

Bill 21 forced teachers to withdraw job applications, EMSB says

Premier Legault says the board is hurting its credibility with a pointless exercise by challenging the legality of Bill 21 in court

JASON MAGDER, MONTREAL GAZETTE ([HTTPS://MONTREALGAZETTE.COM/AUTHOR/JASONMAGDER](https://montrealgazette.com/author/jasonmagder)) & PHILIP AUTHIER, MONTREAL GAZETTE ([HTTPS://MONTREALGAZETTE.COM/AUTHOR/PHILIPAUTHIER](https://montrealgazette.com/author/philipauthier))



The English Montreal School Board says four prospective teachers withdrew their job applications in recent weeks because they would have had to remove their religious garb.

The teachers were all women wearing hijabs. They were interviewed and went through the board's hiring process, but were told that to be hired, they would have to comply with Bill 21, which bars public school teachers from wearing religious clothing while on the job.

EMSB chairperson Angela Mancini said all four decided to withdraw rather than remove their hijabs. One has since reconsidered and said she would remove her hijab when she goes to work, so she received an offer of employment, Mancini said.

"It's very unfortunate because we need teachers; we have a shortage," Mancini said Thursday. "So there has been an effect of Bill 21 in our ability to hire teachers."

The board voted Wednesday night to challenge the legality of Bill 21 in court.

The EMSB contends that, under the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, the bill cannot apply to a school board that administers minority language education.

"This particular law breeds a lot of intolerance," Mancini told reporters at Dalkeith Elementary School in Anjou.

Mancini said she abstained from the vote because she's concerned about a drain on funds the legal challenge is likely to entail.

The board is already fighting legal battles with the government on two other fronts: [the transfer of schools \(https://montrealgazette.com/news/local-news/emsb-contesting-law-that-allows-schools-transfers-without-consultation\)](https://montrealgazette.com/news/local-news/emsb-contesting-law-that-allows-schools-transfers-without-consultation) to a French-language board and the [plan to abolish school boards \(https://montrealgazette.com/news/local-news/emsb-to-fight-quebecs-plan-to-abolish-school-boards\)](https://montrealgazette.com/news/local-news/emsb-to-fight-quebecs-plan-to-abolish-school-boards).

The EMSB has \$1.6 million in surplus funds reserved to fight all three challenges. Mancini said she's concerned about devoting more funds that could be spent on improving schools.

She said the board will encourage other English school boards, the Quebec English School Boards Association (QESBA) and representatives of the English-speaking community to participate in the legal action and help raise funds.

In Quebec City, Premier François Legault dismissed the EMSB challenge as a pointless exercise, saying the government believes Bill 21 will stand up to any challenge.

“For me it’s more like a show,” Legault told reporters on his way to question period. “We’re very confident that we will win that, but in order to satisfy some people, they are putting on a big show.

“They must see that there’s a very large consensus in Quebec and it’s a very reasonable bill. We are forbidding religious signs only for a few employees being in an authority position.”

RELATED

Martin Patriquin: EMSB flip-flop on Bill 21 is a poor omen

(<https://montrealgazette.com/opinion/columnists/martin-patriquin-emsb-flip-flop-on-bill-21-is-a-poor-omen>)

EMSB facing possible trusteeship, Roberge says in wake of report

(<https://montrealgazette.com/news/quebec/government-report-says-emsb-is-dysfunctional-should-be-stripped-of-powers>)

Legault added he thinks the EMSB is hurting its credibility in pursuing this path.

“This kind of law has already existed for many, many years in some countries in Europe, and I’m confident that (Immigration Minister) Simon Jolin-Barrette did a good job — with advisers, lawyers — and we’re confident Bill 21 will be respected.”

Jolin-Barrette had a similar response to the challenge.

“The law applies to all school boards. The law applies to organizations mentioned in the secularism law, so the debate will proceed,” he said.

“One thing is certain: All the public organizations targeted by the law — including school boards — must respect the law.

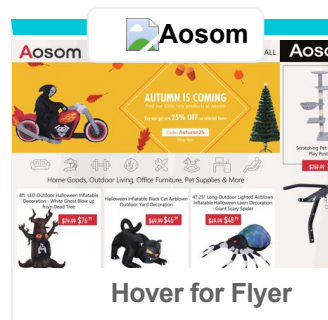
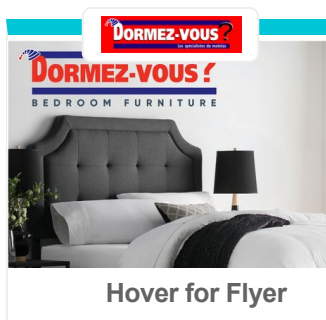
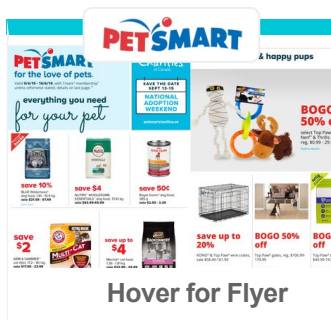
“There will be no exception.”

Like Legault, Jolin-Barrette said the legislation is on sound footing.

“We have a good bill, a bill that is moderate, a bill that is applicable. You see how it has worked since we adopted the law on June 16. That bill is applicable and will continue to be applied.”

jmagder@postmedia.com (mailto:jmagder@postmedia.com)

This Week's Flyers



Powered by

COMMENTS

Postmedia is pleased to bring you a new commenting experience. We are committed to maintaining a lively but civil forum for discussion and encourage all readers to share their views on our articles. Comments may take up to an hour for moderation before appearing on the site. We ask you to keep your comments relevant and respectful. Visit our [Community Guidelines](https://pages.postmedia.com/community-guidelines/) (https://pages.postmedia.com/community-guidelines/) for more information.

SIGN IN TO COMMENT

MOST LIKED

NEWEST

9 Comments