Title: Support for Wearing Religious Symbols by Public Servants

Sponsoring Municipality: Lac La Biche County

WHEREAS Alberta municipalities are culturally and socially diverse communities that have been home to Indigenous Peoples for thousands of years, and have brought together a wealth of ethnic and cultural groups from all over the world;

AND WHEREAS in 2019 the Province of Quebec enacted Bill 21, An Act Respecting the Laicity of the State which prohibits public servants, including those that work for municipalities, from wearing religious symbols in the exercise of their public service duties;

AND WHEREAS some municipalities across the country have passed resolutions opposing Quebec’s Bill 21 in the spirit of government responsibility to protect diversity, and tolerance, and further on the basis of religious freedom being a fundamental right protected by Canadian law;

NOW THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Rural Municipalities of Alberta (RMA) / Alberta Urban Municipalities Association (AUMA) oppose in principle Quebec’s Bill 21, An Act Respecting the Laicity of the State and continue to foster welcoming and inclusive municipalities that celebrate our cultural spectrum and diversity;

AND FURTHER that RMA / AUMA proactively oppose any future restrictions on the wearing of religious and cultural symbols by public servants in Alberta.

Member Background

In 2019, the Province of Quebec signed into law An Act Respecting the Laicity of the State (Bill 21), which prohibits public servants, including municipal employees, from wearing religious symbols while carrying out their duties. The Act purports to promote religious neutrality of the state, but instead creates an environment of intolerance, exclusion and division.

Lac La Biche County Council and staff celebrate and further the County’s cultural and religious diversity by promoting equal access to services, social inclusion and community cohesion. Therefore, Lac La Biche County Council passed a resolution formally opposing Bill 21 on October 8, 2019. Other municipalities – including, but not necessarily limited to, the City of Calgary, City of Victoria, and the Region of Peel – have also passed resolutions that denounce and oppose this divisive bill.

While there are no expected restrictions on wearing religious symbols for Alberta public servants, Lac La Biche County Council wishes to proactively collaborate with municipal leaders and stand united in support of religious freedoms.
A constitutional legal challenge against Bill 21 has been initiated by the Canadian Civil Liberties Association (CCLA) and the National Council of Canadian Muslims (NCCM).