and human rights, addressing the impacts of business activities on people. Later, going back to school to do a Master of Laws showed me what human rights mean at their foundation, with the universality of individual rights at the heart of our free and democratic society.

Living in places where freedoms looked different taught me not to take ours for granted. Democracy is not a naturally occurring and self-sustaining phenomenon. It requires the continuous care, attention and participation of citizens to sustain it.

That's what drew me to Section 1. It goes back to basics: the principles that hold a free and democratic society together, which too few of us were ever taught. And it recognizes that knowledge alone isn't enough. Real change takes the will to stand up for what we believe. That is the inheritance I want to leave for my children, and for every young person.

This fall, I'm focused on setting our strategic direction and launching new pilot programs. I'd love to hear from you, so don't hesitate to reply to this email and say hello.

With gratitude,

Dani Law

Since we last wrote

A year of plans, put into practice

S.I.D.E. in classrooms

- Piloted last year at Université libre de Bruxelles and John Abbott College
- Now in use at the University of Ottawa, with the Toronto French School joining in January 2027
- Student ambassadors leading peer conversations

A growing team

- Section 1's first Executive Director (see letters above)
- Railyn and Scarlett join as Youth Ambassadors (see below)

A refreshed website

We've redesigned section1.ca to make it easier to explore our learning programs and publications, and the ways you can get involved.

Take a look at section1.ca →

More in our annual report, coming November.

Meet our Youth Ambassadors

Welcome, Railyn and Scarlett

Our Youth Ambassadors bring conversations about democracy to their peers, in their schools and in their communities. Meet the first two.



Railyn Datta

Grade 11, Milton, Ontario

I'm Railyn Datta, a Grade 11 student who believes that the strength of a democracy is measured by how deeply its citizens are willing to engage with it. Through my own youth-led civic initiatives and advocacy, I work to give young people not just a seat at the table, but the confidence and tools to use it. For me, civic life is a responsibility we carry every day, in how we listen, how we disagree, and what we choose to stand up for.

"Democracy isn't sustained by institutions alone; it's sustained by people who choose to engage. What draws me to Section 1 is its refusal to let difficult conversations go unspoken. My generation is inheriting a world shaped by polarization and uncertainty, and I don't believe we can afford to be passive about it. As an Ambassador, I want to help young people recognize that their voices aren't a future contribution to democracy; they are essential to it right now."



Scarlett O. Lu

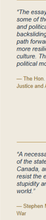
Grade 12, Toronto, Ontario

Hi! I'm Scarlett, and I'm deeply interested in constitutional and civil rights law, particularly in the areas of women's rights and, of course, fundamental democratic principles. I'm passionate about studying and combating democratic backsliding, especially with regard to citizen complacency toward authority, which is why I care so deeply about Section 1's mission of youth civic education!

"As a Youth Ambassador, I work to instill the same commitment to democratic ideals in my peers in order to safeguard our current and future rights and freedoms."

Coming November 10

The conference, now a book



Imperfect Ideal: Essays on Liberal Democracy in the Real World

Based on presentations from Section 1's 2025 conference at Massey College, this new collection, edited by our founder Peter L. Biro, asks how we arrived at democratic backsliding and what citizens can do about it. Peter's opening chapter, "Fear, Habituation and Stupidification," looks at the social and psychological forces behind democratic decline.

With contributions from Thomas Homer-Dixon, Scott Jaczozwski, Michael Bonner, Lucan Way, Dennis Pilon, Sascha Prevec, George Takach, Noa Mendelsohn Aviv and Michel Paradis

Pre-order from Dundurn Press →

"The essays in this volume reckon with some of the intellectual, psychological and political sources of democratic backsliding while offering hope and a path forward towards a renewed and more resilient liberal democratic civic culture. This important book meets our political moment!"

— The Hon. Irwin Cotler, former Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada

"Peter Biro's timely volume is a clarion call to all those who care about the state of public affairs in Canada, and about the future of our country. Biro has long been exercised by the diminishing quality and culture of democratic debate, discourse and argument in the world's second largest country. He has succeeded in assembling a distinguished roster of writers to frame the problem and paint a hopeful path forward out of our present crises of politics, policy and administration

— Irvin Studin, President, The Institute for 21st Century Questions

"A necessary and urgent consideration of the state of liberal democracy in Canada, and how it can systematically resist the equally powerful forces of stupidity and autocracy overtaking the world."

— Stephen Marche, author of The Next Civil War

"For all of us, Imperfect Ideal is an urgent call to action: Wake up, people! Democracy is our responsibility."

— Gilbert Reid, author

Supporting the conversation

A Canary's Song: Antisemitism in Our "Free and Democratic Society"

On September 15, our founder Peter Biro convened A Canary's Song: Antisemitism in Our "Free and Democratic Society" at the University of Toronto Conference Centre and online, with support from Section 1, the Azrieli Foundation and the Aristotle Foundation for Public Policy. A free and democratic society is measured by how it protects every community, and by its shared commitment to seeking the truth. We were glad to support a day that examined how rising antisemitism in Canada tests both.

What's ahead this fall

1 **Setting our direction.** Together with our board, we're developing Section 1's strategy for the next few years, and we look forward to sharing it with you.

2 **Growing S.I.D.E.** We're launching new pilots, starting with the Toronto French School in January, and talking with schools and civic organizations about reaching more young Canadians.

3 **Connecting nationally.** This fall, Dani joins leaders of Canadian democracy organizations in Winnipeg to share ideas on improving national coordination and collaboration.

One Fundamental, explained: Reasonable limits

Can rights ever be limited?

Our rights and freedoms are guaranteed, but they aren't unlimited. Sometimes one person's freedom collides with another's, or with an important public goal. A law against promoting hatred, for example, limits freedom of expression in order to protect targeted groups, and society as a whole, from the harm that spreading hatred causes.

Section 1 of the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*, the section our organization is named for, sets the rule: rights can be limited only by "such reasonable limits prescribed by law as can be demonstrably justified in a free and democratic society." That means a limit must be open about what it restricts, serve an important purpose, and go no further than it needs to.

Watch our S.I.D.E. video on Reasonable Limits →

With thanks

Everything in this newsletter rests on the people behind it: the donors who believe in this work, the volunteers, Fellows and advisors who have carried it for eight years, and the educators and students who bring it into their classrooms. Thank you.

Get involved

Three ways to help

Make an introduction
Know a teacher, principal or school board member? Forward this email.

Follow along
section1.ca and **LinkedIn**

Support the work
Help bring S.I.D.E. to more students and young leaders. Donations to Section 1, a registered charity, are tax-deductible.

Donate

Bring S.I.D.E. to your school

section1.ca | info@section1.ca

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