

**Statement by The Honourable Marlene Jennings, P.C. President of the Quebec Community Groups Network on the Adoption of Bill 96**

**MONTREAL, May 24, 2022** – For more than a year, the QCGN has been doing its best to convince the Quebec government of the shortcomings of Bill 96, *An Act respecting French, the official and common language of Québec*. Unfortunately, our concerns as well as those of countless Quebecers including organizations representing our business, education, health and social services, human rights and legal sectors, have been ignored.

We are deeply disappointed and frustrated that Bill 96 was adopted today without any significant improvements since it was first tabled. It does not reflect our vision of an inclusive Quebec where French is the common language.

The QCGN, and indeed most in our community, favour promoting and protecting the French language in Quebec – and throughout Canada. However, we are convinced that there are more effective and inclusive ways to achieve this goal than those outlined in Bill 96 and that it can be achieved without vacating the human, equality, and legal rights of Quebecers.

Bill 96 is the most significant derogation of human rights in the history of Quebec and Canada.

Bills of rights protect people from abuse by the state. With the preventive use of notwithstanding clause, this protection is eliminated. The government has created a ‘Charter free zone’, where all citizens have lost their fundamental rights and freedoms in the application of the Charter of the French Language.

This far-reaching bill affects many areas of activity: commerce, employment, education, access to public services, expression in many contexts and the functioning of our legal system. If rights that would otherwise be protected are violated, the courts will not be able to examine these violations or provide remedy under the Canadian or Quebec human rights charters.

We are frustrated that Bill 96 limits services in English to citizens eligible to attend English schools. This apparently is the government’s attempt to identify an ‘historic anglophone community.’ Unfortunately, eligibility to attend school in English is not in any way linked to the language of the student or the parent. Rather, it is linked to the language of instruction received by the parent.

It has nothing to do with community self-identification; this legislation revokes the right to access services in English for some 300,000 to 500,000 English-speaking Quebecers. Accordingly, the QCGN maintains that the right to communicate and receive services in English should never be based on eligibility for instruction in English.

We have a host of other concerns. We oppose increasing the powers of the Office de la langue française – particularly that it is now empowered to conduct searches without a warrant. We disagree with limiting access to justice for English-speaking Quebecers and changes to temporary permits that limit access to services in English for newcomers to six months. Provisions in the Bill also make it more challenging to do business in Quebec. In a time of global competition for investment, why erect new barriers?

In looking ahead, the QCGN in partnership with others will continue to rally Quebecers against this ill-conceived legislation and to bring attention to its shortcomings. The next phase of our campaign begins with a rally on Thursday evening in Montreal. We will also be supporting upcoming legal challenges to the law, while ensuring that its nefarious impacts on Quebecers are brought to the public's attention and are debated in the upcoming election campaign.

We remain convinced that Bill 96 does not reflect our values and aspirations and that more Quebecers will join our campaign as they become aware of the law's impact.