

QCGN Statement Regarding the French Language

During a recent meeting of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Official Languages, the decline of the French language in Quebec was questioned. Other statements during the hearing suggested that Canada's English linguistic minority does not exist. Let us quickly deal with this last point. Under the law of Quebec and Canada, there is indeed a linguistic minority community – of more than 1.1 million English-speaking Quebecers. This is Canada's most bilingual cohort of English-speakers.

The Quebec Community Groups Network (QCGN) takes this opportunity to clearly lay out our position on the protection and promotion of the French language.

The QCGN Statement of Principles, unanimously approved by our Board of Directors some years ago, commits our organization to respect French as the official language of Quebec.

We are fully aware of the statistics that demonstrate a decline in the number of mother-tongue Francophones in Canada. Our collective demographic growth comes from immigration, and we support government efforts to ensure that newcomers are able to learn French and integrate into Quebec society. Organizations from our community that work with newcomers stress the importance of learning French. It is Quebec's common language, and without French newcomers will not be able to ensure the economic security they need to remain here.

Recall that French immersion was developed by a group of English-speaking parents in Saint-Lambert, on Montreal's South Shore, in the mid-1960s. These parents understood the imperative for their children to learn French in order to be equipped to fully participate in Quebec society. Nothing has changed. A significant majority of English-speaking Quebecers are bilingual; we are proud to be Canada's most bilingual group of English-speakers. More importantly, the bilingualism rate among our young people exceeds 75 per cent. Our parents and our schools recognize that being able to speak French is not negotiable.

Schools provide basic language skills; they cannot teach French to the level required for successful integration into the workforce. This is why English-speaking Quebec – with the assistance of the Government of Quebec – is working on ways to provide our young people with the necessary workplace-related experience in French.

We want to be very clear about this. The QCGN, our members, and the stakeholders with whom we work support and defend the French language in Quebec and Canada. A vast number of English-speaking Quebecers remained in our province after the tumultuous 1960s and 1970. They, and all others who choose to call Quebec home understand the responsibility to learn and use French in the public space. This position is in no way prejudicial to our insistence that English-speaking Quebecers be able to receive services from the Government of Quebec and businesses in English where allowed by law.

English-speaking Quebec is in a perpetual struggle with the Government of Quebec over the management and control over our institutions. Our health and social service institutions – which provide services to all Quebecers in French and English – must be continually defended. Our CEGEPs and universities provide an opportunity for all Quebecers to study in English – an opportunity enjoyed by

many of the public voices calling for their defunding – and attract students from all over the world. These community institutions are no threat. They are an invaluable asset available to all Quebecers.

The QCGN is also a vigorous defender of Francophone minority communities in the rest of Canada.

The QCGN is committed to: “Protecting, supporting, and enhancing the linguistic rights of Canadians to thrive in our two official languages, and ensuring a united Canada whose two official languages, English and French have equality of status and equal rights and privileges as to their use in all institutions of the Parliament and Government of Canada.”

We are a staunch ally of Francophones outside of Quebec. We intervene in support of our Francophone partners in cases that affect the official language rights of Canadians. Most recently, for example, we were intervenors in the *Conseil scolaire francophone de la Colombie-Britannique v. British Columbia* court case. We are also intervening in *Fédération des francophones de la Colombie-Britannique (FFCB) v. Employment and Social Development Canada (ESDC)* and the *Employment Insurance Commission* at the Federal Court of Appeal.

The QCGN maintains a formal partnership with the L'Assemblée de la francophonie de l'Ontario (AFO), and the Société de L'Acadie du Nouveau-Brunswick (SANB) and coordinates frequently with the Fédération des communautés francophones et acadienne du Canada (FCFA).

The QCGN also remains in contact with the Association canadienne-française de l'Alberta on the crisis facing Campus Saint-Jean, to help ensure that the endangered French-language campus of the University of Alberta may flourish in future. We have spoken out frequently on this issue to the Premier of Alberta, and the federal Minister of Official Languages, and, in public, on social media.

It is worth noting that the Government of Quebec has consistently intervened against minority language education rights for Francophones outside of Quebec.

The QCGN and its partners have worked and will continue to work hard to ensure the full integration of English-speaking Quebecers in Quebec society. However, we are also determined to protect our language rights, including our right to manage and control the institutions that our community has built over generations, and that today serve all Quebecers. And we will continue to work to expand the official language rights of all Canadians – French and English.