

23 April 2019



The Honourable François Legault, M.N.A.
Premier of Québec
Édifice Honoré-Mercier, 3^e étage
835, boulevard René-Lévesque Est
Québec (Québec) G1A 1B4

Dear Premier:

On behalf of the 390,000 members represented by the National Union of Public and General Employees (NUPGE), I am writing to urge you to reconsider Bill 21 and the ban on public sector employees wearing religious symbols at work.

Our union is actively working for a future where people from all religious backgrounds are able to enjoy the rights and opportunities accorded to all Canadians. However, this simply cannot happen with the proposed ban going into effect. By preventing public sector employees from wearing religious symbols at work, you are erasing a crucial part of their identity—identities that are under attack both in Canada and internationally.

You have seen people of one of these identities attacked at the mosque shooting in Québec City, and more recently in Christchurch, New Zealand. The Quebec shooter was explicitly named by the New Zealand shooter as a source of inspiration. In the same year as the Quebec shooting, hate crimes targeting Muslims rose by 151 per cent across the country. This violence is targeted; it is not random. It's the result of increased misunderstanding, fear, and hatred for Muslims and other religious groups simply because of their faith.

Your ban is presented as a way for Quebec to maintain its unique, secular identity. What your ban is in fact doing, is othering Muslims, Jewish people, Christians and other persons who wear religious symbols at work, singling them out from the rest of society. You are marking these people as different, which in turn feeds into the fear and paranoia surrounding Islam and enables violence against religious minorities. Students must see religious diversity in the classroom for it to become a normalized part of their upbringing, just as adults must see religious diversity to normalize it in everyday life.

Unions have a long and proud history of standing up for human rights violations. No one should be forced to choose between their faith and their job. No one should be forced to choose between their faith and a prospective career. This bill moves your province backwards at a time when it's imperative to move forward. And by using the

notwithstanding clause, you are signaling that the government understands this is a violation of fundamental rights but is still choosing to circumvent them.

Premier, Canadians respect the rule of law and human rights, and we believe that Canadians stand with workers who are asking for equality in their workplace. NUPGE stands with the Quebec public sector employees impacted by this ban and those aspiring to pursue a career in the public sector who will be impacted in the future: hard-working employees who are part of our communities, and who deliver quality public services every day to the citizens of Quebec. These workers deserve the respect of their government, but instead are being denigrated simply because of their faith. Bill 21 infringes on Quebec's *Charter of Human Rights and Freedoms*, and we urge you to not pass it into law.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'LB', with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Larry Brown
President

cc: Elisabeth Ballermann, Secretary-Treasurer
National Executive Board