

Mr. Maxime Perreault
Clerk
Committee on Institutions
Édifice Pamphile-Le May
1035, rue des Parlementaires
3e étage, Bureau 3.15
Québec (Quebec) G1A 1A3

CI – 036M
C.P. – P.L. 62
Neutralité religieuse
de l'État

2 November, 2016

Dear Mr. Perreault,

The Quebec Community Groups Network (QCGN) requests the following letter be passed to Mr. Guy Ouellette, Mme. Agnès Maltais, and the other members of the Committee on Institutions, and be considered our organization's comments on Bill n°62: *An Act to foster adherence to State religious neutrality and, in particular, to provide a framework for religious accommodation requests in certain bodies*.

The QCGN wishes to add its voice to organizations like the Commission des droits de la personne et des droits de la jeunesse, in opposition to Bill 62. We are disappointed that the Government of Quebec has proceeded with this legislation. The QCGN considers Bill 62 an affront to human and minority rights, that would, if enacted, constitute a clear constitutional breach of Quebecers' freedom of religion, not saved by section 1 of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

Attempting to pass legislation that so clearly violates the constitution and strips people of an inherent freedom without a pressing and substantial societal goal is irresponsible; that this bill clearly targets a small minority of women is reprehensible. Bill 62 is an ideal example of tyranny of the majority, enabled by deep political cynicism by those willing to exploit irrational fear for their own interest.

We are not fooled at Bill 62's attempt to shield the religious symbols of the Roman Catholic (Christian) majority as, "emblematic and toponymic elements of Quebec's cultural heritage, in particular its religious cultural heritage, that testify to its history." In a failed effort to create a sanitized secular state, Bill 62 reduces Christian symbols to profane artifacts. Moreover, the Supreme Court's in *Mouvement laïque québécois v. Saguenay*, clearly ruled against adherence, "...to a form of religious expression under the guise of cultural or historical reality or heritage", as a "breach" of state neutrality.

If the government is concerned with providing direction to provincial bodies, it can do so through policy that conforms to well established Canadian law guiding religious and other accommodations.

We will repeat our remarks related to *Bill 60, Charter affirming the values of State secularism and religious neutrality and of equality between women and men, and providing a framework for accommodation requests*, since we see no substantive difference between it and Bill 62. We invite Committee members to review the brief the QCGN submitted in opposition to Bill 60, the principle points of which remain pertinent.

The QCGN is disappointed that the Government of Quebec continues to govern in a manner that divides Quebecers, and that does not reflect our deep collective values. We know Quebec to be a society that is welcoming, generous, tolerant, and socially progressive. We know Quebec to be a place that has mastered the balance between collectivism and individualism. We know Quebec to be a place that long ago rejected the centralized dictate of values and behaviour. We also know Quebec to be a place where strong and principled leadership protects and advances the rights of its citizens; not succumb to populist fear and ignorance.

The QCGN calls upon the Government of Quebec to withdraw Bill 62. We reject the need for the Bill, in substance and principle. We call upon the Government of Quebec to govern the province in a manner that protects, defends, and advances the individual rights and freedoms of all Quebecers. We also urge all political parties to respect and recognize the enormous beneficial role linguistic, religious and cultural diversity has played in Quebec's history, and will play in our future success. We encourage Quebecers, no matter their origin, background, or belief, to continue demonstrating leadership by reaching out to those who are different and living together in peace understanding, and prosperity.

The QCGN is a not-for profit organization that brings together 50 community sector organizations from across Quebec that serve the needs of the English-speaking Community of Quebec (ESCQ), a community of more than 1 000 000 people.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'James Shea', with a large, stylized initial 'S'.

James Shea
President