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QUEBECERS UNITE AGAINST BILL 96

By Marlene Jennings
QCGN President



Last Tuesday, the QCGN held a press conference to discuss the harmful impacts of **Bill 96, An Act respecting French, the official and common language of Québec**. More than 150 community leaders were on hand to support our message and concerns about the negative impact that this legislation would have not just on our community, but on Quebec society as a whole. I want to thank all of our QCGN members and stakeholders for participating. They helped demonstrate our community's wide opposition to this far-reaching bill.

Our message was effectively reinforced by our guest speakers including human rights lawyer **Julius Grey**; **Aki Tchitacov**, executive director of YES Employment + Entrepreneurship; **Dan Lamoureux**, president of the Quebec English School Boards Association; **Nancy Beattie**, director of Champlain College – Lennoxville; Côte-St-Luc Mayor **Mitchell Brownstein**; and QCGN Board member **Dr. Sandra K. de la Ronde**. (More details in story below.)

For the past year, the QCGN has served as a crucial and constructive voice through this emotional and, on occasion, hostile debate. Since Bill 96 was tabled in the National Assembly last May 13, we at the QCGN have repeatedly explained the critical concerns of our community to all Quebecers and to our government. We have repeatedly insisted that our legislators reasonably address the serious apprehensions of English-speaking Quebecers. Our cries and concerns have gone unheeded.

Throughout we have posed vital questions that remain unanswered.

1. Why is Quebec so intent on pre-emptively overriding the Quebec and Canadian Charters of Rights and Freedoms? This would set aside our proud tradition of protecting human rights as well as international human rights standards to which Quebec has bound itself.
2. Why does Bill 96 further limit access for our community to education, health and social services, and the courts? Moreover, how does restricting services for English-speaking Quebecers protect and promote the French language?
3. Why is Quebec adding a number of new and draconian powers to the Charter of the French Language? This includes new search and monitoring powers that would be

Language Minister **Simon Jolin-Barrette** stated last February that his goal was to protect and promote French and that the English-speaking community and our institutions would be protected. While he continues to push that refrain, it is clear that Bill 96 will have long term, negative impacts on individual English-speaking Quebecers; on our health care, education, and other institutions; and on our community organizations.

We have repeatedly addressed these questions to the government and have asked to meet with Jolin-Barrette, Premier **François Legault** – who kept for himself the cabinet portfolio as Minister Responsible for Relations with English-Speaking Quebecers – as well as MNA **Christopher Skeete**, Legault’s parliamentary assistant responsible for relations with our community. Skeete will be in Rawdon next week for a talk entitled *What Does Bill 96 Mean For You?* where he is proposing to answer questions from English-speaking Quebecers about this proposed legislation. We suggested to Skeete that the QCGN host a similar event where members of our community could come and ask about Bill 96 and their concerns. He has not acknowledged receipt of our invitation.

Bill 96 Would Hurt Community Vitality

Unquestionably, if passed into law, Bill 96 would hurt the vitality of our community. And we would be unable to fight back on account of the unprecedented, pre-emptive use of the notwithstanding clause which would shield Bill 96 and run roughshod over our rights and the rights of all Quebecers.

QCGN continues to urge the government to set aside this proposed legislation. We remain convinced there are more effective and inclusive ways to protect and promote the French language than those outlined in Bill 96. This bill simply does not reflect the modern inclusive Quebec that members of our community have helped build.

If you missed the press conference, or wish to watch it again on QCGN’s YouTube channel, please click [here](#). Also see extensive coverage of the press conference, the upcoming rally, and Bill 96 in the [Montreal Gazette](#), [Global News](#), [CTV Montreal](#), [CityNews](#), [MTL Blog](#), and the [Quebec Chronicle-Telegraph](#).

Join Us to March Against Bill 96 on May 14



Faced with the intransigence of the government on this issue, the QCGN and its partner organizations, the [English Parents’ Committee Association](#), the [Quebec Federation of Home and School Associations](#), and the [Quebec English School Boards Association](#) (QESBA) are organizing a rally against the bill. We are joining forces with a number of other groups including students, teachers and parents to carry out this demonstration.

Keep abreast of details on our [Quebecers Against Bill 96 - Québécois-es contre le projet de loi 96](#) Facebook page. If you like the page, you will receive updates and information. If you are planning to demonstrate with us, you can sign up on the [Facebook event](#) or, if you are not on that social media platform, you can register [here](#). Please do not sign up more than once.

QCGN Renewal

Over the last two years, the QCGN has been immersed in a renewal process that will set the course for our organization for the years ahead. This has been no small feat as the pandemic has created barriers to us coming together as a community. Meanwhile the Coalition Avenir Québec government has continued to undermine institutions at the heart of English-speaking Quebec.

Despite these challenges, the QCGN has persisted in our commitment to adapt to the needs of our community. The renewal process has sought to develop and implement a new model

The road to renewal has been thoughtful and thorough. Through consultations with our members and stakeholders, we gained a refreshed sense of our community's needs and a new understanding of the challenges we face. This process included a long look at the QCGN's internal processes, resources, and approach to advocacy and community development. This has led to a renewed vision for the organization that is open and inclusive with a sharper focus on advocacy through community development.

Quebec's English-speaking community continues to change and evolve. It includes new and different voices that must be heard in order to promote and defend the vitality of our English-speaking community. The model we have been developing will provide a voice for more people, enshrine a commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion; and ensure representation from all corners of Quebec.

Renewed Vision

The Board of Directors is strong in our commitment to work with our members to bring this renewed vision to life. It is one that we hope will allow the QCGN and its members to better advocate for the needs and priorities of our groups and support the vitality of all English-speaking communities in Quebec.

I am pleased to announce the Transition Committee that will steer the renewal process. Chaired by the Secretary of the QCGN, **Matt Aronson**, members include Treasurer, **Eva Ludvig**, as well as **Eleni Bakopanos**, **Gerald Cutting**, **Valerie Gordon-Williams** and **Matthew Harrington**, who chaired the Renewal Committee which has passed the reins on to the Transition Committee.

We will be discussing the renewal process with our members in the coming weeks to determine how this will usher in positive change for our organization. I look forward to sharing more on this initiative with you all in the months ahead.

Eleni Bakopanos appointed to QCGN Board

I am pleased to announce that at its latest meeting, the Board of Directors appointed the Honourable Eleni Bakopanos to fill a vacancy. A former MP, Eleni has served as a member of the QCGN's Renewal Committee, and she was a community commissioner for QCGN's parallel hearings on Bill 96 last fall.

Eleni is a public policy analyst, political media commentator, and public speaker. First elected in 1993 as the Member of Parliament for Saint-Denis, she was re-elected three times in Ahuntsic. A member of the Privy Council of Canada, she served in a number of parliamentary roles including Assistant Deputy Speaker and Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada and as special advisor for caucus to Opposition Leader Stéphane Dion. She is a member and has served as President of the Women's Commission of the Liberal Party of Canada (Quebec).



Prior to entering politics at the federal level, Eleni worked in provincial politics with the Liberal Party of Quebec and in the Quebec government as policy advisor to the Quebec Premier and the Minister of Immigration and Cultural Communities. She was also a candidate in the electoral district of Crémazie for the Liberal Party of Quebec.

In addition, she was Senior Director for Government Relations at McGill University, her alma mater, and is presently Honorary President of the McGill Women's Alumnae Association. She also serves as a director for a number of non-governmental and not-for-profit boards and is the past chair of the national board of directors of Equal Voice, whose mission is to elect more women at all levels of government. Eleni has also volunteered with many Quebec women's organizations, including the Montreal Council of Women; Groupe Femmes, Politique

QCGN AND COMMUNITY PARTNERS SPEAK OUT AGAINST NEGATIVE IMPACTS OF BILL 96

By Rita Legault

QCGN Director of Communications

More than 160 community leaders were on hand last Tuesday for a community press conference denouncing Quebec's Bill 96, the Coalition Avenir Québec's proposed legislation to enforce and reinforce the Charter of the Quebec Language (Bill 101).

QCGN President **Marlene Jennings** reminded reporters and participants that Bill 96 calls for the most sweeping use of human rights overrides in the history of Quebec and Canada, ousting the application of both the Quebec Charter of Human Rights and Freedoms and the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

"The fundamental human rights and freedoms of all Quebecers are being cast aside by the Quebec government which will have unprecedented and unchecked power to implement the Charter of the French Language," she warns. "Quebecers will be at the mercy of the Minister of the French Language, with no recourse to the courts. When inspectors from *l'Office québécois de la langue française* show up to seize your cellphone, computer, and other equipment; fine your business; and dictate what language you can speak and where, we will all be powerless."

QCGN Board Member Dr. Sandra K. de la Ronde commented that English-speaking Quebecers currently have the right to access services in English "in keeping with the organizational structure and human, material and financial resources of the institutions." However, she noted, in many regions of the province with significant numbers of English-speaking residents, institutions and their staff do not have a matching obligation to provide those services.

Access Plan Outdated

The right must be designated in an access plan. These access plans, by the way, are already wildly out of date due to the dithering and dillydallying of our current and past governments. This situation will be worsened because of new constraints that Bill 96 places on the hiring of bilingual staff. Under these changes, institutions will have the burden to prove a job requires staffing by a bilingual worker and that no existing service or employee can provide the care.

"Imagine this possible scenario," commented Sandra, who sits on the board of Heritage Lower St-Lawrence. "An English-speaking senior with Alzheimer's is living in a CHSLD long term care centre which is not designated as bilingual. While a unilingual Francophone patient attendant is giving this patient a bath, the senior complains in English that the bath water is too hot. The PAB does not understand the patient who ends up with second degree burns."

"This is but one example of the potential damaging impacts of Bill 96 in health care," she said. "Now, imagine a social worker who can barely understand English assigned to a suicidal teen who cannot speak French."

"In health and social services, it is clearly documented that poor communications lead to poor outcomes," said Marlene. "The language of communications must be left to health care professionals and their patients – not to poorly conceived legislation."

Fewer Bilingual Judges

As a former lawyer and past chair of QCGN's Access to Justice in English committee, Marlene said he is also worried that Quebec's Chief Justice would be prohibited from requiring that judges in our province's courts and tribunals be bilingual. This prohibition would also cover the Quebec Human Rights Tribunal, the Administrative Tribunal of Quebec, as well as tribunals dealing with labour, housing, and other issues.

official languages – would only be permitted at the discretion of the Minister of Justice and the Minister Responsible for the French Language. They would decide which judicial districts would be allowed bilingual judges. However first they would have to assess the level of English needed to serve as judge in a particular district; determine if there are already bilingual judges working in those districts; and take every reasonable measure to avoid requiring bilingualism to fill judgeship positions.

The practical implications for English-speaking Quebecers, particularly those living in regions, are vast.

Another change brought about by Bill 96 that carries negative impacts for our community is that the law would compel all “legal persons” – including small businesses and community not-for-profits like the QCGN and its member organizations to provide all their court pleadings in French. Filing French factums and certified translations would double the cost of going to court and force some groups to abandon important cases due to costs.

Marlene said the fact that government institutions – and this includes the civil service and public service jobs like all of those in government-run institutions such as hospitals and schools – will no longer be able to require bilingualism except in exceptional circumstances. “This means that bilingualism – for English- and French-speakers alike – will no longer be considered a valuable job skill.”

Marlene warned that if the government enacts the bill as currently written, the community will challenge it. Many individuals and groups have signed petitions and thousands of Quebecers have written letters both to Premier François Legault, Language Minister Simon Jolin-Barrette, and other MNAs. And a huge rally is being planned for May 14.

MOST ENGLISH-SPEAKING QUEBECERS HAVE DIFFICULTY ACCESSING QUEBEC GOVERNMENT SERVICES ONLINE IN ENGLISH

By Mitra Thompson
Project manager, Access to Justice in English

A strong majority of English-speaking Quebecers who participated in a recent QCGN poll say it has been difficult for them to access provincial government services online in English within the past two years. Almost two thirds of respondents – 60 per cent – rated their ease of access a paltry 0 to 4 out of a maximum score of 10.

This finding comes at a time when demand for accessing public services online is higher than ever before. For many Quebecers, the COVID-19 pandemic has meant relying on the internet to obtain the goods and services they need, with stores, services counters, and government offices often closed for months at a time. Indeed, nearly everyone who took the poll (96% of respondents) agree that “in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, it is more important than ever for all Quebecers to have easy access to public services online.”

This unique set of circumstances prompted the QCGN’s Justice team to investigate the level of access to online provincial government services in English, now selected as an issue for further research by the project.

The poll is an early part of this research. It was aimed at Quebec residents aged 18 and over with a preference for accessing government services in English. This informal survey conducted by QCGN’s Access to Justice in English project, and shared through the QCGN’s Network News, Weekly Update, and on Twitter. Though results are technically not representative of the English-speaking population of Quebec – no sample quotas or weighting were used – many of you took the time to share your experiences and impressions.

Challenges for the English-speaking Community

Results suggest that English-speaking Quebecers often struggle to access the information

three things:

- More information being available in French than English (84%)
- The client portal was available in French only (79%)
- Forms and documents were unavailable in English (77%)

Most people who experience difficulties accessing online services in English go on to take some form of action to access the information or services they need, but these efforts are often not enough: the poll finds that a significant number (43%) of those who took action say that they still cannot access the provincial services they need online.

Many unaware of Quebec.ca

In recent years, the Quebec government has been gradually migrating its information from various ministerial websites to a central platform at Quebec.ca. Most, though not all, content on this new site is available in English as well as French.

However, not everybody is aware of the government website, Quebec.ca, as a resource. While a majority of poll respondents (70 per cent) claim to have heard of the site, many (30 per cent) admit they've never heard of it.

Skepticism on improving online services in English

This combination of difficult access and not always knowing about bilingual alternatives is leading many in the community to be skeptical about the situation improving. The overwhelming majority of poll respondents – nine in ten (90%) – disagree with the statement “I am confident that the Quebec government will work to improve the availability of its online services in English for those who need it.”

In a post-COVID reality, reliance on online services to work and live is becoming increasingly important for many Quebecers of all language backgrounds. This new way of life is why the QCGN considers its research into access to English-language public services online to be crucial. Determining the most consequential areas where online public information and services are less accessible in English will be a vital part of protecting the health and well-being of Quebec's English-speaking population.

In all, 105 people took the online poll between January 31 and March 7, with roughly half coming from Montreal and many participating from other regions, such as the Outaouais, the Lower North Shore and Montérégie. More in-depth research on the issue will be forthcoming in the months ahead.

ENGLISH-SPEAKING QUEBEC WILL NOT BENEFIT EQUITABLY FROM RENEWED OFFICIAL LANGUAGE ACT

By Sylvia Martin-Laforge
QCGN Director General

Last Tuesday the **Quebec English-Speaking Communities Research Network** (QUESCREN), the **Canadian Institute for Research on Linguistic Minorities** (CIRLM) and the **Observatoire international des droits linguistiques** launched a special issue of the Linguistic Minorities and Society Journal entitled **50 Years of Implementing the Official Languages Act: Review and Prospects**.

Guest-edited by **Patrick Donovan** and **Lorraine O'Donnell** of QUESCREN along with **Érik Forgues** (CIRLM) and **Érik Labelle Eastaugh** (Observatoire international des droits linguistiques), this special issue gathers articles first presented during the 87th ACFAS congress in 2019. Coinciding with the 50th Anniversary of the Official Languages Act – the congress was an ideal time to review the Act in regard to its objectives and in light of the aspirations of official language minority communities (OLMCs) in Canada. It was also a good time to take stock as government and community stakeholders engaged in three years of

charge on [Erudit](#).

My article, entitled **Towards Equal Status: English-Speaking Minority Communities in Canada and the Official Languages Act** notes that the introduction of the **Report of the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism** lays the foundation for two official language minority communities in Canada, and the principle of equality, which “implies respect for the idea of minority status, both in the country as a whole and in each of its regions.” However, the Official Languages Act that flowed from the ‘Bi and Bi Commission, and the structures that oversee it, have not reflected an approach based on equality. The English-speaking community of Quebec – Canada’s English linguistic minority community – has not received “generous treatment” in the implementation of the Act.

After offering some ideas about why this situation developed and the impact it has had on the vitality of Quebec’s English-speaking community, I concluded that equality for both official language minority communities – the outcome envisioned by the Commissioners – had to be achieved through the modernization of the Official Languages Act.

The recent introduction **Bill C-13, An Act to amend the Official Languages Act, to enact the Use of French in Federally Regulated Private Businesses Act and to make related amendments to other Acts**, it is clear that equality remains elusive. Bill C-13 contains fundamental flaws, particularly in the light of Bill 96, the Quebec government’s proposed revision of the Charter of the French Language.

With Bill C-13, it is clear the federal government has abandoned 50 years of commitment to a national vision of linguistic duality and equality in federal law between our official languages from sea to sea to sea. The QCGN is concerned about the long-term effects proposed changes will have on the application of the Official Languages Act and the language rights of English-speaking Quebecers. We are particularly worried about the creation of new language of work and service rights for French in federally regulated businesses in Quebec. Read QCGN’s **preliminary analysis of Bill C-13**.

The QCGN has long advocated that federally regulated businesses be subject to a federal language regime that imposes language of service and work obligations for our two official languages. We were dismayed the federal government chose to create new language rights with respect to the use of French in federally regulated businesses operating in Quebec. This ignored 1.1 million English-speaking Quebecers and postponed help for Francophones outside of Quebec.

The QCGN acknowledges the national importance of protecting and promoting the French language, whose use is declining outside of Quebec. We also support the need for positive and immediate action to address population decline in French linguistic minority communities. However, we believe that these critical challenges can be addressed without abandoning Canada’s traditional approach to linguistic duality, which keeps both languages on an equal legal footing throughout Canada while giving special financial and material help to Francophone communities outside Quebec.

Meanwhile the QCGN is pleased that the bill offers new powers to the Commissioner of Official Languages and some clarity on the role of Treasury Board regarding the implementation of Parts IV, V, and VI of the Act. We were also pleased to see that the option to fund the Court Challenges Program is included in the bill, although this funding remains optional. This is a critical resource for Canadians exercising and advancing their equality and language rights. Still, we remain very concerned with the long-term impact of the interpretation of our community’s language rights and access to federal funding support under an Official Languages Act as amended by C-13.

The QCGN remains a leading voice for English-speaking Quebec in the modernization of Canada’s Official Languages Act and looks forward to engaging lawmakers as C-13 makes its way through the legislative process.

CONCERNED ABOUT IMPACT OF BILL 96 ON STUDENT SUCCESS

On April 12, hundreds of concerned parents, educators, and community member participated in a webinar on Bill 96 and student success. The event was prompted by an amendment to the proposed legislation which would have required all students at English-language colleges to pass at least three core courses in French.

This topic was clearly of concern since we received online registrations than for any previous webinars. There were numerous questions and the chat room was awash with comments about the undue stress that this amendment has caused; fear about what possible impact these new requirements will have on students' R scores and how this will affect their chances of attending university.

More than 350 people attend the online event that was organized by the QCGN along with the **English Parents' Committee Association**, the **Quebec Federation of Home and School Associations**, and the **Quebec English School Boards Association** (QESBA).

Our panel, composed of **Christian Corno**, Director General of Marianopolis College; **Alexandrah Cardona**, President of the Dawson Student Union; **Katherine Korakakis**, President of the English Parents' Committee Association; **Cindy Finn**, Director General of the Lester B. Pearson School Board; as well as moderator **Michael Goldbloom**, Principal and Vice-Chancellor of Bishop's University.

The amendment to Bill 96 which will require Anglophone students to pass at least three core courses in French was an ill-advised motion, which we strongly believe, along with many educators, will present unnecessary hurdles for our students and likely hamper their overall success. No CEGEP administrators nor experts in education were consulted during this decision-making process, and the haphazard approach to this amendment will have a severely negative impact on the English CEGEP system. Upon tabling Bill 96 in May 2021, Quebec French Language Minister Simon Jolin-Barrette promised that the rights of Anglophones and the integrity of their institutions would be respected. It is clear that this promise has since been broken.

Read coverage about our webinar in the Montreal Gazette [here](#).

If you were unable to attend this webinar, or if you wish to watch it again, please find the full recording on the QCGN's YouTube page [here](#).

QCGN Events Survey

We are asking all of our member and stakeholders who attended a QCGN virtual event focused on Bill 96 in the past year to reply to a survey. The goal is to provide you with an opportunity to voice your opinion on these past events, what we did well, and what can be improved upon. The survey will also help us gauge the level of concern felt by our community around Bill 96 and what issues covered in the legislation are of utmost concern.

If you haven't taken the survey, please do so [here](#). The estimated time it takes to complete this survey is 5-10 minutes. Every voice counts. We want to hear from you.

BLUE MET HOSTS 24TH EDITION OF BLUE METROPOLIS INTERNATIONAL LITERARY FESTIVAL

Blue Metropolis, one of the QCGN's member organizations, is currently hosting the **24th edition** of the annual **Blue Metropolis International Literary Festival**. The online festivities began on **Thursday, April 28**, and will end **Wednesday, May 4**. That will be followed this week by in-person events from **Thursday, May 5**, to **Sunday, May 8**, at Hôtel 10, Espace Godin at 10 Sherbrooke Ouest in Montreal.

Quebec, Canada, and across the world. Heralded as one of the largest multilingual literary festivals in North America, its features include roundtable discussions, workshops, master classes, interviews, and talks to engage and inspire readers. Consult festival details [here](#).

With the theme “What Age are We?”, the opening ceremony for the in-person programming will be held **Friday, May 6 at 5 p.m.** View the lineup of guest speakers and register [here](#). For each ticket purchased for a 2022 Blue Metropolis Festival event this spring, you will receive a book coupon of equal value redeemable for a limited time at the festival’s bookselling partners.

Blue Metropolis Foundation is a not-for-profit organization founded in 1997 that brings together people from different cultures to share the pleasure of reading and writing and encourages creativity and intercultural understanding.



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