

QCGN Eager to Work on Modernization of Official Languages Act

MONTREAL, November 23, 2021 – As the 44th Canadian Parliament of the House of Commons gets under way, the Quebec Community Groups Network welcomes the opportunity to work with the new Minister of Official Languages, Ginette Petitpas Taylor, and Francophone minority communities from across Canada to modernize the Official Languages Act, legislation that is critical to the vitality of our minority language communities.

“As Canadians, our two official languages are part of who we are,” read Gov. Gen. Mary Simon as she delivered today’s Speech from the Throne reiterating the Liberal government message that “it is essential to support official language minority communities, and to protect and promote French outside and inside Quebec.”

QCGN President Marlene Jennings said she is pleased the government will reintroduce the proposed Act for the Substantive Equality of French and English and the Strengthening of the Official Languages Act. “The QCGN had serious concerns with the government’s previously proposed legislation: Bill C-32, An act to amend the Official Languages Act, which we hope will be addressed in forthcoming federal legislation,” she added.

“For more than a decade, the QCGN and English-speaking Quebec have engaged in efforts to modernize the Official Languages Act,” Jennings underlined. The community’s central guiding principle is that the equality of status of English and French remain a cornerstone of the Official Languages Act. “English and French are the official languages of Canada and they must have equal status and rights under the law, as well as privileges regarding their use in all institutions and enterprises under the jurisdiction of the federal government.”

“Canada’s linguistic duality – a core national value – is a national vision. It cannot be subjugated to or interfered with by provincial language regimes,” added QCGN Board member Joan Fraser. Proposed asymmetry and territorialization introduced in the previous version of the bill were wrongheaded and dangerous, she stressed.

“We are particularly concerned that new official language of service and work obligations on federally regulated business that were proposed in Bill C-32 would be created only for Francophones,” she said: “Our community of 1.1 million English-speaking Quebecers expects the Government of Canada to include us in these language rights.”

“It is disappointing that the consensus achieved between Canada’s English and French linguistic minorities during the Senate Standing Committee on Official Languages’ exhaustive study on modernizing the Act was lost,” added Jennings: “Bill C-32 radically changed course on the traditional approach to official languages. The bill may have been politically useful, but official languages is a sensitive policy area that depends on broad consensus.”

“We expect the Minister to take the necessary time to ensure the integrity of Canada’s Official Languages Act is maintained through a principled and de-politicized consultative approach that respects our Constitution and reinforces a national vision of linguistic duality,” Jennings concluded.

The Quebec Community Groups Network (www.qcgn.ca) is a not-for-profit organization bringing together English-language community organizations across Quebec. As a centre of evidence-based expertise and collective action it identifies, explores, and addresses strategic issues affecting the development and vitality of the English-speaking community of Quebec and encourages dialogue and collaboration among its member organizations, individuals, community groups, institutions, and leaders.

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