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## IT HAS BEEN AN HONOUR TO LEAD THE QCGN AT THIS CRUCIAL CROSSROADS

By **Marlene Jennings**  
QCGN President



I have taken that proverbial walk in the snow – well, actually it was a walk in the rain – and I have decided to step down from the position of QCGN President effective June 9, 2022.

This decision has been both difficult and easy. Many of you will recall that in 2020, I reluctantly agreed to stand for president and was ultimately elected. This wasn't something I had sought. But there was a general unease among many members regarding the QCGN's then governance and leadership, a sentiment that I shared.

From the outset my intention was to fill a two-year mandate, which was to come to an end at the AGM this spring. This term would allow me to play an active role in the QCGN's Renewal process – QCGN 2.0 – which I have had much pleasure in doing. I believe I have also played a significant role in the important even crucial reframing of QCGN as a more genuinely representative voice for our English-speaking community and as an active and vital advocate for our communities' linguistic rights. My time as President has been fulfilling and overwhelming at the same time.

The past two years have been a whirlwind of activity with substantial upheaval to both provincial and federal language legislation. The QCGN has and continues to be a crucial and constructive voice during emotional and sometimes divisive debates. Unfortunately, Bill 96 became law this week. We were unable to stop it – or to achieve significant change, but the battle will continue. Meanwhile the influence QCGN has grown substantially during the time that I have served, and I am confident the organization will continue to thrive. I will continue as a member of the Board until QCGN's 2022 Annual General Meeting, which as you well know, has been delayed till after the provincial election in the fall.

My decision to not continue as President is based on the realization that my multiple commitments make it impossible for me to give this important role all the time it requires to remain truly effective. For close to two years, I have been obliged to delay fulfilling other commitments that I had made prior to agreeing to my election as President. The recent decision to postpone the AGM was well founded. However remaining President until the fall would have required that I continue postponing important personal commitments.

I wish to thank each and every board member for their support and active involvement, as well as the QCGN's staff who provided me with a continuous stream of evidence-based information that fuelled my public advocacy on our linguistic rights. I've truly valued the opportunity to work with this strong and dedicated team. I also want to thank QCGN Treasurer **Eva Ludvig**, who has agreed to take on the role of Interim President between now and elections at the Annual General Meeting. Finally, I want to sincerely thank our member organizations and

I have truly enjoyed filling the role and responsibilities of QCGN President. It was an honour to lead this organization at this crucial crossroads.

## Renewed QCGN will be a Leading Voice and Advocate

As I prepare to pass the mantle to the next President of the QCGN, I rest assured in the knowledge that the organization is ready to face the future and will continue to play an integral role for Quebec's English-speaking community.

On May 26, the QCGN's members came together for a special meeting and voted to approve the organization's new mission, vision, values, principle, and pillars and to adopt amended By-laws. These votes of approval completed a two-year process of consultation, consideration, and reimagining what the QCGN will be for years to come. We will now set about bringing these important changes to life.

Embarking on any process of renewal takes courage as it requires taking a hard look at our assumptions, our relationships, and our ways of operating. We are stronger for it. Looking ahead, the QCGN will provide a voice to a broader range of people within our evolving community.

Not only is this an important moment for the QCGN and our members, but for the entire English-speaking community. Through a robust consultation process, we engaged our members and many community stakeholders. We have a clear sense of our collective concerns, our needs, and our hopes. While we as a community continue to face challenges and limitations on our rights, we have shown that we will stand together to protect the vitality of English-speaking communities across the province. The renewed QCGN will remain a leading voice and advocate for us all for years to come. More about this in story by my Board colleague **Matt Aronson** below.

## Bill C-13 Weakens Federal Lifeline to English-speaking Quebec

This week the QCGN called on the Government of Canada to immediately remove all reference to Quebec's Charter of the French Language from Bill C-13, the proposed legislation amending the Official Languages Act, and creating a new law that will impose language of work and service obligations for French only on federally regulated businesses.

Bill C-13 territorializes language rights, and explicitly recognizes the Charter of the French Language, a provincial Act that now operates notwithstanding the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Canadians expect the Attorney General to safeguard their fundamental rights and freedoms, something the revised Charter of the French Language takes away. It is inconceivable that the Government of Canada would put forward legislation amending the quasi-constitutional Official Language Act which would recognize a provincial Act that as a result of Law 96 creates a Charter-free zone for more than 9 million Canadians. (Read our [statement](#).)

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](#) passed second reading this week in the House of Commons. It has been referred to the [Standing Committee on Official Languages](#) (LANG) and the QCGN has been invited by LANG to testify in view of its study. I will be appearing along with my board colleague Joan Fraser and our legal counsel Marion Sandilands. The QCGN submitted a [brief](#) to the committee. It has been posted [here](#) on the [Language Rights page](#) of our website.

## A BROADER TENT FOR ENGLISH-SPEAKING QUEBECERS



**By Matt Aronson**

**Secretary of the QCGN Board of Directors and Chair of the Transition Committee**

Quebec's English-speaking community never ceases to amaze me. Over the past year, our community has faced many challenges, especially in light of the debate over Bill 96. With that as a backdrop, our community came together to discuss, to advocate, and to march in protest for the first time in a generation. What strikes me is that while the face of the community continues to change, we have always preserved the same spirit of community, togetherness, and fairness.

It has been a privilege to work so closely with so many of the QCGN's volunteers, members, and stakeholders over the course of the renewal process. Over 25 years, the QCGN has built an incredible network and a strong foundation of advocacy and community development. The road to renewal was a long one, taking place during the pandemic and amidst the debate over the province's language laws. We took our time to do it right. Through consultation and dialogue, we learned much about the worries of our community, but also about the dreams you have for the future. The changes adopted by members in May – the new mission, vision, values, as well as the amended By-laws – are procedural but significant. They will influence the QCGN's governance, membership, operations, and its approach to advocacy and community building. Today, the QCGN is better positioned for the future and to represent Quebec's English-speaking community of communities.

## Individual Membership

The guiding light through our renewal process has been to make sure that everyone has a home within the QCGN. Whether you identify with a cultural community, a religious community, or a community-based organization, we want all English-speaking Quebecers to see themselves reflected in the QCGN's work, its membership, and through its staff and volunteers. One of the most important changes ushered in by the renewal process, approved by the membership in May with the adoption of the new By-laws, is the introduction of individual membership. While community groups remain at the heart of the QCGN's work, this will allow individuals already associated with groups, those who are not, and any English-speakers who may be one of the few in their region to join the QCGN. This will deepen our connection with English-speakers and offer more opportunities for community members to find belonging within our organization.

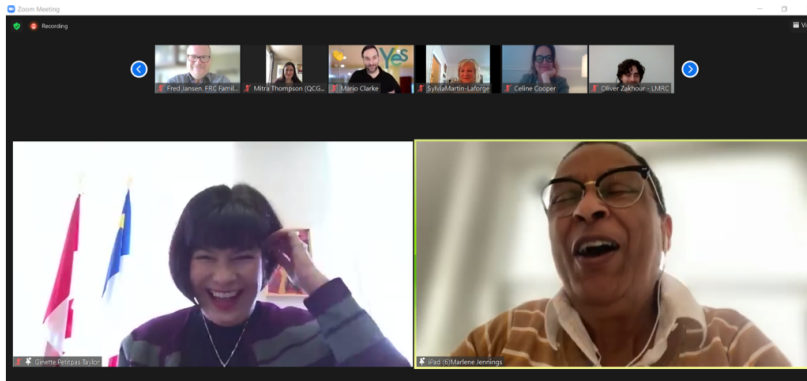
As part of the renewal process, the QCGN continues to refine and define what services and benefits are offered to members. Through consultation, thought leadership, policy research, and its network, the QCGN offers tools, training, and connections that support its members understanding of the policy landscape and issues affecting the English-speaking community to support greater vitality for all. It also equips them to engage in political processes so their voices will be heard.

As we emerge from our renewal, the QCGN will be better able to lift the voices of the members of its community and to represent an even broader base of English-speakers. Recognizing that French is the official language of Quebec, everyone has the right to choose the language in which they would like to express themselves. The QCGN will continue to advocate for English-speakers rights while it also continues to support the development of our exceptional, diverse, and evolving community.

## A NEW COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT PLAN AND 2023-2024 COMMUNITY PRIORITIES

By Riley Dalys-Fine

QCGN Manager Community Outreach and Engagement



The next few months represent a critical time for our Network and community. Provincial and federal legislation will have profound negative impacts on how the English-speaking community is defined and thus, what level of support we can expect from our public sector partners. It is therefore more important than ever for organizations to exchange and to be able to present a common vision of our collective needs,

aspirations, and priorities.

Since November 2021, we have been working with members and stakeholders to define the needs and priorities of English-speaking communities through Community Roundtables set up to explore common strategic concerns. The work of the Community Roundtables is leading to the creation of a Community Development Plan for 2022-2027. This shared strategic plan for the English-speaking community aims to achieve together what we cannot accomplish on our own.

This Community Development Plan is divided into four areas based on recurring themes raised during consultations: funding, data, representation, and organizational and network health. During our **Taking Action for a More Vital Community Forum** on March 15, we shared a draft of this plan with a wide range of community stakeholder for feedback and validation.

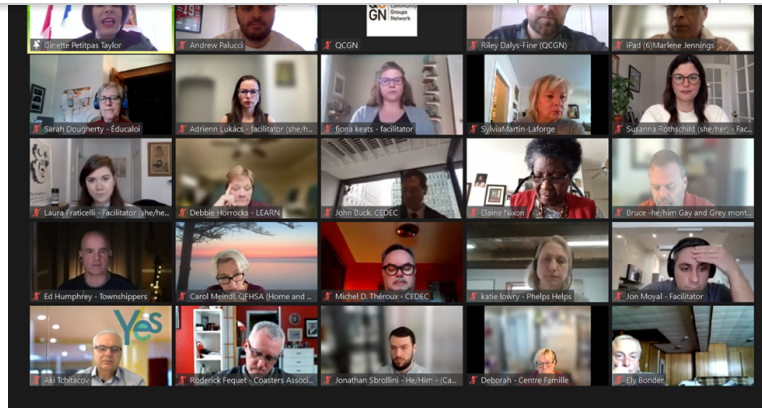
During the forum we had the great pleasure of welcoming Official Languages Minister **Ginette Petitpas-Taylor**, who reiterated the Government of Canada's commitment to supporting the vitality of Official Language Minority Communities (OLMCs). Taking note of the priorities, the Minister said that for her government to effectively represent the needs of OLMCs in its forthcoming action plan, they must work closely with the community sector. The Minister assured participants that the community would be provided with the resources necessary to help this collaboration move forward.

Since the forum, the QCGN has been collecting feedback from community stakeholders to share with the Community Roundtables in order to integrate additional perspectives and insights into the Community Development Plan. An updated plan will be shared with the community in time for the Minister's consultation on the Action Plan taking place this summer which stops in Montreal and Sherbrooke in July.

Last week, the Government of Canada launched the consultation process for the next action plan for official languages. There are currently two consultations being planned in Quebec, one in **Montreal on July 6**, and another in **Sherbrooke on July 7**. The QCGN will continue to monitor this process as more information becomes available, and I will be providing regular updates. More details on the Canadian Heritage [website](#) which provides information on how you can send your comments via mail or email or you can complete an [online survey](#). The survey is anonymous and takes about 10-15 minutes to complete.

### Community Priorities

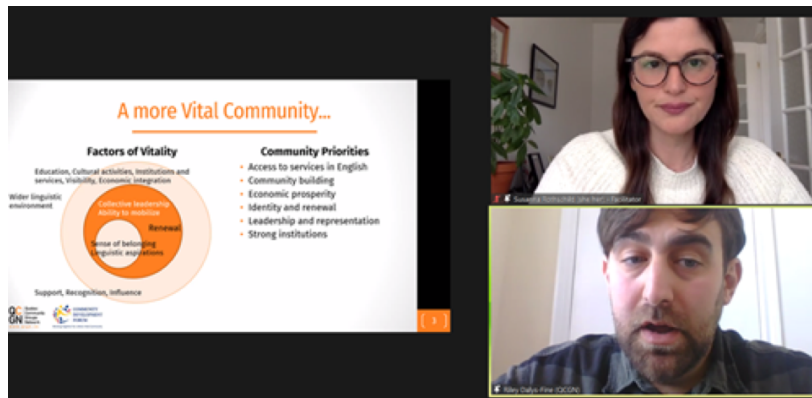
community vitality over the next five years. But our collective work has already begun. Some three dozen organizations from across Quebec have already contributed to the roundtable process. Roundtable discussions lay the groundwork for stakeholders to advocate effectively for the interests of our communities. In the coming weeks, Network members and stakeholders will take strategic action by validating annual community priorities.



Between 2012 and 2019, the Priority-Setting Steering Committee (PSSC) of the QCGN conducted an annual online survey to monitor evolving priorities for building community vitality. This work has been taken on by the Community Roundtables which convene stakeholders to build consensus on common challenges facing the community and strategies to address them.

A survey containing proposed priorities for the development of Quebec's English-speaking community has been shared with some 200 community stakeholder groups and institutions. The Community Roundtables guided the development of annual priorities based on the draft Community Development Plan. This ensured broader community involvement in the priority-setting process.

The QCGN will continue to provide backbone support to this priority-setting process. As an official interlocutor of the English-speaking community with the Government of Canada, the QCGN will deploy resources to support the community's capacity to drive collective action. A validated list of priorities will be posted on the QCGN website at the end of June 2022 and will be shared with Canadian Heritage which will attach the priorities to the call letter for program and project funding for fiscal year 2023-2024.



"This is an open and inclusive process, and for that reason we encourage more community groups to join the Roundtables," says **Sylvia Martin-Laforge**, Director-General of the QCGN. "Your perspectives are needed so that you too can help guide the community priority-setting process in future years." In addition to convening stakeholders to work on collective action, the Community Roundtables serve as spaces for networking, capacity-building and

mutual support. In the months and years ahead, they will also play a key role in overseeing the evaluation of the Community Development Plan, ensuring the entire process is by and for the community.

The priority-setting exercise will further serve as an opportunity for the English-speaking community to influence the next federal Action Plan on Official Languages and funding and support initiatives by other levels of government. If you would like to get involved, I encourage you to contact me at [riley.dalys-fine@qcgnc.ca](mailto:riley.dalys-fine@qcgnc.ca).

## QCGN POLICY FORUM: ENGLISH-SPEAKING QUEBEC AT A CROSSROADS

By Sarah Barbosa  
QCGN Volunteer and Events Coordinator

Over the course of the last year, English-speaking Quebecers have been voicing their concerns and about changes to Quebec's Charter of the French Language and proposed changes to the Official Languages Act. Both signal serious negative impacts for English-speaking Quebec. The Quebec Community Groups Network has been engaging with members, stakeholders, and the broader community to explore and address these concerns that

The event will begin on the evening of **June 9** from **7:00-8:30 p.m.** during which we will thank outgoing President **Marlene Jennings** for her steady hand at the wheel during many months of turbulent weather. We will also welcome interim president Eva Ludvig, QCGN treasurer who will navigate the choppy waters between now and our Annual General Meeting which was delayed to the fall.

Our policy forum entitled **English-Speaking Quebec at a Crossroads** kicks off in earnest on June 10 with welcome remarks by the QCGN and an address by the Commissioner of Official Languages, **Raymond Thériault** on **How Canadians View Official Languages**.

A first panel discussion entitled **Quebec in Transition** where **Jack Jedwab**, President of the Association for Canadian Studies; **Émilie Nicolas**, columnist with *Le Devoir* and *The Montreal Gazette*; and QCGN's legal counsel **Marion Sandilands**, Partner at Conway Litigation. Our panelists will discuss the profound changes occurring in Quebec with legislation like **Law 21, An Act respecting the laicity of the State**, and **Bill 96, An Act Respecting French, the Official and Common Language of Quebec**. With the Coalition Avenir Québec government's focus on identity politics that is at odds with the primacy of individual rights and freedoms, and the legislative branch of government is minimizing the role of the judiciary, what does this signal for linguistic and other minorities. This panel will be moderated by **Richard Bourhis**, Professor Emeritus at Université du Québec à Montréal (UQAM)

With the next Quebec election just months away, what does the English-speaking community need and how should we position ourselves for optimal success in ensuring these needs are met? Our second panel entitled **English-speaking Quebec in the Face of Change** will explore the needs and priorities of English-speaking Quebecers in critical areas such as employment, education, racialized communities, and non-profit funding. Panelists include **Tino Bordonaro**, Chair, Advisory Board on English Education; **Kimberly Buffitt**, Director of Engagement & Development, Coasters Association; **Kassandra Kernisan**, Executive Director of DESTA; and **Nicholas Salter**, Executive Director of the Provincial Employment Roundtable (PERT). This panel will be moderated by **Lorraine O'Donnell**, Affiliate Assistant Professor at Concordia University and Research Associate at QUESCREN.

Wrapping up the morning, **QCGN's Access to Justice** project manager **Mitra Thompson** will unveil the project's new web presence and demonstrate how this new online tool informs, consults, and interacts on justice issues that have an impact on Quebec's English-speaking community.

After lunch, between **1:00 and 3:00 p.m.**, QCGN members and invited stakeholders will participate in a brainstorming session in partnership with the Community Development Roundtables. Officials from the Department of Canadian Heritage will be on hand to provide an overview of the government's five-year strategy to support official language minority communities now being evaluated for renewal. We will host a facilitated discussion in preparation for our community's participation in consultations on the future Action Plan that will take place this summer.

Please register [here](#) by **June 8, 2022, at 6:00 p.m.** to receive the secure link to participate.

If you have any questions, please contact me at [sarah.barbosa@qcgnc.ca](mailto:sarah.barbosa@qcgnc.ca).

## BILL 96 IS NOW LAW

**By Rita Legault**  
**QCGN Director of Communications**

Bill 96 was passed in the National Assembly on May 24 by a majority of 78-29 votes. The Coalition Avenir Québec and Québec solidaire voted in favour of the bill while the Liberals and the Parti Québécois opposed the legislation.

Last week's passing in the National Assembly brought about an outcry from the community, including a second rally to demonstrate the community's opposition to this discriminatory and far-reaching legislation. (See coverage by **Global News**, **CTV News**, and **CityNews**.) The outcry over this new law is not limited to the English-speaking community. The Indigenous community in Kahnawake has threatened to **suspend all ties** with the Quebec government until "substantive solutions" are presented for problems this legislation would create. Meanwhile, Québec solidaire is **facing a backlash** within their own party for supporting a bill that would create unnecessary hurdles for immigrants.



QCGN retorted that the community's concerns were clearly outlined by a number of learned, credible individuals including **Robert Leckey**, dean of McGill University's faculty of law; lawyers **Eric Maldoff** and **Julius Grey**; and the DGs of CEGEPs. "And this full-page ad ... doesn't respond to any of these points. We are really in the domain of alternative facts," QCGN Treasurer **Eva Ludvig** told *The Gazette*. Meanwhile, we may anticipate similar ads in our regional papers.

Legal experts consulted by **CBC Montreal** including Dean Leckey and Julius Grey as well as **Pearl Eliadis**, associate professor at McGill's Max Bell School of Public Policy and **Frédéric Bérard**, co-director of the National Observatory on Language Rights, part of the Public Law Research Centre at Université de Montréal, say the government's ad campaign correcting 'falsehoods' contains falsehoods of its own. Read article [here](#).

In a commentary in today's **Montreal Gazette**, QCGN Board member Eric Maldoff said that rather than responding substantively to the issues raised, Premier François Legault has "chosen to obfuscate, deflect, discredit, and deny." A longtime defender of English community rights, Maldoff writes that core elements of concern include "the widely acknowledged centrality of effective communication in health and social services and the ability of clinical and support staff to provide quality care." In addition, he explains that "Bill 96 introduces new and pernicious mechanisms that appear to be aimed at intimidating public sector employees who can be penalized for speaking a language other than French to clients. These include anonymous third-party denunciation, the threat of revocation of professional licences to practise, and warrantless search and seizure of documents including, potentially, confidential medical records."

Meanwhile Bill 96, which enforces and reinforces the Charter of the French Language, received royal assent this Wednesday, June 1. It is now a law of the land.

This sweeping piece of legislation covers almost all government departments, municipalities, and Crown corporations. Under the new law almost all government services – with the possible exception of health care – must be provided in French. Some measures, such as the creation of the Ministry of the French Language, take effect immediately. Others, like francization requirements for small businesses, will apply in three years.

Two categories of people who will be entitled to receive service in English or other languages:

1. so-called "historic" anglophones (people who were educated in English or have the right to send their children to English schools), and
2. immigrants who've been in Quebec for less than six months.

newspapers (Coverage [here](#)). Titled "Bill 96: The Facts," the ad says it aims to counter several "falsehoods" that have circulated about the legislation's impact on the English-speaking communities." The ad claims that English-speaking Quebecers will continue to have access "in the same way to health services in their language," and will continue to benefit from a quality English-language school system "at a level unequalled among French-speaking minorities elsewhere in Canada." It further claims that the legislation also ensures access to justice and the rights of Indigenous groups.



### BILL 96: THE FACTS

On May 24, 2022, the National Assembly of Québec adopted Bill 96 to consolidate the status of French as the common, official language of Québec. The legislation will better protect and promote French, while preserving the rights of the English-speaking minority and the First Nations and Inuit communities.

Several falsehoods have circulated on the legislation's impact on the English-speaking communities. Here are the facts:

- English-speaking citizens will continue to have access in the same way to health services in their language.
- The English-speaking communities will continue to benefit from a quality English-language school system, colleges, universities, and hospitals at a level unequalled among French-speaking minorities elsewhere in Canada.
- English-speakers in Québec will continue to benefit from the same constitutional guarantees concerning their access to justice in their language.
- The legislation will continue to apply in keeping with the rights of the First Nations and the Inuit communities while ensuring the existence and development of Indigenous languages and cultures.
- At no time has the Office québécois de la langue française (OQLF) engaged nor will it engage in searches or seizures.

Québec is the only predominantly French-speaking nation in North America. The Québec government is acting in a balanced manner to ensure the future of the French language while respecting the rights of the linguistic minorities.

Votre  
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Québec

The legislation also created a new French language ministry is charged with maintaining the status of French in the province.

**Simon Jolin-Barrette**, who shepherded the bill through the National Assembly, was sworn in Wednesday as the new Minister for the French Language. He is also Justice Minister and House Leader as well as Minister Responsible for Laicity (Bill 21) and Parliamentary Reform.

Jolin-Barrette has sweeping new powers that were listed in the QCGN's [Preliminary Analysis](#), pp 8-9. They include:

- Developing the Language Policy of the State.
- Broad coordination and oversight responsibilities across the civil administration, exercised on the Minister's own initiative.
- The Minister approves or makes the language directives of civil administration bodies and municipalities
- Broad and strong powers to intervene and obtain information across the civil administration.
- Power to require the Office Québécoise de la Langue Française (OQLF) to inspect or verify compliance in the bodies to which the Language Policy of the State applies.
- Power to make regulations to "restrict" the option to use a language other than French in certain circumstances.
- Power to intervene in court proceedings that "could impact the status or use of French in Quebec".
- Power to approve language criteria for judges and administrative adjudicators.
- Power to revoke the permit or authorization of an enterprise that "repeatedly" contravenes the Charter of the French Language, after an opinion from the OQLF.
- The power to revoke funding from a municipality that contravenes the Charter. This was added to the Bill during the clause-by-clause study by the Committee on Culture and Education.

## French at Home

To gauge the success of the bill, Premier François Legault announced Wednesday that his government will be following statistics the use of French in the workplace, and the use of French at home. Efforts to promote and protect French stems, in part, from a study by the Office québécois de la langue française that projected fewer Quebecers will speak the language at home in the decades to come. The study predicted that about three quarters of Quebecers – between 74 and 76 per cent – would speak French at home by 2036. In 2011, 82 per cent of Quebecers spoke French at home. In 2016, most immigrant families spoke a language other than French or English at home (39 per cent). About one third spoke French at home. Some 14 per cent spoke English.

The QCGN and others do not believe that tracking the language spoken at home is a good indicator of the status of French in Quebec. The vast majority of English-speaking Quebecers, especially Anglophone youth, have high levels of bilingualism and most Allophones speak French quite well. Many Anglophones and immigrants speak French in the workplace, says **Jack Jedwab**, from the Association for Canadian Studies in this [CTV Montreal](#) report.

Jedwab says Quebec should have more realistic goals considering the province's linguistic diversity. "Montreal is not going to be Chicoutimi. It is not going to be Rimouski," he said. "Anyone who hopes to make it that, in terms of the public use of the two languages, is being unrealistic and unfair."

## Moving Forward

Almost as soon as Bill 96 was passed into law last week, constitutional lawyer Julius Grey announced a legal team was being created to contest the law. The **English Montreal School Board** and **Sir Wilfrid Laurier School Board** announced they will be launching a suit of their own. They say the law violates the rights of English-speaking Quebecers in managing and controlling their educational institutions under Section 23 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Other lawyers are examining the bill and keeping tabs on its application.

The Quebec Community Groups Network is keeping a close watch on how the situation evolves and how Bill 96 is implemented. We expect a long and drawn-out fight over the constitutionality of the bill that will like land in front of the Supreme Court of Canada.



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