

Policy Matters Blog #15 – Bill 96

COMMITTEE DISCUSSES QUALITY OF FRENCH TAUGHT TO NEWCOMERS AND ENGLISH-SPEAKERS

March 23, 2022 – The National Assembly’s [Committee on Culture and Education](#) yesterday resumed its clause-by-clause analysis of Bill 96, [An Act respecting French, the Official and Common Language of Québec](#). Members completed their discussion of clause 62, covering the new Articles 88.9 to 88.13 of the [Charter of the French Language](#). This clause focuses on the promotion of French-language education and instruction to non-Francophones in Quebec.

Sitting only for an hour and a half, the session began with Liberal MNA Hélène David withdrawing the Liberal amendment to Art. 88.11 submitted last week, which would have made clear that “French-language learning services” are available to any person living in Quebec who cannot speak or understand French.

Once the Liberal amendment was withdrawn, Minister of Justice and Minister Responsible for the French Language Simon Jolin-Barrette introduced an amendment which would insert Art. 88.9.1 into the Charter. This new provision would require that Quebec’s immigration policies promote French as the common language of newcomers to Quebec. MNA David asked about the purpose of the Minister’s amendment, as one of the goals of Bill 96 is to promote French as the common language throughout the immigration process. She then inquired about the difference between “official” and “common” with respect to the French language. Minister Jolin-Barrette responded that the term “official” means the use of French by the state (in government institutions, courts, agencies, etc.) in its communications with the public. The term “common,” according to the Minister, covers the use of French between private citizens, as the language of work, education, commerce, social activities, and the like. The Minister stated that the objective of Bill 96 is not just to solidify French as the official language used by the Quebec government, but moreover to increase the use of French in the everyday lives of Quebecers. The amendment was adopted by the committee.

The discussion then shifted to Art. 88.12. This provision would require English elementary schools, high schools, and CEGEPs to provide their students with an appropriate level of French-language instruction to enable them to better navigate and contribute to Quebec society. Liberal MNAs Hélène David and David Birnbaum took the opportunity to consider the status of English-speaking Quebecers navigating French-speaking circles. More specifically, they emphasized the importance of this article to help ensure English-speaking Quebecers have better prospects to work in Quebec’s public service, a sentiment the Minister shared.

Clause 62 was then adopted in its entirety. The Committee adjourned until today.