

LOST IN TRANSLATION

FROM LAICITY TO TRUE
RELIGIOUS NEUTRALITY



**BC HUMANIST
ASSOCIATION**

APRIL 15, 2026



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ABOUT THE BC HUMANIST ASSOCIATION

Since 1984, the British Columbia Humanist Association has provided a community and a voice for Humanists, atheists, agnostics and the non-religious in BC. Humanism is a worldview that promotes human dignity without belief in a higher power. We are a registered charitable organization that promotes progressive and secular values and challenges religious privilege.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 2025, the Government of Quebec's *Comité d'étude sur le respect des principes de la Loi sur la laïcité de l'État* released a report containing fifty recommendations aimed at strengthening and clarifying Quebec's model of state laicity. This response from the BC Humanist Association (BCHA) evaluates each recommendation in line with our understanding of the simultaneous importance of the state's duty of religious neutrality and individual freedoms.

We appreciate much of what the Committee has to say. We strongly support many of the recommendations and hope governments across Canada will also take them up. Specifically, the Committee talks about clearly defining the separation of church and state, phasing out subsidies and tax privileges for religious institutions, ending state funding of religious schools, and protecting access to abortion and sexual health education.

However, we are concerned that these critical advances for secularism are undermined by other recommendations that attack individual rights to freedom of expression and belief, such as the expansion of religious symbols bans. We argue that this is because of the inherent contradiction in laicity. Proponents argue that the state must not just be neutral in action but neutral in appearance. Thus, to protect individuals from potential religious coercion, the state must, ironically, restrict individual religious freedom.

Further, the Committee's report unnecessarily employs rights-limiting language. Words matter. Language throughout the report narrows human rights protections to citizens and a binary conception of gender. Additionally, we are concerned by the Committee's efforts to undermine human rights by watering down the duty to accommodate from a well-established standard.

Quebec has a genuine opportunity to lead Canada in articulating a robust and principled model of religious neutrality. To do so, however, such a model must be anchored within a human rights framework that protects freedom of conscience and religion, while respecting diversity in a multicultural society. Laicity, as expressed in the Committee's report, fails this test. True religious neutrality is not achieved by regulating personal expression. It is achieved when the state abstains from religious favouritism, refrains from coercion, and safeguards the equal dignity of all persons.

We urge the Government of Quebec to adopt recommendations that strengthen institutional neutrality and eliminate religious privilege, while rejecting those that erode the duty to accommodate, restrict individual expression, or undermine fundamental rights. An inclusive secularism—one that limits the government rather than its people—offers the most coherent and constitutionally defensible path forward.

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INTRODUCTION

Successive Quebec governments have advanced a distinctive model of state *laïcité*, often translated as “secularism.” We use the term *laicity* to preserve an important conceptual distinction between the state’s duty of religious neutrality under Canadian jurisprudence and Quebec’s model that has extended into the regulation of individual religious expression.

Laicity has generated significant controversy, particularly regarding restrictions on public employees wearing religious symbols. Critics, including the BCHA, argue that these measures disproportionately affect religious minorities, especially Muslim women and Sikh men. At the same time, Quebec deserves recognition for placing the state’s duty of religious neutrality at the centre of public debate—an obligation that is too often neglected elsewhere in Canada.

The central tension lies in how neutrality is understood. The Supreme Court of Canada has said the state must neither favour nor hinder any belief system. Quebec’s model, however, increasingly treats neutrality as requiring the absence of visible religious expression. In doing so, it risks transforming neutrality from abstention into coercion.

In 2025, the Government of Quebec established the *Comité d’étude sur le respect des principes de la Loi sur la laïcité de l’État et sur les influences religieuses* [Committee of Study on the Respect of the Principles of the Act Respecting the Laicity of the State and on Religious Influences] to assess compliance with existing legislation and recommend reforms. The Committee issued fifty recommendations aimed at strengthening and clarifying Quebec’s model of laicity.¹

This report sets out the views of the BC Humanist Association (BCHA) on those recommendations. We begin with a brief legislative overview and then assess each proposal in turn. For every recommendation, we provide a summary, our position, and our reasoning.

Throughout, we evaluate whether a proposal strengthens institutional religious neutrality, understood as limiting state action, or instead shifts toward regulating individual identity in the name of appearance. We support measures that clarify the separation of religion and state, eliminate institutional religious privilege, and reinforce human rights protections. We oppose those that weaken the duty to accommodate, restrict personal expression, or redefine neutrality in ways that undermine freedom of conscience and religion.

Quebec has an opportunity to model an inclusive secularism grounded in constitutional principles and human rights. Whether it succeeds depends on ensuring that neutrality restrains the state and not the individual.

¹ Comité d’étude sur le respect des principes de la Loi sur la laïcité de l’État et sur les influences religieuses. (2025). *Pour une laïcité québécoise encore plus cohérente : bilan et perspectives*. Bibliothèque et Archives nationales du Québec. https://cdn-contenu.quebec.ca/cdn-contenu/adm/org/secretariat-institution-democratiques/laicite/rapport-comite/rapport_laicite-bilan-perspectives-2025.pdf

LEGISLATIVE BACKGROUND AND METHODOLOGY

Quebec's model of laicity is rooted in its historical experience. For much of its history, the Catholic Church exercised significant influence over public institutions, particularly in education and healthcare. The Quiet Revolution of the 1960s marked a decisive shift, transferring authority from religious institutions to the state and embedding secularization within Quebec's civic identity.

In recent decades, increased religious diversity—especially the visibility of Muslim and Sikh communities—has intensified debates about religious symbols, accommodation, and the role of religion in public institutions. In 2013, the Parti Québécois government introduced a Charter of Quebec Values to enshrine laicity into law.² Most controversially, the Charter included a ban on public servants wearing visible religious symbols. The bill did not become law before the PQ's defeat in the 2014 election to the Liberals. They would go on to pass the Neutrality Act in 2017 and the Coalition Avenir Québec (CAQ) government would pass the Laicity Act in 2019. Together, these two laws define the province's current framework for state secularism.

The Neutrality Act (2017)

The *Loi favorisant le respect de la neutralité religieuse de l'État et visant notamment à encadrer les demandes d'accommodements pour un motif religieux dans certains organismes* [Act promoting respect for the religious neutrality of the State and in particular at regulating requests for accommodations for religious reasons in certain organizations]³ (the Neutrality Act)⁴ formalized the state's duty of religious neutrality and codified the handling of religious accommodation requests.

It incorporated the established human rights standard of “undue hardship” [*contrainte excessive*]⁵ requiring accommodation unless doing so would create a serious risk, be impossible, or incur excessive costs. Accommodations were required to respect religious neutrality, equality between women and men, and others' rights. The Act controversially banned people from covering their faces when providing or receiving public services.

The Liberal Government argued its legislation was constitutional and therefore did not need to invoke the notwithstanding clause.⁶ Following legal challenges from the National Council of Canadian Muslims and the Canadian Civil Liberties Association, portions of the Act banning

² Dagenais, M. (2014 February 18). “Québec Values Charter.” The Canadian Encyclopedia. Available at <https://thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/the-charter-of-quebec-values>

³ Translations provided by BC Humanist Association.

⁴ *Loi favorisant le respect de la neutralité religieuse de l'État et visant notamment à encadrer les demandes d'accommodements pour un motif religieux dans certains organismes*, R-26.2.01 (2017). Gouvernement du Québec. <https://www.legisquebec.gouv.qc.ca/fr/document/lc/R-26.2.01/20171018>

⁵ See e.g. *Ontario Human Rights Commission v. Simpsons-Sears Ltd.*, [1985] 2 S.C.R. 536 and *Hydro-Québec v. Syndicat des employé-e-s de techniques professionnelles et de bureau d'Hydro-Québec, section locale 2000 (SCFP-FTQ)*, [2008] 2 S.C.R. 561.

⁶ *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*, s. 33, Part I of the *Constitution Act, 1982*, being Schedule B to the *Canada Act 1982 (UK)*, 1982, c. 11.

face coverings were suspended pending further judicial review. However, the government lost the subsequent election to the CAQ, which had pledged to introduce a new bill that included the notwithstanding clause.

The Laicity Act (2019)

The *Loi sur la laïcité de l'État* [Act respecting the laicity of the State]⁷, introduced in 2019 as Bill 21, expanded Quebec's approach to laicity. It first defined four foundational principles: Separation of state and religion; religious neutrality of the state; equality of all citizens; and freedom of conscience and religion.

The Act requires government bodies to respect these principles "in fact and in appearance." It prohibits certain public officials, such as teachers, police officers, and judges, from wearing religious symbols while exercising their functions and imposes additional face-covering restrictions.

The CAQ invoked the notwithstanding clause to shield the Act from certain Charter challenges.⁸ The law is currently under review by the Supreme Court of Canada.⁹ The BCHA has opposed provisions that restrict individual religious expression and is participating as an intervener.

The Laicity Committee (2025)

In March 2025, the Quebec government established the *Comité d'étude sur le respect des principes de la Loi sur la laïcité de l'État et sur les influences religieuses* [Committee of Study on the Respect of the Principles of the Act Respecting the Laicity of the State and on Religious Influences].¹⁰ Its mandate was to assess compliance with existing legislation, identify obstacles to implementation, examine international approaches, and recommend reforms.

Following consultations with ministries, municipalities, and the public, the Committee concluded that the coexistence of the 2017 and 2019 statutes created confusion and inconsistency. Its August 2025 report, *Pour une laïcité québécoise encore plus cohérente : bilan et perspectives* [Towards an even more coherent laicity in Quebec: assessment and

⁷ *Loi sur la laïcité de l'État*, L-0.3 (2019). Gouvernement du Québec.

<https://www.legisquebec.gouv.qc.ca/fr/document/lc/l-0.3>

⁸ See: Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, s. 33, Part I of the *Constitution Act, 1982*, being Schedule B to the *Canada Act 1982* (UK), 1982, c. 11. The clause was renewed in 2024, see: Plante, C. (2024 February 8). Quebec cites 'social peace' to renew notwithstanding clause on Bill 21. *Global News*.

<https://globalnews.ca/news/10281768/quebec-bill-21-notwithstanding-clause-extension/>

⁹ *English Montreal School Board v. Attorney General of Quebec*, No. 41231 (Supreme Court of Canada).

<https://www.scc-csc.ca/cases-dossiers/search-recherche/41231/>

¹⁰ Gouvernement du Québec. (2026 January 13). *Comité d'étude sur le respect des principes de la Loi sur la laïcité de l'État et sur les influences religieuses*. <https://www.quebec.ca/gouvernement/politiques-orientations/laicite-etat/comite-etude-respect-laicite>

perspectives]¹¹, issued fifty recommendations aimed at consolidating and strengthening Quebec's model of laicity.

Methodology

This response reflects a structured and collaborative review conducted by the four authors on behalf of the BC Humanist Association.¹²

We extracted and translated all fifty recommendations, with bilingual review to ensure accuracy. Each author independently assessed the proposals before participating in structured discussions to reach consensus positions. We consulted the full Committee report where necessary to understand context and intent.

AI-assisted research tools were used to organize materials and structure early drafts; all analysis, positions, and conclusions reflect the authors' considered judgment.

For each recommendation, we provide:

- The original French text and an English translation;
- A plain language summary;
- Our position;
- Our rationale.

Our analysis is grounded in constitutional jurisprudence and Canadian human rights law. Throughout, we assess whether proposals strengthen institutional religious neutrality, understood as a restraint on state power, or instead shift toward regulating individual identity in the name of appearance.

¹¹ Comité d'étude sur le respect des principes de la Loi sur la laïcité de l'État et sur les influences religieuses (2025).

¹² Highway, Boullard and Phelps Bondaroff are bilingual.

THE BCHA'S OVERARCHING CONCERNS

Before delving into the individual recommendations, we want to address several recurring concerns with the Committee's report. These themes are common to multiple recommendations and warrant a more fulsome discussion. Specifically, we want to draw out the tensions that we see between open and closed secularism, our concerns about the Committee's language that potentially restricts rights, and the risks posed by the Committee's proposals to weaken the legal standard for the duty to accommodate.

The contradiction in laicity

There is a fundamental tension between the approach to laicity taken by the Committee (and Quebec more broadly) and secularism promoted by the BCHA and others. We distinguish this as differences between closed and 'open secularism, or between 'laicity' (the Quebec system) and 'religious neutrality.' For this reason, we translate *laïcité* as 'laicity' in English, as the distinctions between the concepts are lost in translation when the broader French concept is collapsed into 'secularism.'

Quebec's model of laicity attempts to assert a collective right to the *appearance* of a secular state. Laicity entails a collective aspect of freedom of conscience, positing that the state must be perceived as neutral in fact and in appearance to guarantee the freedom of all citizens. For example, proponents of laicity have argued that individual religious iconography and clothing serve as a means of proselytizing.¹³ As such, they argue that banning such clothing is necessary to preserve the secular nature of the state from nefarious religious influences that were attempting to "usurp" the power of the government.¹⁴

In the 2015 Supreme Court of Canada decision in *Mouvement laïque québécois v Saguenay*, Justice Gascon referred extensively to the state's duty of religious neutrality in finding that prayers at a municipal council meeting were unconstitutional. He defined the state's duty of religious neutrality as an obligation for government institutions to neither favour nor hinder any religion or belief system.¹⁵ And specifically:

"I note that a neutral public space does not mean the homogenization of private players in that space. Neutrality is required of institutions and the state, not individuals."¹⁶

¹³ Montpetit, J. (2020 November 9). Uphold religious symbol ban to spare children from being influenced by hijab, Quebec parents plead. *CBC News*. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/montreal/bill-21-court-case-quebec-religious-symbols-ban-1.5795610>

¹⁴ Virard, M. (2019 August 11). L'égalité de traitement des non-croyants avec les croyants reste à achever. *Le Devoir*. <https://www.ledevoir.com/opinion/libre-opinion/558445/l-egalite-de-traitement-des-non-croyants-avec-les-croyants-reste-a-achever>

¹⁵ *Mouvement laïque québécois v. Saguenay (City)*, 2015 SCC 16, [2015] 2 S.C.R. 3 at para 137.

¹⁶ *Saguenay* at para 74. References removed.

We support the framework described in *Saguenay*, whereby neutrality is abstention. True religious neutrality focuses on limiting state action and ensuring the government refrains from favouring any specific belief through its decisions and legislation. It is not a tool to force uniformity across society.

This tension comes to the fore in our review of the Committee's report, as many proposals seek to enforce a neutral environment by limiting individual religious expression. For instance, the BCHA opposes Recommendation 11, which defines neutrality as the absence of "symbolism or display." We argue this overreaches by implying that a person's clothing constitutes a state message. A central fear expressed by proponents of these recommendations is the implication that the mere presence of religiously-identifiable individuals – such as a teacher wearing a cross or a turban – is a form of "religious pressure" on vulnerable groups like children. We contend that by shifting the focus from the state's actions to the individual's identity, the report's recommendations move away from genuine neutrality toward a system that actively discriminates against those whose faith requires specific attire.

Fundamentally, these are arguments rooted in fear. They are reminiscent of those that have been deployed for decades against 2SLBTQ+ individuals. Attacks on drag queen story times rely on the accusation that the performers will 'confuse' children. Such claims rely on bigotry and the dehumanization of individuals and their identities. These arguments reduce individual employees to their religious affiliation, which is portrayed as a malevolent force. As Humanists, we reject efforts to strip anyone of their humanity.

Under laicity, we see the Government attempt to claim neutrality even as it actively intervenes in its citizens' personal expression.

Rights-limiting terminology: Citizenship and gender binaries

The Committee repeatedly uses the term "citizens" [*citoyens/citoyennes*] when defining fundamental principles and rights. Article 2 of the Laicity Act currently enshrines "the equality of all citizens" as one of the four foundational principles of secularism. This terminology is unduly limiting, as any rights derived from this law should be equally available to non-citizens. Most human rights legislation applies to "persons" [*personnes*] to ensure that rights and responsibilities extend to all individuals within its jurisdiction, regardless of their citizenship status.

Additionally, the Committee dedicates significant space to strengthening equality of "women and men"; however, this approach overlooks current scientific understandings of gender identity. We recognize that the French language itself is deeply rooted in a binary conception of gender, though significant work has been done by French linguists to develop guidelines for

more gender-inclusive language.¹⁷ The binary terminology present throughout the Committee’s report and recommendations is simply not trans-inclusive and should be broadened to encompass “equality of genders” to ensure all gender identities are protected.

Watering down the duty to accommodate

The Committee proposes replacing the current legal standard of *contrainte excessive* [undue hardship] with a much lower threshold referred to as *contrainte plus que minimale* [more than minimal constraint]. Undue hardship is currently defined in human rights law as a constraint characterized by impossibility, serious risk, or exorbitant cost.¹⁸ It requires organizations to exhaust all reasonable efforts to accommodate an individual before a refusal is justified. The proposed change to a “more than minimal” standard, which is modelled after a standard used in the United States, defines a constraint as more than minimal if it involves a risk of work overload for another employee, a decrease in the quality, access, or speed of a service, or any risk of affecting the normal functioning of the institution (Recommendation 41).

While it is framed as providing greater certainty, this new standard is highly subjective and will likely fail to protect individuals from religious discrimination, as it allows institutions to prioritize administrative convenience over fundamental rights. This change elevates the interests of organizations over the rights and dignity of individuals.

Were any government to propose similarly reducing the duty to accommodate people with disabilities, it could result in offices failing to provide accessible washrooms or ramps because doing so would incur an administrative cost. There is no justification for singling out religious accommodation requests for a unique and lower standard of protection.

The duty to accommodate is fundamental to protecting people from discrimination, religious or otherwise. Our rights should not be so easily overridden. “Undue hardship” is a widely recognized standard in Canadian and Quebec human rights law. Lowering the threshold makes it easier to refuse accommodations, infringing on freedom of conscience and religion and undermining the fundamental nature of such rights.

¹⁷ See e.g. Government of Canada. (n.d.). *Inclusive writing: French principles and guidelines*. <https://www.noslangues-ourlanguages.gc.ca/en/ressources-ressources/ecriture-inclusive-writing/principes-francais-guidelines-french-eng>

¹⁸ British Columbia Office of the Human Rights Commissioner. (n.d.) *Undue hardship*. <https://bchumanrights.ca/glossary/undue-hardship/>

RECOMMENDATION-BY-RECOMMENDATION ANALYSIS

Here we follow the Committee’s report, summarizing each section and addressing recommendations in turn. For each recommendation, we reproduce it in French and provide an English translation. We also include a short background, the BCHA’s position, and our rationale.

Legislative Coherence and Constitutionality

The following recommendations address the structural and constitutional foundations of laicity. They propose consolidating existing legislation, entrenching laicity within constitutional frameworks, clarifying its supremacy over other statutes, and adjusting procedural rules governing judicial review and legislative amendment.

Overall, we support these efforts to clarify and consolidate the legal framework governing state neutrality. However, measures that insulate laicity from judicial scrutiny or make it more difficult for courts to intervene risk undermining constitutional safeguards. A principled commitment to secularism must strengthen institutional clarity without weakening the court’s role in protecting fundamental rights. Neutrality is reinforced by accountability.

Recommendation 1

Français	English
<i>Fusionner la Loi sur la laïcité de l’État et la Loi favorisant le respect de la neutralité religieuse de l’État et visant notamment à encadrer les demandes d’accommodements pour un motif religieux dans certains organismes dans une même loi et les harmoniser notamment quant à leurs champs d’application (en assujettissant les organismes visés aux paragraphes 11 à 13 de l’annexe I de la Loi sur la laïcité de l’État aux principes de la laïcité prévus à son article 2).</i>	Merge the Laicity Act and the Neutrality Act into a single law and harmonize them in particular with regard to their scope of application (by subjecting the bodies referred to in paragraphs 11 to 13 of Schedule I of the Laicity Act to the principles of secularism provided for in its article 2).

The Committee noted that the existence of two separate laicity laws creates confusion and ambiguity. They recommend merging the two for greater clarity.

The BCHA supports this recommendation.

While this is largely an administrative measure, reducing duplication and potential contradictions between two pieces of legislation should ensure that people and organizations are better able to understand and follow the law.

Recommendation 2

Français	English
Mentionner le caractère laïque de l'État du Québec dans une constitution québécoise écrite et y enchâsser les principes ainsi que les droits et les principales règles qui y sont associés.	Include the secular nature of the state of Quebec in a written Quebec constitution and enshrine therein the principles as well as the rights and the main rules associated with it.

The committee argues that enshrining secularism in a written constitution would make its fundamental role within the legal system clear. This follows a recommendation from a separate committee that Quebec should adopt its own constitution.¹⁹

The BCHA offers qualified support for this recommendation.

The state's duty of religious neutrality, in our view, rises to a constitutional principle. However, as discussed, we have reservations about Quebec's implementation of laicity over the rights to freedom of expression and religion. Further, we note the proposed written constitution has attracted significant criticism.²⁰

¹⁹ Gouvernement du Québec (n.d.), which resulted in *Projet de loi 1, Loi constitutionnelle de 2025 sur le Québec*, 2e sess, 43e lég, Québec (2025). <https://www.assnat.qc.ca/en/travaux-parlementaires/projets-loi/projet-loi-1-43-2.html>

²⁰ See e.g. Shingler, B. (2025 November 22). Why Quebec's proposed constitution has legal experts, civil rights groups sounding the alarm. *CBC News*. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/montreal/quebec-legault-constitution-controversy-9.6988103> ; Béland, D. (2025 November 8). François Legault's deeply flawed Québec Constitution Act. *Policy Magazine*. <https://www.policymagazine.ca/francois-legaults-deeply-flawed-quebec-constitution-act/> and Dwivedi, S. (2026 January 9). The unintended consequences of Quebec's planned abortion bill. *Canada's National Observer*. <https://www.nationalobserver.com/2026/01/06/opinion/quebec-abortion-bill-1-legault>

Recommendation 3

Français	English
Prévoir dans une constitution québécoise écrite une procédure de modification exigeant : 1) une majorité qualifiée pour limiter la laïcité ; 2) une majorité simple pour élargir la portée de la laïcité.	A written Quebec constitution should include an amendment procedure requiring: 1) a qualified majority to limit laicity; 2) a simple majority to broaden the scope of laicity.

This proposal seeks to protect the core nature of laicity by making it more difficult for the legislature to restrict laicity (for example, requiring a two-thirds majority), while allowing expansion to occur more easily (requiring a simple majority).

The BCHA supports this recommendation.

With our previously mentioned reservations about the specifics of a Quebec constitution in mind, should one be adopted, we support the principle that it should generally be easier to expand rights than to limit them.

Recommendation 4

Français	English
Rendre prépondérante la <i>Loi sur la laïcité de l'État</i> , y compris ses articles 1 à 3, vis-à-vis des lois qui lui sont antérieures.	Make the Laicity Act, including its articles 1 to 3, predominant over the laws that preceded it.

The current Laicity Act states that Articles 1 to 3 do not apply to older laws. This change would ensure the principles of laicity apply across all Quebec legislation and government institutions.

The BCHA offers qualified support for this recommendation.

We support bringing older laws into compliance, given the importance of religious neutrality. However, as discussed in our overarching concerns, the specific language in Article 2 refers to “citizens” rather than “persons,” which could limit the scope of inherent rights. Additionally, Article 3 requires institutions to comply with these principles “in fact and in appearance,” where appearance has been interpreted against the expression rights of government employees.

Recommendation 5

Français	English
Inscrire le caractère laïque de l'État du Québec en tant que « caractéristique fondamentale du Québec » au sein de la <i>Loi constitutionnelle</i> de 1867.	Enshrine the laicity of the province of Quebec as a "fundamental characteristic of Quebec" within the <i>Constitution Act</i> of 1867.

This recommendation would enshrine Quebec's state laicity within the Canadian constitution.

The BCHA offers qualified support for this recommendation.

Provided our concerns with the tensions between laicity and secularism are addressed, enshrining laicity in the constitution would recognize its importance in Quebec. Furthermore, as Canadian jurisprudence has upheld the state's duty of religious neutrality, we recommend that the constitution recognize the secular nature of Canada as a whole. Doing so would address the mistaken claim that Canada does not have an explicit separation of religion and government.²¹

²¹ It should go without saying that such an amendment ought to come with the removal of the vestigial reference to God in the preamble of the *Charter of Rights and Freedoms*.

Recommendation 6

Français	English
Modifier le <i>Code de procédure civile</i> pour codifier un test en trois étapes applicable en matière de suspension des lois et préciser qu'une loi est réputée incarner l'intérêt public et ne peut être suspendue qu'exceptionnellement si la partie qui requiert sa suspension démontre par une preuve nettement prépondérante qu'il y aurait beaucoup plus d'inconvénients à ne pas la suspendre qu'il y en aurait à la suspendre.	Amend the <i>Code of Civil Procedure</i> to codify a three-step test applicable to the suspension of laws and specify that a law is deemed to embody the public interest and can only be suspended exceptionally if the party requesting its suspension demonstrates by a clear preponderance of evidence that there would be many more disadvantages in not suspending it than there would be in suspending it.

The Committee introduced this proposal in response to delays in judgments on constitutional challenges. This recommendation would make it harder to suspend laws that are challenged as unconstitutional.

The BCHA opposes this recommendation.

This proposal would overrule the established test for a court to issue an interlocutory injunction against a law.²² Courts are an important safeguard against the potential tyranny of the majority²³ and undermining their ability to suspend laws pending a full review could result in irreparable harm.

²² In *RJR-MacDonald Inc. v. Canada (Attorney General)*, [1995] 3 S.C.R. 199, the Court set out that an applicant must show (1) a serious question to be tried, (2) a likelihood of irreparable harm if the injunction is refused, and (3) that the balance of convenience favours granting the injunction.

²³ Or in the case of our first-past-the-post elections, tyranny of the plurality.

Recommendation 7

Français	English
Créer la Journée nationale de la laïcité.	Create a National Day of Laicity.

The Committee recommends the creation of a National Day of Laicity to reinforce social cohesion around shared national values.

The BCHA supports this recommendation.

On April 15, 2025, the BCHA marked the tenth anniversary of the *Saguenay* decision with 'Religious Neutrality Day' and the Cities of Vancouver, Toronto and Ottawa all issued proclamations recognizing it. We recommend that April 15 be taken up nationally as Religious Neutrality Day, which could be called *Journée nationale de la laïcité* in Quebec.

Defining and Implementing the Principles of Laicity

These recommendations seek to define and operationalize the core principles of laicity, including the separation of religion and state, religious neutrality, equality, and freedom of conscience. They address public funding, religious symbols, institutional messaging, zoning rules, education policy, and the meaning of “religious pressure.”

Taken together, this section reveals the central tension in the Committee’s approach. We strongly support measures that eliminate institutional religious privilege and clarify the separation of religion and state. However, we oppose efforts that equate individual religious expression with state endorsement or redefine neutrality to require uniformity of appearance. Neutrality constrains institutions, not individuals. A coherent secularism must focus on the conduct of the state rather than the visibility of personal belief.

Recommendation 8

Français	English
Définir, à l'article 2 de la <i>Loi sur la laïcité de l'État</i> , le principe de la séparation de l'État et des religions comme faisant référence notamment au fait qu'il n'existe pas de religion officielle au Québec; qu'afin de favoriser l'autonomie réciproque, l'État n'a pas de liens opérationnels avec les religions ou leurs institutions; qu'il ne reconnaît aucune normativité juridique aux convictions, croyances et appartenances fondant les pratiques religieuses; qu'il ne peut s'appuyer sur une conviction, une croyance ou une appartenance religieuse pour justifier ses décisions ou ses actions; et qu'il ne reconnaît, ne salarie ni ne subventionne aucune religion.	Define, in section 2 of the Laicity Act, the principle of the separation of government and religions as referring in particular to the fact that there is no official religion in Quebec; that in order to promote reciprocal autonomy, the government has no operational links with religions or their institutions; that it does not recognize any legal normativity to the convictions, beliefs and affiliations that underlie religious practices; that it cannot rely on a conviction, a belief or a religious affiliation to justify its decisions or actions; and that it does not recognize, pay or subsidize any religion.

The Committee offers a clearer definition of the principle of separation of religion and government. Their definition would declare the government has no established religion, cut ties with religious institutions, and bar government decisions based on religious beliefs.

The BCHA supports this recommendation.

A legislated definition of secularism clarifies the government’s obligations, while the absence can create confusion. This definition is thorough and defensible.

Recommendation 9

Français	English
<p>Mettre fin de manière progressive aux avantages fiscaux et aux subventions accordés aux organismes religieux, après la réalisation d'une consultation et d'une étude d'impact, en abrogeant le critère de la « promotion de la religion » pour la reconnaissance des organismes de bienfaisance enregistrés ainsi qu'en éliminant les exemptions et déductions fiscales, comme celle visant précisément des membres du clergé et d'autres dirigeants religieux et celles en matière de fiscalité municipale. En lien avec l'abolition progressive de ces dernières exemptions, créer un fonds de transition pour les organismes affectés. Enfin, interdire le financement public des groupes religieux dans les collèges et les universités.</p>	<p>Gradually phase out tax breaks and subsidies granted to religious organizations, following consultation and an impact assessment, by repealing the "promotion of religion" criterion for the recognition of registered charities and eliminating tax exemptions and deductions, such as those specifically targeting members of the clergy and other religious leaders, as well as those related to municipal taxes. In conjunction with the gradual elimination of these latter exemptions, create a transition fund for affected organizations. Finally, prohibit public funding of religious groups in colleges and universities.</p>

This recommendation calls for the gradual end of tax benefits, subsidies, and public funding for religious organizations, while offering a transition fund to support groups in the interim.

The BCHA strongly supports this recommendation.

This provision aligns with many key issues that the BCHA has raised regarding the continued privileging of institutional religious organizations in Canada.²⁴ The transition fund is a tolerable compromise, allowing current recipients time to adjust to new funding models.

²⁴ See our many reports: <https://www.bchumanist.ca/publications>

Recommendation 10

Français	English
Mettre fin progressivement au financement étatique des écoles privées religieuses, tout en prévoyant un mécanisme d'admissibilité pour celles qui souhaitent conserver ce financement, sous réserve qu'elles entament des changements institutionnels visant le respect des quatre principes qui sous-tendent la laïcité de l'État.	Phase out state funding of private religious schools, while providing an eligibility mechanism for those wishing to retain this funding, provided that they undertake institutional changes aimed at respecting the four principles that underpin state laicity.

The Committee recommends the phasing out of government funding for religious private schools. Schools that agree to become secular could be eligible to maintain public funding.

The BCHA strongly supports this recommendation.

We have long opposed the public funding of private faith-based schools.²⁵

²⁵ See our work at https://www.bchumanist.ca/public_education

Recommendation 11

Français	English
<p>Définir, à l'article 2 de la <i>Loi sur la laïcité de l'État</i>, le principe de la neutralité religieuse de l'État comme posant que l'État ainsi que ses représentantes et représentants dans l'exercice de leurs fonctions doivent s'abstenir de favoriser ou de défavoriser une conviction, une croyance ou une appartenance religieuse ou l'absence d'une telle conviction, croyance ou appartenance et de véhiculer, par leurs actions ou leurs expressions, quelque message qui puisse raisonnablement être considéré comme approuvant ou désapprouvant de telles convictions, croyances ou appartenances, y compris par symbolisme ou affichage.</p>	<p>Define, in section 2 of the Laicity Act, the principle of the religious neutrality of the state as stating that the state and its representatives in the exercise of their functions must refrain from favouring or disfavouring any conviction, belief or religious affiliation or the absence of such conviction, belief or affiliation and from conveying, by their actions or expressions, any message which may reasonably be considered as approving or disapproving of such convictions, beliefs or affiliations, including by symbolism or display.</p>

This proposed definition of religious neutrality specifies that government employees must not promote or oppose any conviction, belief or religious affiliation (or lack thereof). The test for this requirement is whether an objective observer might reasonably consider an action, symbol or display to favour or disfavour religion. The committee suggests that a municipality erecting a menorah, a daycare including nativity figurines and a company allowing a staff member to wear religious clothing in company colours fail the test, while a daycare refusing to remove pig-shaped toys (presumably for a religious reason) would not.

The BCHA opposes this recommendation.

While we strongly support government religious neutrality, including the requirement that officials, acting in their official capacity, refrain from endorsing or opposing religion, we cannot endorse this definition. The inclusion of the phrase “by symbolism or display” implies that personal expression or dress can constitute an endorsement, which is reflected in the committee’s examples. This is an overreach that limits an individual’s freedom of expression.

Recommendation 12

Français	English
Préciser que le respect du principe de la neutralité religieuse de l'État par les institutions étatiques a pour corollaire que les membres de son personnel ne peuvent effectuer aucun acte de nature religieuse dans l'exercice de leurs fonctions, sauf exceptions prévues par la loi.	It should be noted that the respect for the principle of religious neutrality of the state by state institutions has as a corollary that members of its staff cannot perform any act of a religious nature in the exercise of their functions, except for exceptions provided for by law.

This recommendation clarifies that the duty of religious neutrality also requires civil servants abstain from performing religious acts as part of their official duties.

The BCHA supports this recommendation.

The critical caveat in this recommendation is that public-sector employees should not be performing religious acts "in the exercise of their functions." This permits those with religious obligations, for example, to pray at specific times of day, to still use breaks and other accommodations to exercise their faith as private citizens. At the same time, it recognizes that government representatives carry the authority of the state when performing their duties. So, for example, a mayor may pray privately before a meeting, but once they take the chair of a council meeting, they should abstain from religious rituals.

Recommendation 13

Français	English
Interdire, à l'avenir, d'élever ou d'apposer un nouveau signe ou un nouvel emblème religieux sur les monuments de l'État.	Prohibit, in the future, the erection or affixing of any new religious sign or emblem on state monuments.

This recommendation attempts to balance the preservation of existing religious heritage (protected by Article 17 of the Laicity Act) with the need for state neutrality by preventing future additions of religious signs or emblems on state monuments.

The BCHA supports this recommendation.

The government's duty of religious neutrality means it should not fund religious monuments. However, we would go further and call for the review of existing monuments and names for compliance with the government's duty of religious neutrality. As Justice Gascon wrote in *Saguenay*, "If the state adheres to a form of religious expression under the guise of cultural or historical reality or heritage, it breaches its duty of neutrality."²⁶ When the Laicity Law was first passed, many (including the BCHA) noted the irony of claiming that state neutrality required restricting individual expression even as a giant cross adorned the National Assembly.

²⁶ *Mouvement laïque québécois v. Saguenay* at para 78.

Recommendation 14

Français	English
Interdire la représentation et le port de signes religieux sur les affiches et dans les publicités du gouvernement et des institutions publiques, sauf exceptions.	Prohibit the representation and wearing of religious symbols on posters and in advertisements of the government and public institutions, except in certain cases.

This recommendation attempts to ensure consistency with the principle of state neutrality in public advertisements and communication.

The BCHA opposes this recommendation.

Acknowledging religious diversity is not an endorsement of religion. This remains the fundamental contradiction of laicity. Under this framework, religious neutrality is so fragile that it is threatened by a public service announcement featuring someone wearing a hijab or turban.

Recommendation 15

Français	English
Prévoir que les postes, les unités administratives et tout autre mécanisme public se consacrant à la lutte contre la haine liée à la religion visent toutes les religions, et non une seule ou un nombre restreint de religions.	Provide that posts, administrative units and any other public mechanism dedicated to combating religious hatred target all religions, and not just one or a limited number of religions.

In response to observed increases in religion-based hate crimes, the Committee favours a global, universalist approach to fighting all hate, thereby ensuring the government maintains religious neutrality rather than focusing resources exclusively on specific religious affiliations.

The BCHA opposes this recommendation.

While a global approach can be appealing, nuance is required to address the unique expressions of hatred that target different groups. For example, antisemitism, Islamophobia and transphobia are quite distinct from one another. Attempting to address all at once will mean none are addressed adequately.

Recommendation 16

Français	English
Modifier l'article 2 (3°) en remplaçant les mots « l'égalité de tous les citoyens et citoyennes » par les mots « l'égalité de toutes les citoyennes et de tous les citoyens, et l'égalité entre les femmes et les hommes ».	Amend Article 2 (3°) by replacing the words "equality of all citizens" with the words "equality of all citizens, and equality between women and men."

The Committee aims to explicitly incorporate equality between women and men into the foundational principles of laicity to address patriarchal norms.

The BCHA opposes this recommendation.

While we support this intention, as we discussed in our overarching concerns, this recommendation is insufficient. First, we would broaden the term citizen [*l'égalité de tous les citoyens et citoyennes*] to people [*l'égalité de toutes les personnes*] to recognize the inherent rights of non-citizens in our society (permanent residents, immigrants, etc). Second, the proposed expansion to recognize the equality of women and men [*l'égalité entre les femmes et les hommes*] reinforces a false binary that risks excluding trans identities. Instead, the section could be broadened to "equality of genders" [*l'égalité entre les genres*].²⁷

²⁷ Egale Canada. (2022). *French style guide* (Version 7.0). <https://egale.ca/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/Egale-French-Style-Guide-7.0.pdf>

Recommendation 17

Français	English
<p>Définir, à l'article 2 de la <i>Loi sur la laïcité de l'État</i>, le principe de l'égalité de toutes les citoyennes et de tous les citoyens, et l'égalité entre les femmes et les hommes, comme faisant référence à l'égalité de toute personne, peu importe ses origines ou ses croyances, qui est réalisée lorsqu'elle a la possibilité d'exercer tous ses droits à la mesure de son propre potentiel et de contribuer à l'évolution culturelle, économique, politique et sociale de son pays, tout en bénéficiant personnellement de cette évolution, et que les divers comportements, aspirations et besoins des femmes et des hommes sont considérés, appréciés et promus sur un pied d'égalité, et ce, indépendamment des restrictions imposées par les rôles stéréotypés réservés aux femmes et aux hommes.</p>	<p>Define, in Article 2 of the Laicity Act, the principle of equality of all citizens, and equality between women and men, as referring to the equality of every person, regardless of their origins or beliefs, which is achieved when they have the opportunity to exercise all their rights to the extent of their own potential and to contribute to the cultural, economic, political and social development of their country, while personally benefiting from this development, and that the various behaviors, aspirations and needs of women and men are considered, valued and promoted on an equal footing, regardless of the restrictions imposed by stereotypical roles reserved for women and men.</p>

This definition aims to clarify the concept of substantive equality, ensuring that outcomes are just by accounting for diverse individual needs beyond restrictive gender roles.

The BCHA supports this recommendation.

This represents a positive step toward substantive equality. However, we reiterate the necessity of broadening the definition to include non-citizens and to transcend the male/female binary to ensure the inclusion of trans, non-binary and two-spirit identities. Otherwise, we risk simply replacing one essentialist viewpoint with another.

Recommendation 18

Français	English
<p>Préciser, dans la <i>Loi favorisant le respect de la neutralité religieuse de l'État et visant notamment à encadrer les demandes d'accommodements pour un motif religieux dans certains organismes</i>, que dans la prestation de tout service envers un membre du public, aucun accommodement ne peut être accordé pour permettre à une personne d'exiger d'être servie ou traitée par un fonctionnaire d'un sexe particulier plutôt que l'autre, sauf lorsque la prestation de service est liée ou a trait à la santé, à l'intimité sexuelle ou à la sécurité de cette personne.</p>	<p>Specify, in the Neutrality Act, that in the provision of any service to a member of the public, no accommodation may be granted to allow a person to demand to be served or treated by an official of a particular sex rather than the other, except when the provision of service is related to or pertains to the health, sexual intimacy or safety of that person.</p>

This measure would prohibit members of the public from demanding to be served by a public servant of a particular sex, except in situations involving health, sexual intimacy, or safety. The Committee cites several “troubling testimonies” of requests for sexual segregation in public institutions. For example, in some CEGEPs,²⁸ students have refused to be paired with mentors or work partners of the opposite sex and women who wear the niqab have refused to be identified by male teachers. Further, in 2009, the *Commission des droits de la personne et des droits de la jeunesse* [Human Rights and Youth Rights Commission] issued an opinion siding with a man who refused to take a driving test administered by a woman who worked for the *Société de l'assurance automobile du Québec* [Quebec Automobile Insurance Corporation].²⁹

The BCHA generally supports this recommendation.

While we support reasonable accommodations of religious beliefs, this does not always require positive government action. In the examples cited, these requests can come at the cost of the dignity of government employees. In other words, accommodating these requests violates the worker's right to gender equality. These nuances will require continual debate and refinement to balance competing rights over time.

²⁸ CEGEP stands for "Collège d'enseignement général et professionnel" [College of General and Vocational Education]. These are public educational institutions in Quebec that provide the first level of higher education, sometimes referred to as grade 13.

²⁹ Commission des droits de la personne et des droits de la jeunesse. (2009 January 30). *Commentaires sur la politique*. <https://www.cdpdj.qc.ca/fr/publications/commentaires-sur-la-politique>

Recommendation 19

Français	English
<p>Définir, à l'article 2 de la <i>Loi sur la laïcité de l'État</i>, le principe de la liberté de conscience et de la liberté de religion comme incluant le droit d'une personne de croire ou de ne pas croire, de professer ou de manifester sa conviction, sa croyance ou son incroyance religieuse, en dehors de ses fonctions de représentante de l'État, et de ne pas être contraint d'agir de manière contraire à ses convictions ou à ses croyances, d'adhérer à une religion ou de se soumettre à une observance religieuse, directement ou indirectement, par pressions ou autrement, particulièrement lorsqu'une personne est en situation de vulnérabilité, par exemple en raison de son âge ou de son appartenance réelle ou supposée à une religion.</p>	<p>Define, in section 2 of the Laicity Act, the principle of freedom of conscience and freedom of religion as including the right of a person to believe or not to believe, to profess or manifest their religious conviction, belief or disbelief, outside of their functions as a representative of the State, and not to be forced to act in a manner contrary to their convictions or beliefs, to adhere to a religion or to submit to a religious observance, directly or indirectly, by pressure or otherwise, particularly when a person is in a vulnerable situation, for example because of their age or their real or supposed belonging to a religion.</p>

This proposed definition clarifies the principle of freedom of conscience and freedom of religion. Specifically, it includes the right to believe or not to believe and to profess or manifest one's religious convictions (except for those actively representing the government). It also includes the freedom from being coerced into acting contrary to one's convictions or beliefs or adhering to a religion or religious observance.

This definition incorporates the right to freedom *from* religion and explicitly protects vulnerable individuals from religious pressure.

The BCHA supports this definition.

This definition is largely borrowed from jurisprudence, such as *Saguenay*. Too often, the concept of freedom of religion focuses on the rights of people to have and explore their own religious sentiment in their own way, but neglects to include the irreligious or the right to be free from religious coercion.

Recommendation 20

Français	English
Consacrer le droit de tout enfant fréquentant une institution relevant de l'État de jouir d'un milieu neutre lui permettant d'être protégé contre toute forme de pression religieuse, et ce, sans restreindre la généralité de ce qui précède, comme prévu par la <i>Loi sur la laïcité de l'État</i> .	Enshrine the right of every child attending a state-run institution to enjoy a neutral environment that allows them to be protected against any form of religious pressure, without restricting the generality of the above, as provided for by the Laicity Act.

This recommendation aims to protect the freedom of conscience and belief of children from religious proselytism or pressure.

The BCHA offers qualified support for this recommendation.

Given the broader context of this report, we are concerned that interpreting all forms of religious expression (like a teacher wearing a religious symbol) as “pressure” could lead to discrimination by excluding individuals with certain religious beliefs from jobs in education. This can be addressed by providing a clear definition of “religious pressure” based on jurisprudence. For example, religious pressure is any action by a representative of the government that requires an individual to act contrary to their beliefs or to adhere to a religion or participate in a religious observance.

Recommendation 21

Français	English
Documenter les enjeux liés aux influences religieuses favorisant le jeûne chez les enfants d'âge scolaire ainsi que les effets de ce type de jeûne sur ces enfants en vue d'améliorer les méthodes de sensibilisation à ces enjeux.	Document issues related to religious influences promoting fasting among school-aged children and the effects of this type of fasting on these children in order to improve methods of raising awareness of these issues.

This Committee heard reports of children fasting due to religious influences, possibly affecting their school attendance, performance, and health. They therefore recommend further study.

The BCHA offers qualified support for this recommendation.

On its face, this is a worthwhile study; however, we argue it should be religiously neutral and focus on the health impacts of fasting on children. Not all fasting is rooted in religious practice. Understanding the prevalence and effects of childhood fasting and its influences is critical here.

Recommendation 22

Français	English
Mettre fin à la pratique consistant à écrire aux parents d'élèves pour les informer à l'avance qu'un contenu lié à la sexualité sera enseigné à leurs enfants.	End the practice of writing to parents of students to inform them in advance that sexuality-related content will be taught to their children.

Notifying parents in advance of curriculum content containing sexuality-related elements often led to students missing school. This undermines the goal of ensuring all students receive equal education. The recommendation calls for an end to advance notice for these lessons.

The BCHA supports this recommendation.

Sexual health education should be a core part of every curriculum. Singling it out for special notice undermines the value of those lessons. Parents can remain informed of their child's curriculum content through publicly available curriculum documents and communication with their child's teachers.

Recommendation 23

Français	English
Modifier la <i>Loi sur l'aménagement et l'urbanisme</i> afin de soustraire au processus d'approbation référendaire les changements de zonage permettant l'implantation de lieux de culte.	Amend the <i>Planning and Development Act</i> to exempt zoning changes allowing the establishment of places of worship from the referendum approval process.

Quebec allows residents to apply for a local referendum to block rezoning applications. This has led to residents vetoing proposed Mosques and Muslim cemeteries.³⁰

The BCHA supports this recommendation.

As it stands, the current law empowers a 'not in my backyard' tyranny of the majority that undermines the ability of adherents of non-majoritarian faiths to establish their own facilities.

Recommendation 24

Français	English
Modifier l'alinéa 2 de l'article 4 de la <i>Loi sur la laïcité de l'État</i> en remplaçant les mots « dans la mesure prévue par la présente loi » par ceux-ci : « sans restreindre la généralité de ce qui précède, comme prévu par la présente loi ».	Amend paragraph 2 of section 4 of the <i>Laicity Act</i> by replacing the words "to the extent provided for in this Act" with the following: "without restricting the generality of the foregoing, as provided for in this Act."

The Committee seeks to increase the right to secular institutions from a simple interpretative principle to a full right.

The BCHA supports this recommendation.

Fundamental rights, including the state's duty of religious neutrality, should be expansive.

³⁰ See e.g. Lowrie, M. (2017 July 16). Voters reject Quebec City area Muslim cemetery project 19 to 16. *Montreal Gazette*. <https://montrealgazette.com/news/local-news/voters-reject-quebec-city-area-muslim-cemetery-project-19-to-16>

Strengthening Rights and Governance

This final section focuses on the implementation and oversight of laicity. The Committee proposes new enforcement mechanisms, expanded ministerial and institutional powers, mandatory policies for public bodies, data collection, and training initiatives intended to ensure consistent application of laicity across the province.

Overall, we support improved oversight, clearer redress mechanisms, and better public education regarding state neutrality. At the same time, expanded regulatory and intervention powers must be bounded to prevent uneven or discretionary enforcement. Governance reforms should enhance transparency and rights protection; they should not create new tools for suppressing lawful expression. Secularism is best served through consistent, rights-respecting administration rather than expanded executive authority.

Recommendation 25

Français	English
Prévoir, dans la <i>Loi sur la laïcité de l'État</i> , qu'une atteinte à un droit prévu par cette loi confère à la victime le droit de s'adresser à un tribunal compétent afin d'obtenir la cessation de cette atteinte et la réparation du préjudice subi.	The Laicity Act should stipulate that an infringement of a right provided for by the Act gives the victim the right to apply to a competent court in order to obtain the cessation of this infringement and compensation for the harm suffered.

If your right to secular public services have been infringed, the Committee believes you should have a way to seek compensation.

The BCHA supports this recommendation.

All rights should include a redress mechanism. At the same time, this process must protect people from what the Committee refers to as the risk of empowering “vigilante anti-religious sentiments.” Civil litigation can be costly and time-consuming for all parties involved; a human rights approach, including a preliminary investigation, can often provide an accessible pathway.

Recommendation 26

Français	English
Expliquer et faire connaître le droit à des institutions parlementaires, gouvernementales et judiciaires laïques ainsi qu'à des services publics laïques de même que les liens entre ce droit et la liberté de conscience, et ce, plus particulièrement dans les communications gouvernementales se rapportant à la <i>Loi sur la laïcité de l'État</i> et à la <i>laïcité</i> .	Explain and publicize the right to secular parliamentary, governmental and judicial institutions and secular public services, as well as the links between this right and freedom of conscience, particularly in government communications relating to the Laicity Act.

The Committee found there was still public misunderstanding of the rights contained in the Laicity Act. They recommend further education.

The BCHA supports this recommendation.

Public education breathes life into rights that otherwise only exist on paper.

Recommendation 27

Français	English
Consacrer, dans la <i>Loi sur la laïcité de l'État</i> , le droit des travailleuses et des travailleurs de l'État d'exercer leurs fonctions dans des institutions laïques, et ce, sans restreindre la généralité de ce qui précède, comme prévu par la <i>Loi sur la laïcité de l'État</i> .	Enshrine in the Laicity Act the right of state workers to perform their duties in secular institutions, without restricting the generality of the above, as provided for by the Laicity Act.

This recommendation clarifies that a secular environment also benefits government employees by protecting them from religious pressures and discriminatory demands.

The BCHA supports this recommendation.

Secularism benefits both the public broadly and those working for the government alike. Making this protection for workers explicit ensures that their rights and interests remain protected in debates over religious accommodation.

Recommendation 28

Français	English
Étendre l'application de l'article 2 de la <i>Loi sur la laïcité de l'État</i> aux centres de la petite enfance et garderies subventionnées, et celle de son article 6 aux éducatrices, éducateurs, directrices et directeurs œuvrant dans ces centres et ces garderies tout en prévoyant un droit acquis.	Extend the application of Article 2 of the Laicity Act to subsidized early childhood centres and daycares, and that of Article 6 to educators, directors and managers working in these centres and daycares while providing for an acquired right.

This recommendation would extend the Laicity Act, including the ban on religious symbols, to all publicly-funded childcare facilities. Current employees would be exempted from the law.³¹

The BCHA opposes this recommendation.

We have long opposed Quebec's religious symbols ban.³² Extending the prohibition to childcare facilities effectively bans people from these careers on the basis of their religious practices.

³¹ This recommendation was recently adopted by the Quebec National Assembly, *Projet de loi 9, Loi sur le renforcement de la laïcité au Québec*, 2^e sess, 43^e lég, Québec, 2025.

<https://www.assnat.qc.ca/fr/travaux-parlementaires/projets-loi/projet-loi-9-43-2.html>

³² BC Humanist Association. (2019 July 22). *Reiterating our opposition to Quebec's Bill 21*.

https://www.bchumanist.ca/reiterating_our_opposition_to_quebec_s_bill_21

Recommendation 29

Français	English
Accompagner de près les centres de la petite enfance et les garderies subventionnées de facto confessionnels afin qu'une réelle laïcité y soit déployée.	Closely support de facto faith-based early childhood centers and subsidized daycare centers so that genuine laicity is deployed there.

The Committee heard that some publicly funded daycares affiliated with religious community centres were exerting religious pressure on children. This included staff having to take religious courses and children being told they would “go to hell” if they didn’t obey religious rules.

The BCHA supports this recommendation.

Simply defining secularism in law is insufficient; there must be proper oversight to ensure public funds are not used for religious teachings or proselytization.

Recommendation 30

Français	English
Modifier l'article 8 de la <i>Loi sur la laïcité de l'État</i> de manière à rendre obligatoire la réception à visage découvert de tout service.	Amend Article 8 of the Laicity Act to make it mandatory to receive all services with one's face uncovered.

Currently, only government employees' faces must be uncovered. Those receiving services must uncover for identification or security. This recommendation extends the requirement to all service recipients.

The BCHA opposes this recommendation.

We have objected to the requirement that government employees have uncovered faces.³³ Expanding that requirement merely increases the discrimination. These provisions target those whose religion requires them to cover their faces and those with health conditions that require them to wear a mask.

³³ Ibid.

Recommendation 31

Français	English
Prévoir, dans la <i>Loi sur la laïcité de l'État</i> , un pouvoir réglementaire permettant au ministre responsable de la Laïcité de préciser la portée de cette loi.	Provide, in the Laicity Act, a regulatory power allowing the minister responsible for laicity to specify the scope of this law.

This measure grants the Minister regulatory power to clarify the scope of the law, addressing inconsistencies and confusion noted during consultations.

The BCHA offers no comment on this recommendation.

Ministers being able to clarify laws through regulation is a common practice; however, we caution that these types of provisions come with the risk of empowering politicians to rewrite the laws without legislative oversight. Human rights advocates should provide scrutiny to specific efforts to implement these powers and their use by future governments.

Recommendation 32

Français	English
Créer un organisme indépendant, dont la présidence serait nommée par les deux tiers de l'Assemblée nationale, ayant notamment pour mission de veiller au respect de la <i>Loi sur la laïcité de l'État</i> et de la <i>Loi favorisant le respect de la neutralité religieuse de l'État et visant notamment à encadrer les demandes d'accommodements pour un motif religieux dans certains organismes.</i>	Create an independent body, whose president would be appointed by two-thirds of the National Assembly, whose mission would include ensuring compliance with the Laicity Act and the Neutrality Act.

The lack of effective oversight or body to provide redress for these laws led the Committee to propose the creation of an independent agency. The agency's head would be appointed by a two-thirds majority of the legislature (like an ombudsperson). It would have a mandate to track issues, report, and intervene in court cases.

The BCHA supports this recommendation.

Ombudsperson and watchdog positions play an important role in monitoring the implementation of legislation. The two-thirds majority requirement is a reasonable effort to ensure political consensus but could lead to opposition parties in a polarized assembly undermining the agency by refusing an appointment. Further, it is critical that individuals have the right to apply for judicial review or otherwise appeal the agency's decisions and actions.

Recommendation 33

Français	English
Conférer au ministre responsable de la Laïcité et à la direction d'un organisme spécialisé en laïcité de l'État le pouvoir d'intervenir, d'office et sans avis, dans toute instance qui pourrait avoir une incidence sur la laïcité.	Give the Minister responsible for laicity and the management of a specialized state laicity body the power to intervene, ex officio and without notice, in any case that could have an impact on secularism.

This power would allow the Minister, and the future laicity commissioner, to intervene in court cases that could affect laicity, mirroring the powers granted to enforce Quebec's language law. The committee argues this is necessary to enrich jurisprudence in this field.

The BCHA opposes this recommendation.

Without clear policy guidelines governing the nature and criteria of such interventions, this power is susceptible to abuse.

Recommendation 34

Français	English
Inscrire, dans la <i>Loi sur la laïcité de l'État</i> , l'obligation pour le gouvernement d'adopter une politique quinquennale en matière de laïcité de l'État et l'obligation pour les organismes publics (autres que les organismes autonomes) de se doter d'une directive conforme à cette politique et aux exigences de cette loi.	Include in the Laicity Act the obligation for the government to adopt a five-year policy on the laicity of the state and the obligation for public bodies (other than autonomous bodies) to adopt a directive in accordance with this policy and the requirements of the Act.

This recommendation requires public bodies to create five-year laicity implementation plans. The goal is to ensure continuous, coherent governmental action on laicity, addressing observed inconsistencies in implementation.

The BCHA supports this recommendation.

Words on paper are meaningless without tangible plans to implement them into practice. Provided our overarching concerns are addressed, this approach creates a pathway to ensure government-wide adoption.

Recommendation 35

Français	English
<p>Prévoir, par voie législative, l'obligation pour des organismes autonomes associés à l'État (notamment les municipalités, les collèges, les universités, les centres de la petite enfance, les garderies subventionnées et les écoles privées subventionnées) de se doter d'une politique en matière de laïcité assujettie à l'approbation gouvernementale et devant traiter de différents sujets tels que les accommodements pour un motif religieux, la location de salles à des groupes religieux et les autorisations d'utilisation d'espaces publics à des fins religieuses, et ce, de manière à respecter les principes, les droits et les règles d'ordre public liés à la laïcité.</p>	<p>Legislate to require that autonomous bodies associated with the government (particularly municipalities, colleges, universities, early childhood centres, subsidized kindergartens/daycares, and subsidized private schools) adopt a policy on secularism. This policy is to be subject to government approval, and to deal with various subjects, such as religious accommodations, room rentals to religious groups, and authorizations of the use of public spaces for religious purposes, in such a way as to respect the principles, rights and rules of public order related to laicity.</p>

This recommendation seeks to require that quasi-public bodies adopt specific laicity policies covering areas like religious accommodations and the rental/use of public spaces, subject to government approval.

The BCHA offers no comment on this recommendation.

This recommendation might not be practical because it would affect a significant number of organizations, the policies could end up being very broad, and it may be difficult for the government to review and approve all these different policies. Some of this could be addressed through model policies or clauses in funding agreements.

Recommendation 36

Français	English
Préciser que dans leurs politiques en matière de laïcité les municipalités doivent intégrer, en harmonie avec leurs réglementations, un encadrement des manifestations religieuses collectives sur leur territoire.	It should be specified that municipalities must integrate, in accordance with their regulations, a framework for collective religious demonstrations in their territory, into their laicity policies.

The Committee heard concerns about roadways being blocked by religious protests and public prayers. Others spoke out about street preachers promoting hatred. In attempting to strike a balance between the right to freedom of expression and civil order, the Committee recommends municipalities adopt policies on religious demonstrations in their laicity policies. The Quebec National Assembly went farther and prohibited public “collective religious practices,” unless authorized by a municipality under strict criteria.³⁴

The BCHA opposes this recommendation.

This proposal undermines the state’s duty of religious neutrality by singling out religious gatherings for special regulations. Further, the recommendation is vague on its proposal, which will ultimately lead to discrepancies in implementation between various municipalities. An individual’s fundamental right to gather and express themselves should not be geographically dependent. Rather, existing secular regulations (like public disturbance laws, bubble laws, etc.) can be utilized to address public disturbances and nuisances.

³⁴ *Projet de loi 9 (2025).*

Recommendation 37

Français	English
Prévoir des formations, initiales et continues, en matière de laïcité, notamment pour les éducatrices et les éducateurs des centres de la petite enfance et des garderies subventionnées et pour les enseignantes et les enseignants (écoles primaires, écoles secondaires et collèges).	Provide initial and continuing training on laicity, particularly for educators in early childhood centers and subsidized daycare centers, and for teachers (primary schools, secondary schools and colleges).

Due to widespread confusion and insufficient communication, many educators apply laicity principles inconsistently. Mandatory, formalized training is recommended to ensure a more coherent application across educational system.

The BCHA supports this recommendation.

As we have discussed previously, simply passing a law does little to guarantee rights are protected. Ongoing training for frontline workers is critical to ensure a consistent standard across the province. We do caution that any such training, as with our overarching concerns, must be mindful of the diversity of religious beliefs among the public sector workforce. Religious neutrality is not about enforced atheism but ensuring that everyone's rights are protected.

Protecting Women's Rights and Access to Healthcare

These two recommendations address access to reproductive healthcare and the role of religiously motivated organizations within publicly funded health systems. They focus on abortion access, public funding for anti-choice organizations, and the intersection of conscience claims with universal healthcare obligations.

In this context, the Committee's proposals clearly align with a principled model of secularism. Ensuring equitable access to healthcare and ending public support for discriminatory advocacy reflects the proper function of neutrality: preventing the imposition of religious doctrine through public institutions. Here, laicity operates as a safeguard for individual autonomy rather than a restriction upon it.

Recommendation 38

Français	English
Exiger sans délai que les administratrices et administrateurs des établissements publics de santé respectent leur obligation d'offrir les soins d'avortement, et que le ministre responsable de la Laïcité assure un suivi rigoureux auprès du ministre de la Santé afin de garantir un accès équitable et adéquat à ces soins dans toutes les régions, au même titre que les autres soins de santé.	Demand without delay that the administrators of public health establishments respect their obligation to offer abortion care, and that the Minister responsible for Laicity ensure rigorous follow-up with the Minister of Health in order to guarantee equitable and adequate access to this care in all regions, on the same basis as other health care.

This recommendation stems from the finding that access to abortion care is unequal across regions, sometimes due to religious objections by medical professionals in public hospitals, which violates the principle of universal healthcare.

The BCHA strongly supports this recommendation.

So-called 'conscience rights' are often deployed to prevent access to abortion and reproductive healthcare services. This is a strong recommendation that puts the patient's right to care back at the centre of our healthcare system. We recommend this be interpreted broadly to include all reproductive healthcare including prescription contraception, as well as end-of-life care, such as medical assistance in dying.

Recommendation 39

Français	English
Mettre fin au financement des organismes anti-choix et discriminatoires et s'assurer que le Secrétariat à la condition féminine poursuive ses efforts de sensibilisation auprès de la population ainsi qu'auprès des élus et élues quant aux conséquences des actions de ces organismes sur la liberté de choix des femmes.	End funding for anti-choice and discriminatory organizations and ensure that the Secretariat for the Status of Women continues its efforts to raise awareness among the public and elected officials about the consequences of these organizations' actions on women's freedom of choice.

The Committee noted that anti-choice groups, often religiously motivated, actively militate against abortion rights and have sometimes received public funding. Ending public funding for these discriminatory organizations is presented as necessary to protect women's freedom of choice.

The BCHA strongly endorses this recommendation.

We have long advocated for governments to take seriously the threat to reproductive rights posed by these types of organizations. We have called out the misleading and manipulative content on the websites of unregulated pregnancy centres,³⁵ supported efforts to clamp down on misinformation spread by anti-choice charities,³⁶ and advocated for a public health region to end a partnership with a local anti-choice organization.³⁷

³⁵ BC Humanist Association. (2023 March 8). *Study finds "crisis pregnancy centres" mislead and manipulate.*

https://www.bchumanist.ca/study_finds_crisis_pregnancy_centres_mislead_and_manipulate

³⁶ BC Humanist Association. (2024 October 30). *A step toward greater transparency from "crisis pregnancy centres".*

https://www.bchumanist.ca/a_step_toward_greater_transparency_from_crisis_pregnancy_centres

³⁷ Gamage, M. (2025 October 1). Fraser Health distances itself from group opposed to abortion. The Tye. <https://thetyee.ca/News/2025/10/01/Fraser-Health-Group-Opposed-Abortion/>

Reforming the Accommodation Framework

The final set of recommendations concerns the religious accommodations frameworks. The Committee proposes making religious accommodations more difficult to request, while increasing reporting requirements. Lowering the accommodation threshold risks undermining fundamental rights in the interests of institutional convenience. The duty to accommodate is a cornerstone of equality. A secular state maintains neutrality by limiting its own coercive power, not by making it easier to deny minority protections.

Recommendation 40

Français	English
Modifier la <i>Loi favorisant le respect de la neutralité religieuse de l'État et visant notamment à encadrer les demandes d'accommodements pour un motif religieux dans certains organismes</i> pour remplacer le critère de la contrainte excessive par celui de la contrainte plus que minimale et ainsi accorder davantage d'autonomie et de sécurité juridique aux organismes.	Amend the Neutrality Act to replace the criterion of excessive constraint with that of more than minimal constraint and thus grant more autonomy and legal certainty to organizations.

The Committee seeks to change the threshold for refusing religious accommodations from the established human rights standard of “excessive constraint” (or undue hardship) to the lower standard of “more than minimal constraint.” The Committee argues that the current standard is difficult to apply and negatively affects the quality of public services.

The BCHA strongly opposes this recommendation.

As we discussed in our overarching concerns, “undue hardship” is a widely recognized standard in Canadian law. While it is contextually dependent, it is defined as “the point at which it is too unsafe, difficult, or expensive to remove barriers so people can participate in work or other areas of daily life.”³⁸ Lowering the threshold makes it easier to refuse accommodations, infringing on freedom of conscience and religion. Overall, this concern rests upon anecdotal evidence rather than proof of systemic failure of the current legal standard. Counter to the Committee’s claims, introducing an untested standard would create legal uncertainty.

³⁸ British Columbia Office of the Human Rights Commissioner (n.d.).

Recommendation 41

Français	English
Préciser qu'une contrainte est plus que minimale notamment lorsqu'il y a un risque de surcharge de travail pour un autre employé, un risque d'une diminution de la qualité, de l'accès ou de la rapidité du service ou un risque d'affecter le fonctionnement normal d'un organisme public ou autonome associé à l'État.	It should be specified that a constraint is more than minimal, in particular when there is a risk of work overload for another employee, a risk of a decrease in the quality, access or speed of the service, or a risk of affecting the normal functioning of a public or autonomous body associated with the State.

This recommendation provides specific examples of what constitutes "more than minimal constraint," such as risks of employee overload or diminished service quality.

The BCHA strongly opposes this recommendation.

As with the previous recommendation, this recommendation undermines the established and clear legal standard of "undue hardship" with new, untested and subjective criteria ("risk of work overload"). The duty to accommodate is fundamental to protecting people from religious discrimination and should be subject to a higher standard.

Recommendation 42

Français	English
<p>Modifier la <i>Loi favorisant le respect de la neutralité religieuse de l'État et visant notamment à encadrer les demandes d'accommodements pour un motif religieux dans certains organismes</i> pour rendre l'octroi d'un accommodement pour un motif religieux conditionnel au respect des quatre principes et des droits consacrés par la <i>Loi sur la laïcité de l'État</i>.</p>	<p>Amend the Neutrality Act to make the granting of an accommodation for religious reasons conditional on respect for the four principles and rights enshrined in the Laicity Act.</p>

Under the current Neutrality Act, accommodations must respect religious neutrality, equality between women and men, and the rights of others. These are three of the four core principles in the Laicity Act. The proposed amendment would require that any religious accommodation granted must also respect the separation of state and religion as a condition. This proposal is in part intended to support the harmonization of the conflicting laicity laws.

The BCHA has no position on this recommendation.

The right to reasonable accommodations for religious reasons is well established in law. Additional caveats to this right might infringe on an individual's right to religious freedom. Alternatively, the change may prove to be relatively trivial as the current law already contains most of the intended principles.

Recommendation 43

Français	English
<p>Réclamer que le ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux ou Santé Québec adopte une politique pour la mise en application de la <i>Loi sur la laïcité de l'État</i> et de la <i>Loi favorisant le respect de la neutralité religieuse de l'État</i> et visant notamment à encadrer les demandes d'accommodements pour un motif religieux dans certains organismes avec des directives pour assurer la compréhension des obligations des organismes et établissements à l'endroit des usagères et usagers, mais aussi du personnel.</p>	<p>Demand that the Ministry of Health and Social Services or Santé Québec adopt a policy for the implementation of the Laicity Act and the Neutrality Act with directives to ensure the understanding of the obligations of organizations and establishments towards users, but also of staff.</p>

This recommendation addresses the observation that frontline health staff often handle accommodation requests *ad hoc* without official guidelines. This can lead to inconsistent application of policy and service delivery. Formal policies would ensure consistent treatment of accommodations for both users and staff.

The BCHA supports this recommendation.

It is good practice to standardize responses to accommodation requests, especially in urgent or high-pressure settings like hospitals. Clear guidelines will help staff understand their obligations and ensure consistency in service

Recommendation 44

Français	English
Préciser qu'un accommodement pour un motif religieux ne peut être octroyé s'il a pour effet de contrevenir au respect des programmes d'éducation et d'enseignement post-secondaire ou aux libertés d'éducation et d'enseignement.	It should be specified that an accommodation for religious reasons cannot be granted if it has the effect of contravening respect for education and post-secondary teaching programs or freedoms of education and teaching.

Some educators reported self-censoring from teaching controversial topics, including same-sex relationships and gender equality, at risk of triggering religious accommodation requests. While many of those would likely have been deemed unreasonable, the Committee recommends the government take steps to protect the integrity of the curriculum and academic freedom by explicitly stating that such accommodation requests would be unreasonable. This policy would apply to public schools, publicly funded private schools, and post-secondary institutions.

The BCHA supports this recommendation.

While such a position may not necessarily need to be enshrined in law, communicating clearly to educators may dispel the potential fears that the Committee reported hearing.

Recommendation 45

Français	English
Permettre aux collèges d'aménager des locaux de détente et de recueillement, accessibles à une ou deux personnes à la fois, excluant des salles consacrées exclusivement aux prières ou toute autre forme d'appropriation d'espaces communs, telles les salles de toilettes et les cages d'escaliers, à des fins religieuses.	Allow colleges to set up relaxation and meditation areas, accessible to one or two people at a time, excluding rooms dedicated exclusively to prayers or any other form of appropriation of common spaces, such as washrooms and stairwells, for religious purposes.

The recommendation promotes the creation of small (limited to one or two people) multi-purpose reflection or sensory rooms over establishing dedicated, collective prayer rooms. The Committee argued the latter can lead to other requests that violate institutional values (e.g., gender separation).

The BCHA supports this recommendation.

Multipurpose rooms, available to students of all beliefs and none, are the best way to accommodate diverse faith needs. Providing such space is valuable for those students with daily prayer obligations but establishing these spaces explicitly as “prayer rooms” may undermine multiculturalism by granting preferential treatment to a subset of students based on belief. Broadening their purpose allows them to serve a greater portion of the student population, from the religious to those seeking low-sensory environments. That said, we do not agree with the Committee’s justification for requiring the rooms be limited to one to two people.

Recommendation 46

Français	English
Donner explicitement le pouvoir aux universités de ne pas fournir de salles de prière ou de recueillement.	Explicitly give universities the power not to provide prayer or meditation rooms.

Relying on the principle of institutional autonomy, this recommendation aims to legislate the power of universities to refuse to establish dedicated prayer spaces, contradicting a 2006 human rights tribunal decision that mandated a prayer room.³⁹

The BCHA opposes this recommendation.

As discussed in the previous recommendation, there is a value to providing these spaces as part of the duty to accommodate. Allowing universities to ban these spaces undermines the multicultural reality of our contemporary society, and their duties to provide appropriate facilities for students

³⁹ *Centre de recherche-action sur les relations raciales c. École de technologie supérieure et R.N.*, Résolution COM-510-5.2.1 (Commission des droits de la personne et des droits de la jeunesse)

Recommendation 47

Français	English
Rendre obligatoire la communication des noms des répondantes et des répondants désignés en matière d’accommodement pour un motif religieux au Secrétariat à la réforme des institutions démocratiques, à l’accès à l’information et à la laïcité.	Make it mandatory to communicate the names of designated contacts regarding accommodation for religious reasons to the Secretariat for the Reform of Democratic Institutions, Access to Information and Laicity.

Many organizations fail to comply with the existing legal obligation to appoint an accommodation respondent. Mandating that organizations report those names would allow the Secretariat to track compliance and disseminate information, promoting consistency.

The BCHA supports this recommendation.

This will allow the government to track who the designated religious accommodation point persons are. This ensures that relevant updates and best practices can be disseminated to public organizations.

Recommendation 48

Français	English
Faire en sorte que les répondantes et les répondants en matière d'accommodement pour un motif religieux soient également répondantes et répondants en matière de laïcité.	Ensure that those responsible for accommodation on religious grounds are also responsible for laicity.

This recommendation facilitates merging the Neutrality and Laicity Acts, by requiring that the person responsible for religious accommodation requests also oversees organizational laicity.

The BCHA supports this recommendation.

Any individual trained to oversee religious accommodations will have an underlying understanding of the purpose and value of the state's duty of religious neutrality and vice versa. Merging these roles simplifies the bureaucracy required of smaller organizations.

Recommendation 49

Français	English
Prévoir la transmission systématique au Secrétariat à la réforme des institutions démocratiques, à l'accès à l'information et à la laïcité des demandes en matière d'accommodement pour un motif religieux ou relatives à la laïcité reçues et traitées au sein des organisations.	Provide for the systematic transmission to the Secretariat for the Reform of Democratic Institutions, Access to Information and Laicity of requests for accommodation on religious grounds or relating to laicity received and processed within organizations.

Currently, requests are rarely tracked, limiting the government's ability to assess the scope of religious accommodation issues. Providing these to the government would provide the Secretariat with objective data to inform future recommendations and guidance.

The BCHA supports this recommendation.

As an evidence-driven organization, collecting and compiling this data is critical to developing a robust understanding of the nature and response to accommodation requests, facilitating further iterative improvements to the Act.

Recommendation 50

Français	English
Prévoir qu'il ne soit pas possible d'accorder un accommodement pour un motif religieux concernant un enfant ou une étudiante ou un étudiant sans consultation préalable de la direction ou d'une personne désignée par cette dernière.	It should be stipulated that no accommodation may be granted for a religious reason concerning a child or student without prior consultation with the administration or a person designated by the administration.

Centralizing the handling of religious accommodation requests for minors and students with the administration is considered a good practice that ensures consistent decision-making, upholds established rules, and prevents conflicts.

The BCHA supports this recommendation.

Requiring management sign-off can create consistency across classrooms and facilitate tracking (per Recommendation 49). Such centralization must be sensitive to the privacy rights of those making accommodation requests, particularly as they are minors.

CONCLUSION: TOWARD AN INCLUSIVE AND PRINCIPLED SECULARISM

The BC Humanist Association recognizes and supports Quebec's effort to clarify the relationship between religion and the state. A democratic society benefits when governments articulate, debate, and refine the meaning of religious neutrality. The Committee's report contains important and constructive proposals: particularly those that strengthen the separation of religion and state, eliminate institutional religious privilege, and protect access to reproductive healthcare.

However, neutrality must be carefully defined. A secular state fulfills its duty not by regulating the visibility of belief, but by restraining its own authority. The Supreme Court of Canada has affirmed that neutrality requires the state to neither favour nor hinder any religion. It does not require the homogenization of individuals within public space.

Across the Committee's fifty recommendations, two competing visions emerge. One reinforces institutional clarity: merging overlapping statutes, clarifying definitions, improving oversight, collecting data, ending religious subsidies, and ensuring universal access to healthcare. These measures strengthen secularism as a constraint on state power.

The other vision shifts neutrality toward uniformity. Defining personal attire as state messaging, lowering the threshold for refusing accommodations, expanding face-covering bans, or insulating laicity from judicial oversight risks transforming secularism into a tool of individual oppression. Such measures disproportionately affect religious minorities and weaken established human rights protections.

Additionally, language throughout the Committee's report unduly restricts these rights to citizens rather than all persons or reinforces binary understandings of gender. A secular concept of rights ought to be expansive and inclusive.

Quebec has a genuine opportunity to lead Canada in articulating a mature and coherent model of secularism. That leadership will be measured not by the strictness of symbolic prohibitions, but by the strength of its commitment to equality, freedom of conscience, and institutional restraint.

A secular state is not one that suppresses difference. Rather, it must govern impartially amid differences. By ensuring that laicity limits the power of the state rather than the identity of its citizens, Quebec can model a form of secularism that is principled, inclusive, and constitutionally defensible.

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