

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**Report card on French may bring more coercive measures, QCGN says**

**MONTREAL – April 28, 2024** – Will the Quebec government set French up to fail?

QCGN President Eva Ludvig raised that possibility today as Jean-François Roberge, Minister for the French Language, and other ministers presented the government's long-delayed Plan d'Action for the protection and promotion of French.

"What's new in today's presentation," Ludvig said, "is the report card, or dashboard, M. Roberge has introduced to measure the state of French in Quebec.

"What was missing in today's presentation was mention of the yardsticks the government intends to use to measure the health of French. A news report on an early version of the plan suggested the expected measurements are largely those known in advance to automatically indicate declines in French: mother tongue, language used mainly at home, and first official language spoken. And Minister Roberge today mentioned mother tongue as one of the worrisome statistics the government has observed.

"Increases in immigration and a low birthrate in the traditional francophone Quebec community combine to reduce the number of people who have spoken French since birth and who use it at home. But, as the Office Québécois de la langue française reported recently, that doesn't mean the use of French in public has declined; it has remained stable. In this light, stability is strength, given the pressures of globalization, the digital world and social media," Ludvig said.

"But if the government discovers further weakness according to these measurements, as it most likely will, it will have given itself more reason to constrain rights and services for the 1.3 million Quebecers in the English-speaking community, as it has done since it was first elected," Ludvig said. "On this basis, we have legitimate concerns about how the government will seek to reverse the foregone conclusion of a decline in French."

Ludvig noted that French in the North American context will always be fragile, deserves protection and needs all Quebecers, of all linguistic backgrounds, to join in the effort to promote it.

"French needs protection and support," Ludvig said. "Everyone knows that. But the government's modus operandi on language has been simple, consistent and divisive: find statistics to show French is imperiled, identify appropriate scapegoats (English-speaking university students, asylum-seekers, merchants trying to be courteous to customers) and then bravely bring in punitive legislation and rules against groups who often enjoy little political power.

“We would like to see an end to that approach and a shift toward a more co-operative, positive gameplan that brings Quebecers together to provide vital support to what is the essence of Quebec, rather than pitting groups against each other in a phony zero-sum game,” Ludvig said.

Ludvig noted there was no mention of engaging English-speaking Quebecers in the effort to strengthen French and indeed the aggressive tone of some of the ministerial presentations further entrenched the sense of “us versus them” that we must get beyond if English speakers are to be full participants in Quebec society.

For other parts of the Plan d’Action, Ludvig said the QCGN has expressed cautious support, especially around the desire to make French culture more visible in the English-dominated digital world of streaming and Spotify. “More details will be provided in legislation to be presented by Culture Minister Mathieu Lacombe,” Ludvig said. “So long as there are no measures or regulations that would curtail Quebecers’ access to cultural content in other languages, we would support that effort.”

The QCGN remains steadfastly opposed, however, to elements of the plan that have brought discriminatory tuition-fee increases for out-of-province university students attending English universities, as well as an unworkable demand that McGill and Concordia require their undergraduates to obtain an intermediate level of French proficiency by the time they graduate, Ludvig said.

The Quebec Community Groups Network ([www.qcgn.ca](http://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.

**For further information:**

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