



400 – 3381 Cambie Street, Vancouver, BC V5Z 4R3  
bchumanist.ca | info@bchumanist.ca  
Charitable Registration Number: 89100 4749 RR0001



55 Eglinton Avenue East Suite 307 Toronto, ON M4P 1G8  
phone: 647-391-2342 ♦ email: info@centreforinquiry.ca  
Charitable Registration Number: 83364 2614 RR0001

Hon Mauril Bélanger, PC MP  
09, Justice Building  
House of Commons  
Ottawa ON K1A 0A6

February 1, 2016

**Re: Bill C-210 An Act to amend the National Anthem Act (gender)**

Dear Mr Bélanger

As organizations that support efforts to promote gender equality, we are excited to hear about your private member's bill to make our national anthem gender-neutral. We ask that you go one step further and make a simple change to include the growing constituency of non-religious Canadians: Replace the line "God keep our land, glorious and free" with "O Canada! Glorious and free."

Fewer and fewer Canadians identify with traditional monotheistic religions. According to the 2011 National Household Survey, 24% of Canadians and 44% of people in British Columbia are not religious<sup>1</sup>. This is an increase from 17% and 36% in 2001<sup>2</sup>. However, the question asked by Statistics Canada exaggerates the number of religious respondents. A survey by Justason Market Intelligence in 2013 found that 64% of British Columbians do not practice a religion or faith<sup>3</sup> and a 2015 survey by Angus Reid institute found that only 30% of Canadians are inclined to embrace religion<sup>4</sup>.

It has been pointed out that the words "thy sons" were only inserted into the national anthem in 1914. In fact, the line "God keep our land" was also not part of the original poem by Robert Stanley Weir<sup>5</sup>. Changing this line is therefore in keeping with your goal to "make 'O Canada' more inclusive" by including the many atheist Canadians who are part of our great country, while also recognizing tradition.

---

<sup>1</sup> Statistics Canada. (2011) *2011 National Household Survey* [Data Set].

<sup>2</sup> Statistics Canada. (2001) *Census of Population* [Data Set].

<sup>3</sup> BC Humanist Association (2013) *2013 BC Religious and Secular Attitudes Poll* [Data Set]. Justason Market Intelligence [Producer]. [http://www.bchumanist.ca/2013\\_bc\\_religious\\_and\\_secular\\_attitudes\\_poll](http://www.bchumanist.ca/2013_bc_religious_and_secular_attitudes_poll)

<sup>4</sup> Angus Reid Institute. (2015) *Religion and faith in Canada today* [Data Set]. <http://angusreid.org/faith-in-canada/>

<sup>5</sup> Canadian Department of National Heritage. National Anthem: O Canada. Accessed 29 January 2016. <http://www.pch.gc.ca/pgm/ceem-cced/symb/anthem-eng.cfm>

The French lyrics are significantly more religious, with references to carrying the cross and valour steeped in faith, and are worthy of their own debate. For now, we ask for a simple amendment to your bill to make the English-language anthem inclusive of those of us who do not believe in God.

Sincerely

Ian Bushfield  
Executive Director, BC Humanist Association

Eric Adriaans  
National Executive Director, CFI Canada

Cc

Leona Alleslev, MP

*The BC Humanist Association has been providing a community and voice for Humanists, atheists, agnostics and the non-religious of Metro Vancouver and British Columbia since 1984.*

*CFI Canada's mission is to provide education and training to the public in the application of skeptical, secular, rational and humanistic inquiry through conferences, symposia, lectures, published works and the maintenance of a library.*