

QCGN Eager to Collaborate with New Official Languages Minister Ginette Petitpas Taylor

MONTREAL, October 26, 2021 – The Quebec Community Groups Network today congratulated Ginette Petitpas Taylor on her appointment as Canada’s new Minister of Official Languages and offered our keen assistance in her new portfolio. We also congratulated her predecessor, Mélanie Joly, on her promotion to Minister of Foreign Affairs.

For more than a decade, the QCGN has been working with the Government of Canada and Minister Joly on the modernization of the Official Languages Act. In January, Joly introduced *Bill C-32 An Act to amend the Official Languages Act and to make related and consequential amendments to other Acts*. This legislation, which died on the order paper when the recent election was called, constitutes a significant shift in federal thinking on official languages. The QCGN remains very concerned that the legislative pursuit of the notion that French is in need of special protection in Quebec would imperil the rights of English-speaking Quebecers and could spell trouble for equitable access to federal programs for English-speaking Quebec.

“We are wary of federal commitments to support the institutions of English-speaking Quebec, given that these institutions are part of Quebec’s civil administration,” QCGN President Marlene Jennings says in a letter to the new minister: “We are also very concerned that federal support to our community sector would somehow involve the Government of Quebec.”

“English-speaking Quebecers are facing an unprecedented threat to our community by Quebec’s *Bill 96, An Act respecting French, the official and common language of Québec*. This legislation, which updates the Charter of the French Language (Bill 101), contains provisions that if adopted would vacate the fundamental freedoms, legal, and equality rights of all Quebecers. It attempts to unilaterally amend the Constitution Act, 1867, and threatens access to justice guarantees contained in s.133 of the same.”

“These are matters of federal concern,” Jennings insisted. “We expect our federal government to defend our Constitution, and the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Prior to the election, we were in conversations with Justice Minister David Lametti on these issues and will be contacting him shortly to continue this dialogue.”

“There is obviously much work to continue. Canada’s Official Languages Act must be updated to address the challenges faced by Canada’s English and French linguistic minority communities,” commented Jennings. “The QCGN and English-speaking Quebec have been actively engaged in this effort and we continue to insist that the central guiding principle in the Government of Canada’s modernization of

legislative, regulatory, and policy approaches to official languages be grounded on the principle of the equality of status of English and French. We also expect an evidenced-based policy approach that is national in scope and vision – one that rejects the territorialization of language rights.”

“To this end, the QCGN and the community we represent support the extension of new language of service and work rights in federally regulated businesses, providing these rights are offered to both English and French-speaking Canadians,” said Jennings. “We also expect to continue our work with Treasury Board to ensure the equitable participation of English-speaking Quebecers in the federal civil service in Quebec (outside of the National Capital Region) and will be reaching out to new Treasury Board President Mona Fortier on this matter.”

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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