

Health directives should be scrapped, not tweaked, QCGN says

For immediate release

MONTREAL, August 13, 2024 – The Quebec government’s new directives dictating when languages other than French can be used in health and social services settings should be scrapped, not edited to make them “clearer” to the English-speaking community, Quebec Community Groups Network Director-General Sylvia Martin-Laforge said today.

Her remarks came following a meeting earlier today where French-language Minister Jean-François Roberge and various government officials met with some members of the English-speaking community following widespread complaints about new restrictions on the use of English and other languages.

“The QCGN was not at today’s meeting, and when we received a last-minute invitation to attend, we respectfully declined,” Martin-Laforge said. “We maintained what we have said since the outset of this controversy: that the Minister of Health, Christian Dubé, must be at the table now. Last we looked, it is his ministry, not the ministry of the French Language, that delivers health and social services to Quebecers – ALL Quebecers – and he, not M. Roberge, is in charge of that. As we have said repeatedly: this is a health issue.”

Martin-Laforge reiterated that if what three ministers (Roberge, Dubé and Eric Girard) said in *The Gazette* last week is true (that nothing is adding restrictions to health care access for English-speaking Quebecers in their language) then these directives are unnecessary and should be scrapped, immediately and permanently.

Instead, Roberge reported the government will revisit the directives, but made no commitment to abandon them. “Piecemeal changes to these directives are not enough,” Martin-Laforge said. “The problem is not that we don’t understand the directives – we very clearly do. The problem is in the government’s choice of priorities, which, to read the directives, lean to protecting a language first.

“At the very least, if the directives are to be edited, the current, unacceptable directives must be suspended immediately, this minute. The confusion they create, the complications they introduce into the administration of health care in Quebec are unnecessary and unconscionable.”

Martin-Laforge added that the QCGN and others can only hope for the elimination of the need for an eligibility certificate to obtain health services in English, a need the government denies exists, despite its presence in the new directives.

Quebecers in this province,” she said. “That is obviously discriminatory and a violation of the human rights of nearly half of our 1.3-million-member English-speaking community. There should be no ‘historic’ English-speaking Quebecers, no requirement for proof of any kind that one is allowed to engage with the government in English. Period.”

She again called on Dubé to make his views known and respond to the many questions this exercise has raised, starting with who is really in charge – the minister of health and social services, or the minister responsible for the French language.

“On July 29, we asked for a meeting with M. Dubé,” Martin-Laforge said. “Sadly, we have yet to receive his response. We are surprised by his silence.”

For further information:

Elizabeth Zogalis, Media Relations Manager | elizabeth.zogalis@qcgn.ca Telephone: 438-270-0680