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CRITICAL MONTHS AHEAD FOR QCGN AND ENGLISH-SPEAKING COMMUNITY

By **Marlene Jennings**
QCGN President



With Canadians scheduled to go to the polls September 20, the Quebec Community Groups Network is calling on all federal parties and candidates to commit to support the language rights of English-speaking Quebecers.

We are firmly opposed to the Government of Quebec's pre-emptive use of the notwithstanding clause to suspend the fundamental freedoms, legal, and equality rights of ALL its citizens under **Bill 96, An Act respecting French, the official and common language of Québec**. The Government of Quebec is proposing to create what we are calling a Charter-free zone that would make the National Assembly – not the courts – the arbiter of the balance between collective and individual rights and freedoms. We believe

it is the Government of Canada's obligation to support the Constitutional rights of all Canadians. We expect the federal government to fulfill its solemn duty to protect and defend our rights.

English-speaking Quebecers are also worried about the path proposed under Bill C-32, which would amend the Official Languages Act. The federal bill died on the Order Paper when the election was called, but the QCGN is concerned that federal parties appear to be abandoning the equality of Canada's two official languages in favour of an approach focused solely on the protection and promotion of French.

English-speaking Quebecers are wary of proposals to extend language rights only to Francophones dealing with federally regulated businesses in Quebec. It is essential that federal parties and candidates support the right of English-speaking consumers and workers to communicate with these businesses in the official language of their choice."

QCGN is writing to all of the federal parties to seek their commitment to support the concerns of Quebec's English-speaking community and pledge for positive change. We also urge members of our community to question candidates about these matters on the campaign trail. Read our **press release**. Read **our letter** to the parties. Their responses will be published on the QCGN website when we receive them. Stay tuned to find out what the candidates have to say to English-speaking Quebecers.

English School Board Elections

With some English-speaking Quebecers being called to the polls three times in a matter of a few weeks, QCGN and education leaders are concerned the turnout for school board elections will be abysmally low.

Despite previously postponing them twice due to the pandemic, and the rising tide of a fourth wave of COVID-19, Quebec's Ministry of Education decided English school board elections will go ahead on



postponed to December 19-20, five days before Christmas. Despite concerns over the rising tide of COVID infections due to the more contagious Delta variant, they are back on again and scheduled for September 26 – less than a week after the federal vote.

Once again, the announcement was met with anger and confusion from many in the English community including the QCGN and the Quebec English School Boards Association (QESBA). See coverage in [The Montreal Gazette](#).

QESBA Vice-President **Noel Burke** remarked that Quebec missed an opportunity to innovate by not holding the vote at the same time as the municipal elections, which would reduce costs and make voting in school elections more convenient. “The QESBA has long advocated that school elections be twinned with municipal elections, as is the case in many other provinces. Given that there are a limited number of positions to be filled, we thought that this represented a good opportunity to initiate a pilot project and hold school and municipal elections together on Nov. 7.”

This is tantamount to voter suppression. In a true democracy, governments must do everything they can to encourage electors to exercise their democratic right to vote. And with the fourth wave of a pandemic upon us, these are clearly not winning conditions for a good turnout. Clearly, the government of Quebec is not aiming for our elections to be successful.

“This government has done everything in its power to eliminate our English school boards. This is a transparent attempt to continue along the path towards their abolition,” said a Tweet by APPELE-Québec, a broad-based alliance to promote the continued existence of English school boards governed by school board commissioners democratically elected by the English-speaking community at large. There are only 17 positions – three board chairs and 14 commissioner seats – left to be filled via election in eight of Quebec’s nine English boards. The rest of the seats were filled by acclamation. QCGN is encouraging all English-speaking Quebecers who are being called to the polls to get out and vote – or to insist on a mail in ballot. We have to show this government that our school boards matter. Find out more on the websites of the [QESBA](#) and [Elections Québec](#).

QCGN Opposes New Regulation for Provincial Access Committee

The QCGN is adamantly opposed to proposed unilateral changes to the regulation governing the Provincial committee on the dispensing of health and social services in the English Language, commonly referred to as the Provincial Access Committee. (Full details of proposal in story below.) The QCGN is concerned that the new regulation, unilaterally imposed by the government, will not only abolish the current committee but also the critical work that it has accomplished in reviewing access programs that are shamefully out of date.

The access programs spell out which services English-speaking Quebecers have access to. Without them we have no rights. The programs currently in place are 10 years old and refer to a system that is no longer in place. The current revision process is urgently required and must be completed without delay.

We have conveyed our comments and concerns to Health Minister **Christian Dubé** regarding the proposed changes. ([Read our letter.](#))

We are of the view that the members of the Provincial Access Committee deserve support and encouragement for a job well done in difficult circumstances. The committee has shown itself to be extremely diligent in carrying out its mandate. Members of the committee dedicated considerable time and effort and carried out their own extensive research for the proper review and evaluation of the 29 access programs. It recently delivered its opinions and recommendations to the Minister setting the stage for potential approval and implementation of up-to-date access programs as early as fall 2021. I would like to thank the members of QCGN’s Health and Social Services Committee, under the leadership of **Eric Maldoff**. Thanks to their work, the QCGN has taken a very strong position that was endorsed by the Board of Directors at its meeting of August 10. I would like to extend a special thanks to our committee members, **David Morris, Sara Saber-Freedman, Marilyn Kaplow, Gerry Cutting, Howard Nadler, Richard Walling,** and **Sandra de la Ronde** -- and of course all the staff supporting this important work.

Language Rights are Human Rights

Over the coming weeks, the QCGN’s main focus will be engaging the community on [Bill 96, An Act](#)

language of Quebec. This controversial bill, which aims to enforce and reinforce Bill 101, is a wide-ranging and complex piece of legislation that would significantly overhaul Quebec's legal order and have dire impacts on our community.



The QCGN believes this proposed legislation would have a direct and grave impact on the rights of English-speaking Quebecers and on our community's vitality. Bill 96's provisions to amend the Canadian Constitution by writing in Quebec nationhood and a declaration that French is Quebec's only official language would also have dire legal and political consequences across Canada. QCGN rejects the notion that our governments can set aside our fundamental freedoms in the name of the collective good. Constitutionally entrenching recognition of a sub-provincial, rights-holding nation within Quebec represents a significant change to Canada's constitutional architecture.

As the focus on Bill 96 intensifies, the QCGN has created a new Bill 96 webpage to discuss how the bill will attack the individual and collective rights of Quebecers and how we can work together to oppose it.

We invite you to visit our Say No to Bill 96 page as well as our comprehensive **Language Rights** page that contains background including QCGN's **preliminary analysis** of the impact of Bill 96 on both the English-speaking community and all Quebecers. In addition, QCGN has presented a series of webinars explaining the language rights of English-speaking Quebecers. View them on our **YouTube channel**.

Campaign Generates 3000+ letters



Meanwhile our letter-writing campaign is gaining momentum with more than 3,000 letters generated to Premier **François Legault**, Language Minister **Simon Jolin-Barrette** as well as MNAs and MPs expressing concerns about the use of the notwithstanding clause to override the rights and freedoms of Quebecers.

To join this campaign, we invite you to click on no2notwithstanding.com/. We also invite you to share this link widely within your networks and encourage your friends and colleagues to send a letter.

QCGN Mounting Parallel Consultation on Bill 96

The Quebec Community Groups Network (QCGN) is deeply disappointed that the Government of Quebec is severely restricting participation in public hearings on Bill 96 and that it did not issue a wider invitation to Quebecers.

The National Assembly's special consultations and public hearings on Bill 96 will be held for nine days between September 29 and October 7. The Committee on Culture and Education is scheduled to hear from 51 groups and individuals – but only a handful representing Quebec's English-speaking community, including the QCGN. (Consult full details including the update list of participants on the Committee on Culture and Education page of the **National Assembly website**.)

Considering the complexity and scope of the proposed legislative changes, the proposal to invoke the notwithstanding clause to bypass both the provincial and federal rights changes, and the fact that it involves an amendment to the Canadian Constitution – this is simply not acceptable. It is critical that voices of Quebecers are heard and that the public hearing process is comprehensive. For that reason, the QCGN has decided to hold parallel



Share Your Opinion

The QCGN is inviting organizations and individuals to share their opinions with us. Your letter or brief does not have to be long. Simply explain why you disagree with Bill 96 and send it to us at info@qcgnc.ca. In early September the Quebec Community Groups Network will hold public hearings to give voice to our community ahead of the government's consultation. If you or your organization would like to present a brief, please let us know at info@qcgnc.ca. Full details for our consultation and hearings in our [press release](#).

You can also share your opinion with the [National Assembly's Committee on Culture and Education](#) by clicking on the Comment on this Mandate in the right-hand column. Please send a copy of your submission to us at info@qcgnc.ca. We will compile all the submissions we receive and forward them to the committee, appended to the QCGN brief. This will underscore our community's opposition to this controversial legislation.

QCGN Annual General Meeting October 6

With the government hearings wrapping up the next day, Bill 96 is bound to be a hot topic in the virtual corridors as the QCGN holds its Annual General Meeting on **Wednesday, October 6**. On the agenda will be the election of three officers for seats that are up for grabs this year. On behalf of QCGN's Nominating Committee, a [call for nominations](#) was distributed to member organizations who can propose candidates. The deadline for nominations is **August 27**. Please save the date for the AGM and do not hesitate to contact our Director General [Sylvia Martin-Laforge](#) should you have any questions.

COMMUNITY OPPOSED TO UPHEAVAL OF PROVINCIAL ACCESS COMMITTEE

By Michael Udy

QCGN Director of Access to Health and Social Services

Advisory Committee, just before the government is scheduled to review and pass access programs that guarantee access to health and social services to English-speaking Quebecers in their own language. The comments were made as QCGN held a town hall and briefing on the proposed amendments to Regulation respecting the provincial committee on the dispensing of health and social services in the English Language, often referred to as the Provincial Access Committee.

In the middle of the pandemic, as Quebecers were on summer break, the provincial government published a proposed new regulation in the Official Gazette June 30, 2021 without prior notice or consultation with the community or the existing committee and giving the community 45 days to comment.

"Make no mistake about it. This represents a reduction of the rights of English-speaking Quebecers no matter how the government spins it," commented Eric Maldoff, chair of QCGN's Health and Social Services Committee. "The community has to stand up and get together to stand up for its concerns." The Provincial Committee plays a crucial role in the process leading to the approval of access programs. Members have to be knowledgeable about the English-speaking community's health and social service needs, about how the public health and social service system works and be able to communicate back and forth with the community to be able to truly represent it. According to the surprise proposal, the Minister would choose the president and vice-president of the Advisory Committee. Currently they are chosen by committee members. Candidates for the advisory committee are presently put forwards by QCGN and CHSSN. Under the new regulation they would be proposed by a selection committee composed of a ministry employee appointed as the secretary of the committee, a former member of the advisory committee or a regional access committee, and an employee or board member of a provincial organization defending interests of English-speaking community, both chosen by the minister. Additionally, changes to the regulations would also the minister to fill vacant seats with members of his/her own choosing. Up till now, the advisory committee recommended replacement members.

The committee's communication with community, which would be controlled by a government appointed secretary under a Communications Policy imposed by the minister, would be constrained to its opinions to the minister – not its overall mandate. A Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct would be imposed on members. The secretary would monitor conformity and the minister would impose sanctions.

The QCGN is adamantly opposed to any amendments to the regulation governing the Provincial Committee at this critical juncture," said QCGN President Marlene Jennings, explaining that the committee complete its review of programs that have been in place for years – since before the adoption of Bill 10 in 2015 which considerably altered Quebec's health care network.


Following a thorough review of the 29 access programs submitted to them, the committee delivered its opinions and recommendations to the Minister setting the stage for potential approval and implementation of up-to-date access programs as early as fall 2021. A new regulation will dismiss the existing members, leaving the community without representation for at least a couple of months at a crucial moment in the approval process of access programs, and possibly further delaying access programs.

The position the QCGN has taken on the provincial committee regulation is that it should be withdrawn at this time, said Maldoff. "We have not put up a bunch of points to start negotiating on. The issue is it's inappropriate, not timely, not justified, and once we get through this cycle of renewing access programs, then we can sit down, in serenity, and have a discussion about what's working and what's not working and what we can fine tune."

Maldoff also made a link between our community's battle to quash the regulation and the fight against Bill 96, which would enforce and reinforce the Charter of the French Language (Bill 101), and is anticipated to have a negative effect on access to services in English.

"It is significant that these are happening at the same time," he said. "On the other hand, I think it is a big mistake if we get into health becoming a language issue. Health is about health, and we have got to start to speak in those terms on the right to quality and safe and appropriate health and social services – and this is outside the scope of whatever linguistic debates the government wants to have about the education system, immigration or anything else."

"Language is absolutely indispensable in the mental health sector and in the social services also," he



Access to Health & Social Services

language – often they lose their facility in a second language, so this is really a very serious issue particularly for those of us who have aging parents.”

Explaining that the committee must be allowed to complete its review, Jennings encouraged English-speaking Quebecers to write to their elected officials to express their opposition to the proposed new regulations and demand that the current rules continue to operate and allow the Provincial Access Committee to continue the important work it is doing.

“Write to Minister Dubé. Write to Premier Legault. Write to Christopher Skeete, who is our voice in the Legault government. Tell them you that you do not agree with these new regulations, that you endorse the QCGN’s position, and that these proposed regulations be withdrawn.”

QCGN WORKING WITH ELECTIONS CANADA TO RECRUIT POLL WORKERS AND GET OUT THE VOTE

By Andrew Palucci

QCGN Public Policy and Research Analyst



English-speaking Quebecers count more than 800,000 voters. As we head to the polls for Canada’s 44th election on Sept. 20, we can have a real impact.

Out of 78 federal districts in Quebec, English speakers make up at least 20 per cent of the electorate in 19 of them. In an additional 12 ridings, we make up at least 10 per cent of the electorate.

Voting is the way citizens choose who will represent them in political office. The chosen candidate will make important decisions about your community. Our votes can have a real impact on election

results and our community should get involved.

Over the past few months, the QCGN has been collaborating with Elections Canada and Inspire Democracy to help Quebec’s English-speaking community prepare for the next federal election. The first step is confirming you are registered to vote and that you have the right voter identification. To ensure you are registered to vote, click this [link](#). Once you have registered, you will need to bring proper identification to the polls. To find out which IDs are appropriate, click [here](#).

Next, we can explore how things might look different this time around given that we are still in the midst of a pandemic. Elections Canada has made it a priority to ensure the health and safety of its workers and voters. Things will look different this year with increased social distancing and a requirement that masks be worn (some medical exceptions will be permitted).

There are also different voting options, including voting by mail, which you can use to mitigate risk. If you are interested in voting by mail, click this [link](#) to begin the process of receiving your mail in ballots. The deadline to apply online or to your local Elections Canada office is Tuesday Sept. 14. While the election is Monday Sept. 20, there are advanced polling days as well. September 10, 11, 12 and 13 will all be advanced polling days meaning you can go to your polling station early to vote. Information on your polling station will be on your voter information card which should be arriving by mail soon. You can also click this link to find out your [polling station](#) after August 24. For full details on the many ways you can vote, click [here](#).

It is additionally important for Elections Canada to increase the employment of our community during this election. Canadians have a right to be served in the language of their choice when they go to vote. This means Elections Canada is looking to hire bilingual English-speaking Quebecers, of ages 16 and up, to work at the polls, or at Elections Canada Offices during the election.

Elections Canada is also to boost participation from underrepresented groups. It has partnered with the QCGN to help spread the word throughout the English-speaking community to increase the rate of participation from our linguistic minority community.

With the campaign underway, there are still hundreds of thousands of workers needed to work at the polling offices and stations across Quebec. These jobs are paid, and the pay will vary depending on the

to whether you are trained for such a job, there is no need to worry; training is offered in both official languages to all those who apply, and the training is paid as well. If you are still unsure about what role you could occupy, consult their [toolkit](#) for more information. You can begin applying right away for any of the roles. For any organization that wants



to get more involved as well, you can join the Inspire Democracy Network.

The federal government has a duty to provide services in both official languages. For them to do so and for our rights to be respected, we need members of our community to get involved. This is a terrific opportunity for those young and old to help. So, apply, spread the word, and let's be ready for this federal election.

BISHOP'S FORUM: AN EXPERIENCE WORTH REPEATING



By Arielle Warten
QCGN Policy Intern

From August 13 to August 17, 2021, I participated in the Bishop's Forum at Bishop's University in Lennoxville, Quebec.

day forum was to introduce to us young participants on how to be a leader, how to engage in our communities as English speakers in Quebec and how to be involved in social change.

The forum gave us the opportunity to interact with political leaders, activists, non-profit organization leaders, businesspeople, and national assembly members, ask them our questions as well as receive advice on how to do better for our communities.

We were introduced leadership skills, were able to showcase our talents and our interests, and make amazing connections with some great, influential people. This forum was led by Yolande James, one of the most inspiring women I have ever met, who did an amazing job at including every youth participant in each activity and making us all feel extremely welcomed.

The central focus of the Bishop's Forum was to teach us new skills leading to our presentation for each of our groups to a mock parliamentary commission on the final day. Each day, we spoke to our teammates and divided work on how to present our issue and recommended solutions and answer questions on our proposals.

Commissioners included QCGN President **Marlene Jennings**, a former federal MP; **Christopher Skeete**, MNA for Sainte-Rose; **Anna Gainey**, Past President Liberal Party of Canada; **Celine Cooper**, Managing Director for Consortium of English-language CEGEPS; **Daniel Fournier**, Chancellor at Bishop's University; **Michael Goldbloom**, Principal and Vice-Chancellor of BU; **Dr. Patrick McBrine**, Assistant Professor in the English Department at BU; and **William Floch**, Assistant Secretary for the Secretariat for relations with English-speaking Quebecers.

My group's issue was Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion and we chose to focus on skilled immigrant workers coming to Canada and being unable to find adequate resources and the time to start their skilled careers in Canada. We proposed microloans along with welcome packages to facilitate their new beginnings in Quebec and Canada. We also proposed the idea of getting newcomers in contact with individuals able to speak their language to assist them in finding programs and services. Other groups focused on language issues, sustainability, access to services and employment, education and politics, and leadership.



life. Thus, when arriving at the Campus and speaking with my peers, I knew right away how much fun we would all have and it was amazing to be able to share our concerns about the community we are part of!

I definitely recommend this experience to anyone interested in making our society a better place and meeting fascinating young leaders and bright role models. Thank you to the amazing staff at Bishop's and everyone who was a part of making this wonderful in-person experience happen. I'm looking forward to participating again next year!

(Here I am pictured with (left to right) co-forumer Mary-Elizabeth Kroitor; Marin Algattus, our group coach; Bishop's Forum director Yolande James; and me, Arielle Warten.

Finally, we had lunch together for the last time, and said our goodbyes.

Some of the best moments from the five days were listening and engaging with the speakers. I appreciated the most because every speaker had something different to say and taught me so much about issues I had never thought about. I was truly enlightened by my peers. What I gained the most from this experience was the ability to connect with people with similar interests. Despite having different things to say, we all had one thing in common: wanting to change things in our society. Being online because of COVID-19 has had its benefits, but has stopped many people from making new connections and meeting people through school or work who have similar tastes in

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