

Open letter to the Honourable David T. Lametti, Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada

## **New Official Languages Act Must Safeguard the Minority Language Rights of English-speaking Quebecers**

Bill C-13 purports to modernize our Official Languages Act. But what the government of Canada is really proposing is to create a discriminatory language regime in Quebec that will not apply to the rest of Canada.

This new act would abandon half a century of official language policy, which has been based on the principle that both official languages and official language minority communities have equal rights in law. It would turn the Official Languages Act, a quasi-constitutional law, into legislation aimed at protecting and promoting one official language – French – while neglecting the language rights of 1.3 million English-speaking Quebecers.

We congratulate the Prime Minister, the Minister of Justice, and other parliamentarians for recently speaking out strongly in favour of individual rights and freedoms and against the pre-emptive use of the notwithstanding clause in other matters. However, by passing Bill C-13, Parliament would change federal law to acquiesce in the Charter of the French Language, which as amended by Bill 96 now uses the notwithstanding clause to deny the fundamental rights and freedoms of our minority community. This would explicitly demonstrate federal support of the notwithstanding clause and trample on the minority language rights of English-speaking Quebecers.

This bill would have a negative impact on the interpretation of the language rights of all Canadians, inflict serious harm on Quebec's English-speaking community, and weaken the federal lifeline that supports the community sector organizations and institutions vital to English-speaking Quebecers.

Bill C-13 also creates a new federal law, the Use of French in Federally Regulated Private Businesses Act.

**French speakers would be given new rights as both employees and consumers. 1.3 million English-speaking Quebecers would not.**

In a legal first for an area of federal jurisdiction, C-13 would grant federally regulated businesses a choice whether to be subject to this new law or to Quebec's Charter of the French Language (Bill 101).

**This would be an unprecedented constitutional retreat by the government of Canada.**

The government's plan to modernize the Official Languages Act does not reflect the vision of Canada for which linguistic duality – the equality of our two official languages – and the protection of minority rights are intrinsic values.

Consequently, we the undersigned, urge Parliament to amend Bill C-13 to remove all references to the Charter of the French Language. We also call on our federal government to ensure that all language rights created by Parliament are extended to both official languages – English and French.