

Toronto, ON – December 21, 2021

Re: Bill 21

The recent removal of Fatemeh Anvari, a school teacher in Quebec, from her teaching position at Chelsea Elementary School reiterates the racist and problematic nature of Bill 21, which prohibits public servants in positions of authority from wearing any religious symbols. SABA Toronto opposed the passing of the Bill when it was introduced, and stands with our friends at the National Council of Canadian Muslims and the World Sikh Organization of Canada in calling for it to be repealed.

The Bill impacts not only school teachers, but also important participants in the justice system, including judges, prosecutors, and police officers. It disproportionately impacts those who wear religious symbols as part of the practice of their religion, such as Muslims who wear a hijab or Sikhs who wear a turban. This disproportionate impact seems to be deliberate – the Quebec government has invoked the notwithstanding clause to implement the Bill, which allows the legislature to override the religious freedoms and protections guaranteed by the *Charter of Rights and Freedoms*. The notwithstanding clause should not be used to pass laws that appear to be a blatant attack on the religious freedoms of minorities.

Though the Bill is currently being challenged in the Quebec courts, SABA Toronto encourages our political leaders, including those at the federal level, to find the courage to speak out about this xenophobic legislation and take whatever action they can to encourage its repeal. No Canadian should be forced to choose between their religion and their chosen profession, whether in or outside Quebec. We are heartened to see leaders at the local level contribute to the legal fees in order to combat the Bill, fees that were previously shouldered by mosques, gurdwaras, churches, synagogues, and non-profit organizations. There is a noticeable silence among the political leadership across Canada in speaking out against this Bill; a silence that empowers the supporters of this prejudicial legislation. Bill 21 is harmful to the mosaic fabric of this country and the values that we hold dear as Canadians.

SABA Toronto respects all religions and everyone's right to express their religious beliefs. We will continue to defend the religious freedom and diversity in our communities and workplaces.