



Foundation Catholic Education St. Maarten

Stichting Katholiek Onderwijs St. Maarten

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Chamber of Commerce # 19027.0

Patience Involvement Cooperation

To: Minister of Education, Culture, Youth and Sports
Ms. Melissa Gumbs
New Government Administration Building
Soualiga Road # 1
Philipsburg, St. Maarten



Re: Feedback follow-up on Hair Discrimination and upcoming Legislation Amendments

Date: August 18, 2025

Dear Minister Gumbs,

Thank you for your correspondence dated August 12, 2025, regarding alleged hair discrimination and proposed upcoming legislative amendments. SKOS appreciates the opportunity to provide our comprehensive response to the matters as this seems warranted.

At the outset, we wish to state unequivocally that SKOS will continue to maintain and enforce our current biblical hairstyle policies and comprehensive Catholic formation standards, as these constitute essential elements of our religious educational mission protected under constitutional law and European human rights provisions. Let us explain.

Procedural concerns and consultation deficiencies

As you are aware, not all School Boards were present at the June 25, 2025 meeting due to prior commitments. Our request for the documentation of the meeting was not honored, limiting our ability to provide timely input on matters fundamentally affecting our constitutional rights. Relevant documentation was not shared with affected institutions, undermining genuine collaborative policy development. We trust future engagements will ensure broader participation and proper consultation before MECYS implements changes that may violate constitutional and human rights protections.

Constitutional foundation and religious freedom rights

SKOS operates as a special denominational educational institution (*bijzonder onderwijs*) under Article 11 of the Constitution (Staatsregeling), Article 14 of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) and

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Article 2 of protocol 1 ECHR. Our institution possesses fundamental constitutional rights to provide Catholic education according to our religious convictions, biblical teaching, and Church doctrine. These are inherent fundamental rights protecting religious educational autonomy from state interference.

Article 2 of Protocol 1 to the ECHR explicitly guarantees: *"No person shall be denied the right to education. In the exercise of any functions which it assumes in relation to education and to teaching, the State shall respect the right of parents to ensure such education and teaching in conformity with their own religious and philosophical convictions."*

This provision directly supports parental choice of Catholic education and prohibits state interference with religious educational institutions serving families seeking education consistent with their Catholic faith and biblical convictions.

As a Catholic educational institution, SKOS maintains policies grounded in Sacred Scripture, for this matter amongst others: 1 Corinthians 11:14-15, where the Apostle Paul teaches: *"Does not the very nature of things teach you that if a man has long hair, it is a disgrace to him, but that if a woman has long hair, it is her glory? For long hair is given to her as a covering."* Our hairstyle policies serve dual biblical purposes: maintaining gender complementarity as established by divine creation and providing essential disciplinary formation for Christian character development.

Discriminatory inconsistency in proposed legislation

We note concerning inconsistency in the proposed legislative framework. While the Ministry indicates that *"hijabs and other religious head coverings will also be protected,"* the same protection apparently does not extend to Catholic-prescribed hairstyles biblically mandated for our students. This selective accommodation constitutes religious discrimination against Catholic educational institutions and our constitutional right to implement comprehensive faith formation according to biblical teaching.

The proposed legislation protects Islamic religious practices (hijabs) while simultaneously prohibiting Catholic religious practices (biblical hairstyle requirements). This differential treatment violates principles of religious equality, constitutional protection for all faith traditions, and ECHR provisions protecting parental educational choice according to religious convictions. If religious accommodations are appropriate for some faiths, they must be equally available for Catholic institutions operating according to biblical mandates.

Addressing unfounded claims regarding alleged racial impact and inequity

The Ministry's correspondence references policies that *"disproportionately impact students of African descent."* We reject this characterization on several fundamental grounds:

Problematic racial categorization

What exactly constitutes "African descent." How many generations of ancestors must have lived in Africa to qualify? Would this include families whose ancestors left Africa centuries ago? What about mixed heritage from multiple continents? Would students with ancestors from North Africa, East Africa, or Southern Africa be categorized identically despite vastly different cultural and genetic backgrounds?

Introducing racial categories into educational policy represents a troubling departure from equality and non-discrimination principles. Categorizing students by alleged racial descent for policy purposes constitutes the very discrimination that modern legal frameworks seek to eliminate.

Hair length and race

What does racial descent have to do with hair length? Our biblical requirements focus exclusively on hair length - requiring long hair for female students and short hair for male students according to Holy Scripture. Hair length is not determined by racial or ethnic background. Students of all backgrounds are equally capable of growing their hair to required lengths or maintaining required short styles. The implication that certain racial groups cannot comply with hair length requirements introduces racial stereotyping that is both unfounded and inappropriate.

Religious exclusivity of hairstyles and comprehensive prohibited practices

Beyond hair length requirements, SKOS prohibits hairstyles and adornments that serve as religious symbols or expressions of non-Catholic faith traditions. As stated explicitly in our enrollment handbook, an exclusively Catholic institution cannot permit students to display religious symbols from other faiths through their appearance.

These prohibitions align directly with our enrollment handbook's stated requirements that "*dreadlocks, ritual braids, adornments/beads, extensions*" and other non-Catholic religious or cultural expressions are forbidden.¹ The handbook explicitly states these requirements serve to maintain Catholic identity and prevent the display of "*hairstyles reflecting other religious and/or cultural traditions, practices, or spiritual systems.*"

¹ *Eastern Religious and Spiritual Practices:*

- Hindu Jata or matted locks: Worn by sadhus representing dedication to Hindu deities, constituting idolatry (forbidden in Exodus 20:3);
- Buddhist tonsure variations: Partially shaved heads symbolizing monastic commitment to non-Christian enlightenment rather than salvation through Christ;
- Sikh uncut hair (Kesh): One of the Five Ks representing religious commitment incompatible with our biblical requirements and creating dual religious allegiance forbidden in (1 Corinthians 10:21);
- Hindu tilaka markings through hair parting: Invoking false gods and violating the commandment against idolatry;
- Hare Krishna sikha (single tuft of hair): Dedication to Krishna rather than Christ as Lord and Savior.

Islamic and Judaic Expressions:

- Islamic beard styles without mustache: Identifying adherence to specific Islamic traditions that deny the Trinity and Christ's divinity;
- Payot (side curls): Orthodox Jewish interpretation of Levitical law, representing rejection of the New Covenant in Christ;
- Nazarite vows of uncut hair: While biblical, these represent individual covenants outside Catholic sacramental practice and the authority of the Church.

New Age, Pagan, and Hedonistic Expressions:

- Mohawk variations representing indigenous spiritual practices or punk rebellion against authority (violating Fourth Commandment respect for legitimate authority);
- Viking/Norse braids with runes or pagan symbols woven in (Invoking non-Christian deities explicitly condemned in Deuteronomy 18:10-12);
- Wiccan or pagan ritual braids incorporating natural elements (Practicing divination and occultism forbidden in Galatians 5:20);
- Hedonistic styles promoting sensuality over modesty (Violating Catholic virtue of temperance and modesty required in 1 Timothy 2:9);
- Gothic or occult inspired styles with symbols of death or darkness (Glorifying darkness rather than Christ as Light of the World (John 8:12));
- Tribal scarification patterns shaved into hair (Prohibited pagan mourning practices from Leviticus 19:27-28).

Rastafarian and African Traditional Religious Expressions:

- Dreadlocks (locs): Religious covenant in Rastafarianism representing the Lion of Judah and rejection of Babylon, directly conflicting with Catholic teaching on Christ as the true Lion of Judah (Revelation 5:5)
- Ritual braiding with cowrie shells or spiritual beads: Used in Yoruba, Vodou, and other African traditional religions for spiritual protection (violating the First Commandment by attributing divine protection to objects rather than God alone); Bantu knots when worn for ancestral worship purposes: Contradicting Catholic doctrine that prayer should be directed to God alone, not deceased ancestors;

Permitting any of these styles would transform our Catholic school into a multi faith exhibition space where students display competing religious identities. This directly contradicts our mission to provide exclusively Catholic formation. Just as we would not permit students to wear pentacles, ankhs, Om symbols, yin yang pendants, or conduct pagan rituals, we cannot permit hairstyles serving the same religious identification purpose.

The Ministry must understand that these are not arbitrary cultural preferences but protection of our sacred educational space from religious syncretism and confusion. Students cannot simultaneously submit to Catholic formation while displaying allegiance to incompatible spiritual systems.

Unsubstantiated impact claims

Biblical hair length requirements apply uniformly to all students regardless of race, ethnicity, or cultural background. Every female student, regardless of racial heritage, must maintain natural growing hair on or below shoulder length. Every male student, regardless of racial heritage, must maintain hair above collar, ears and eyes. These requirements are based on biblical gender distinctions, not racial categories.

More fundamentally, the Ministry's invocation of "inequity" reveals a logical impossibility when applied to voluntary selection. Inequity requires involuntary disadvantage in accessing necessary services. SKOS provides *optional* religious education, not mandatory public services. Families actively choose Catholic formation with full knowledge of all requirements. Public schools remain freely available for those preferring secular education. Claiming inequity when people receive exactly what they chose is logically incoherent.

Community Distress Claims Are Unsubstantiated

The Ministry references a *"longstanding source of distress within our community."* Within our Catholic educational community (the relevant community for our institutional policies) there is no distress regarding biblical hairstyle requirements. A comprehensive poll among our parents showed 99.4% satisfaction with current policies. Out of 1,400 parents, only 9 have expressed reservations in the past, and these are non-Catholic parents who knowingly enrolled in Catholic education. While SKOS welcomes enrollment from non-Catholic families seeking Catholic educational excellence, such enrollment is obviously conditional upon full subscription to and compliance with our Catholic formation requirements, including our comprehensive behavioral, spiritual, and appearance standards as established in our enrollment handbook. Non-Catholic families choosing SKOS do so with complete knowledge that Catholic teaching takes

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- Thread wrapping associated with African spiritual practices: Representing animistic beliefs that creation itself possesses spiritual power, opposing Catholic teaching on God as sole source of grace.

Secular Ideological Expressions:

- Political symbols or messages shaved into hair: Creating division in the Body of Christ rather than unity in faith;
- Gang affiliated styles or patterns: Promoting violence contrary to the Gospel of peace;
- LGBTQ+ pride colors dyed into hair: Advocating ideologies incompatible with Catholic moral teaching on human sexuality;
- Anarchist or anti authority symbols: Rejecting legitimate authority established by God (Romans 13:1).

Adornments

Adornments of any kind (whether decorative, cultural, or religious), beads, shells, feathers, crystals, amulets, non-Catholic religious symbols (woven into hair). These items function as talismans and protective charms, demonstrating lack of faith in divine providence and Catholic sacramental protection. They violate Canon 1211 requiring Catholic sacred spaces remain free from anything foreign to divine worship.



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precedence over all other religious, cultural, or personal preferences, and that their children will receive exclusively Catholic formation according to biblical mandate.

The alleged "psychological distress" lacks empirical foundation. Zero psychological studies validate distress claims among SKOS students. Parents report their children thrive under consistent standards and clear expectations. The alleged psychological distress appears therefore manufactured to justify dismantling religious standards rather than reflecting actual student experiences.

This opposition stems from a fringe minority seeking Catholic educational excellence while refusing to adhere to Catholic formation requirements fundamental to our institutional identity. These individuals want the benefits without accepting the comprehensive formation that produces such excellence.

If these individuals are dissatisfied with public school quality (which appears to be the actual source of distress), the Ministry should focus on improving public educational standards rather than transforming special denominational schools into secular institutions.

Biblical standards apply universally

Our policies reflect biblical teaching applying universally to all Catholics regardless of racial, ethnic, or cultural background. Gospel and biblical mandates are not limited by racial categories but call all believers to conform to Christian standards. Catholic identity transcends racial distinctions while maintaining biblically-mandated requirements for appropriate gender expression and Christian disciplinary formation.

The universality of Catholic teaching means biblical requirements apply equally to all students choosing Catholic education, regardless of ancestral heritage or cultural background. The Church's teaching on gender complementarity, expressed in Holy Scripture, is not culturally relative but represents divine revelation binding all Catholics. Cultural preferences and ethnic practices must yield to biblical mandate when families voluntarily choose comprehensive Catholic formation.

Students from diverse backgrounds embracing Catholic education understand that Catholic identity takes precedence over all other identities and allegiances. This is not discrimination but the fundamental requirement of authentic Catholic discipleship - that Christ and His teaching come first in all life aspects, including personal appearance and behavior standards.

Parental rights and educational choice under ECHR

European Convention on Human Rights Article 2, Protocol 1 specifically protects parents who consciously chose Catholic education for their children *"in conformity with their own religious and philosophical convictions."* These parents exercised their fundamental human right to select education aligning with their Catholic faith and biblical worldview.

The Ministry's proposed interference with our biblical hairstyle requirements directly violates these parents' protected rights under European human rights law. Parents choosing SKOS do so specifically because we provide comprehensive Catholic formation including biblical standards for appearance, behavior, and spiritual development. Government interference with these standards undermines parental educational choice and violates European human rights protections.



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Comprehensive catholic formation program

Our enrollment handbook establishes that SKOS provides comprehensive Catholic identity formation encompassing all student development aspects, including appearance standards reflecting biblical teaching on gender complementarity and Christian discipline. Parents voluntarily choose Catholic education with full knowledge of our requirements:

- (i) **Cultural subordination provisions** requiring Catholic teaching to take precedence over cultural preferences;
- (ii) **Biblical hairstyle standards** requiring long hair for female students and short hair for male students;
- (iii) **Religious exclusivity policies** prohibiting hairstyles associated with non-Catholic spiritual traditions;
- (iv) **Disciplinary formation standards** developing Christian character through consistent adherence to biblical principles.

These policies serve multiple essential purposes within our Catholic educational mission: maintaining order and discipline necessary for effective learning, forming Christian character, teaching respect for legitimate authority as mandated by Scripture, and preparing students for faithful Catholic discipleship.

Institutional integrity and educational coherence

The Ministry's directive essentially requires Catholic institutions to abandon core biblical teachings regarding gender complementarity and Christian discipline. This constitutes government interference with religious doctrine, undermines the fundamental purpose of Catholic education, and violates European human rights protections for parental educational choice according to religious convictions.

It feels fundamentally wrong to have students attend a Catholic school while displaying symbols, practices, or appearances contradicting Catholic teaching and biblical mandate. This would undermine the very educational environment parents chose under their protected rights to ensure education conforming to their Catholic faith.

Our hairstyle policies are not arbitrary cultural preferences but biblically-mandated requirements essential to our Catholic educational mission. They reflect divine teaching regarding appropriate gender expression, Christian disciplinary formation, and submission to legitimate religious authority. Abandoning these requirements would compromise our institutional integrity and violate our sacred covenant with families seeking authentic Catholic education according to their protected religious convictions.

Legal precedent and timing concerns

These matters have been previously addressed by Sint Maarten Courts, Netherlands Courts, and European Courts, with decisions supporting religious educational autonomy. These legal precedents affirm our constitutional authority and basic human rights to maintain policies consistent with our Catholic identity and biblical teaching.

The Ministry's notice suggesting imminent policy changes one week before school reopening has caused significant concern. Such timing is disruptive, prevents proper consultation, and risks unsettling students and parents looking forward to the new academic year. Parents have signed and agreed to our policies and retain freedom to choose educational institutions aligning with their values, including public schools.

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Respectful dialogue and collaborative approach

SKOS remains committed to respectful dialogue while maintaining our non-negotiable commitment to biblical teaching and Catholic educational standards protected under constitutional law and European human rights frameworks. We respectfully request that the Ministry:

- (i) **Recognize constitutional religious freedom** protections for Catholic educational institutions;
- (ii) **Honor European human rights provisions** protecting parental educational choice according to religious convictions;
- (iii) **Ensure equal treatment** for all religious practices, including Catholic biblical requirements;
- (iv) **Respect voluntary educational choice** rather than imposing secular standards on religious institutions;
- (v) **Engage in genuine consultation** before implementing policy changes that may violate human rights protections;
- (vi) **Provide adequate time and documentation** for meaningful consultation on matters affecting constitutional rights.

Conclusion

SKOS will continue upholding biblical hairstyle requirements and Catholic formation standards as essential elements of our religious educational mission, grounded in Sacred Scripture and protected by constitutional law and ECHR Article 2, Protocol 1.

These policies represent our firm institutional commitment. They were chosen voluntarily by families exercising their fundamental human right to ensure education conforming to their Catholic religious convictions. The 99.4% parental satisfaction confirms our policies serve families who deliberately chose Catholic education.

We cannot compromise our Catholic identity or biblical mandates to accommodate preferences contradicting our religious foundation. Parents seeking alternatives to our comprehensive Catholic formation have numerous public-school options available throughout Sint Maarten.

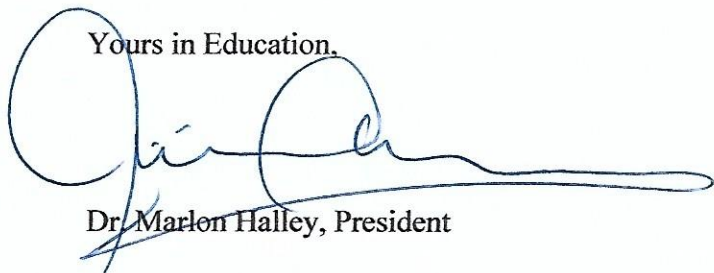
SKOS remains steadfast in our commitment to biblical truth and Catholic educational excellence.

Respectfully submitted in service of Catholic education,

On behalf of SKOS School Board

Foundation Catholic Education St. Maarten

Yours in Education,



Dr. Marlon Halley, President



Mrs. L. Aventurin-Hodge, Executive Director

Cc: Department Head of Education, Mrs. S. Lacorbiniere-Hodge, Inspectorate of Education, Mrs. D. Illis, Ombudsman, Ms. G. Mossel, Secretariate of Parliament of St. Maarten, Members of Parliament of St. Maarten