

**PRESS RELEASE**  
**RASSEMBLEMENT POUR LA LAÏCITÉ**  
(Alliance for Secularism)

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Montreal, 17<sup>th</sup> June 2019 — The adoption of *An Act respecting the laicity of the State* is a step in the right direction towards a more just society, respectful of the freedom of conscience of citizens and especially of children. The Rassemblement pour la laïcité (RPL, or Alliance for Secularism), which includes seven associations, is very pleased that Bill 21 has finally been adopted and that secularism is finally recognized in our laws and inscribed in the Quebec Charter of Human Rights and Freedoms.

This law on State secularism is an integral part of the modernization of Quebec which began with the Quiet Revolution. As a society, we made French our common language and as a result today we speak proudly of the children of Bill 101. In a few years, we will also refer proudly of the children of Bill 21, children to whom Quebec has finally offered a secular school system which welcomes everyone, without regard to their religious affiliation.

The RPL totally supports the four foundational principles of State secularism which are henceforth enshrined in law: separation between State and religions; the religious neutrality of the State; the equality of all citizens, both men and women; and, finally, freedom of conscience and freedom of religion.

### ***An Improved Law***

Several commentators have criticized Draft Bill 21 for failing to specify corrective measures in the event of noncompliance. The legislation has been amended in order to improve the monitoring of its application.

Another very important amendment stipulates that “all persons have the right to lay parliamentary, government and judicial institutions, and to lay public services.” This

provision is a new collective right accorded to Quebeckers, the right of every individual to have access to secular public services.

We believe that this opening will eventually make it possible for the National Assembly to become neutral with respect to religious symbols, both in fact and in appearance, as we of the RPL have demanded for years. This neutrality of elected representatives will allow parliamentary institutions to be consistent with the new law's stipulation that State secularism apply to State employees in positions of authority.

### ***Secular Schools, Necessary for a Pluralistic Society***

We support the government's decision to make schools places where knowledge is disseminated without religious or political interference. Teachers have a duty to practice discretion and reserve as regards expressing their political convictions and this has long been recognized in law. Bill 21 extends this duty of reserve to religious convictions, in order to respect the freedom of conscience and religion of pupils and their parents.

Although we regret that this law does not go far enough, inconsistently failing to enforce religious neutrality for all school personnel, from childcare services to specialized services, we nevertheless consider that the law constitutes a very promising first step towards the respect of our common values.

In a diverse society like Quebec, we are convinced that secularism, finally affirmed in law and in the Charter of Human Rights and Freedoms, will be an important factor contributing to living together and supporting harmony and social cohesion.

### ***List of Member Associations of the Rassemblement pour la laïcité***

- Pour les droits des femmes du Québec (PDF Québec)
- Mouvement national des Québécoises et des Québécois (MNQ)
- Association québécoise des Nord-Africains pour la laïcité (AQNAL)
- Mouvement laïque québécois (MLQ)
- Laïcité capitale nationale
- Libres penseurs athées—Atheist Freethinkers (LPA-AFT)
- Syndicalistes et progressistes pour un Québec libre (SPQ libre)