

ALLIANCE QUEBEC GOES AT LAST TO COURT TO FORCE THE GOVERNMENT TO APPROVE LONG OVERDUE ENGLISH HEALTH SERVICES

QUEBEC, JANUARY 20, 1999 - This morning, in the name of Alliance Quebec, Me. Guy Bertrand introduced a writ of *Mandamus* in Quebec Superior Court, asking the court to order the government to approve the programs for access to English health and social services that were developed by the 16 regional boards.

The law requires that these programs “must be approved by the Government and revised at least every three years”. (An Act respecting Health Services and Social Services (1991), Article 348.)

But the last time the programs were revised and approved was in 1989. Since then, the number of regional boards has gone from 11 to 16, there have been two great waves of restructuring the health and social services system, institutions have been amalgamated, downsized, redefined in their mandate, and in some cases abolished. But still the government refused to do what it must do under the law -- approve revised programs to ensure access to English health and social services.

Again and again over the years, representatives of the English-speaking community of Quebec have asked, urged, pleaded, begged, reproached, in countless fruitless attempts to get the government to do what the law requires it to do. Nothing worked.

Again and again, the government promised that the new programs prepared by the regional boards some years ago were about to be approved, were only weeks away, would be ready by the fall, by the spring, before June 24, before Labour Day. Every promise was broken.

Though the Health Services Act has no provision for submitting English access programs to the scrutiny of the Office de la langue français, Minister Louise Beaudoin and Minister Jean Rochon insisted that this new hurdle be introduced. Pressure was exerted on the regional boards to intimidate them into restricting the English services they proposed to offer. Some boards capitulated, other resisted.

Finally, Alliance Quebec took the only recourse left to citizens whose government denies them their rights: it appealed to the court to order the government to return to the rule of law and approve by decree, though years late, the programs that ensure that

English-speaking citizens will be treated with dignity by the public institutions that treat the sick and the needy.