

Question

TO: Senate

QUESTION FROM: Senators Zi Jun Huang, Jacob Shapiro and Sameer Zuberi

RESPONSE FROM: Senator Christopher Manfredi, Provost and Vice-Principal (Academic)

SUBJECT: Question and Response Regarding Support for Students and Alumni in light of Bill 21

MEETING DATE: April 17, 2019

PREAMBLE: On Thursday, March 28, 2019, Quebec’s Immigration Minister, Simon Jolin-Barrette of Premier François Legault’s Coalition Avenir Québec, tabled Bill 21, “An Act respecting the laicity of the State,” on the floor of National Assembly. Bill 21 seeks to prohibit public workers in “positions of authority,” including teachers, judges, police officers and public prosecutors, from wearing religious symbols, and, in an added measure that particularly targets Muslim women, requires citizens to uncover their faces when receiving government services.

When past governments have put forward similar bills, McGill had publicly expressed its opposition—both in [2013](#) and in [2017](#). McGill has also released a [statement on Bill 21](#).

The fact that this Bill is currently being considered—regardless of whether it passes—puts members of our community under additional stress and pressure. [McGill students](#) and alumni, particularly those in or who have graduated from the Faculty of Education and the Faculty of Law, are immediately impacted by the proposed Bill. Additionally, international students, especially from populations targeted by the bill, are at a greater risk of isolation and marginalization. While this laicity bill exists within a distinct Quebec context, it is difficult to consider it apart from the greater tendency towards overt white nationalism that has fueled greater division and hate crimes against Muslims, Jews, and Black people in [Canada](#), as well as in the [United States](#) and across [Europe](#);

QUESTION: What will McGill do to support students targeted by Bill 21?
What will McGill do to help Muslim, Sikh and Jewish students, specifically in the education and law programs, navigate their way through current increased uncertainty and distress derived from a Bill that, if implemented, will impede on their ability to enter and flourish in their chosen professions?

RESPONSE

Thank you for your question, Senators Huang, Shapiro and Zuberi.

The Provost and Vice-Principal (Academic) released a message to the wider McGill community concerning Bill 21 on Monday, 8 April 2019. In that message, he asserted that, as currently drafted, Bill 21 will not lead to any changes in our University's policies or practices, and committed to monitoring the progress of the Bill through the National Assembly. At the same time, the Provost confirmed that while McGill accepts the principles of secularism and religious neutrality underlying the Bill, it does not support the legislative developments that could restrict educational opportunities for our students or the professional opportunities of our graduates.

The position articulated by the Provost on 8 April remains the position of the University with respect to Bill 21. The Bill is not yet law. It may be rejected by the National Assembly, or may be accepted into legislation in some modified form. Its ultimate impact on the University community remains to be seen.

We appreciate that the restrictions proposed by Bill 21 may be cause for concern and remain steadfast in our commitment to ensuring equity and inclusiveness on our campuses and within the University community.
