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## QCGN Asks Government to Exclude English School Boards from Education Reform Plan

**MONTREAL, November 19, 2019** – Bill 40, the Coalition Avenir Québec government’s plan to abolish school boards, violates the constitutional rights of Quebec’s English-speaking community. The Government should exempt the English system from its reform, pending a full consultation with the community.

“Schools are core institutions of the English-speaking community,” said Geoffrey Chambers, President of the Quebec Community Groups Network (QCGN). “The province has a responsibility to design an educational governance structure that protects and enables the English-speaking community’s management and control over our constitutionally guaranteed minority language education.”

“The government must recognize and support the linguistic and cultural rights of Quebec’s English-speaking community,” he insisted. “This is more than a constitutional duty. It is a fundamental covenant between the Government of Quebec and its English-speaking citizens. It pre-dates Confederation.”

Chambers made the comments Tuesday as the QCGN and more than a dozen organizations and individuals advocating for English-speaking Quebecers participated in community hearings organized by the Alliance for the Promotion of Public English-language Education in Québec (APPELE-Québec).

“It is unfortunate that so many stakeholders affected by Bill 40 were not invited to the Quebec National Assembly Committee on Education and Culture’s consultation to provide their input on this significant piece of legislation,” said Chambers. This is the first major reform of school governance since the change from confessional to linguistic school boards in 1998: “It is especially egregious that public debate has been so limited and rushed on a bill of such far-reaching and fundamental impact.”

The QCGN expressed serious concerns about Bill 40 which were outlined in a [brief](#) submitted to the Committee on Education and Culture. The QCGN argued that Bill 40 violates the community’s right to the management and control of minority schools – rights guaranteed by

the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms; that the Government of Quebec must demonstrate that the reforms are necessary; and that the government is imposing a major upheaval without broadly based public consultations.

“Although Bill 40 purports to establish a system of elected representation, it fails to provide a vehicle by which our community can exercise a meaningful degree of management and control over education,” Chambers argued. “Taken as a whole, Bill 40 creates an empty shell for community representation in which true management and control will inevitably be exercised by school staff and Ministry officials rather than rights-holders and the wider community.”

The exercise of management and control through representatives on Service Centre boards is stifled by restrictions on who is allowed serve on these boards and the lack of resources provided to these representatives. Limited decision-making powers of Service Centre boards, paired with greater control by the Minister and his or her officials, means that these boards will likely not exercise much meaningful leadership over education.

“The minority constitutional rights of English-speaking Quebecers are shared by Francophone minority communities outside Quebec,” QCGN lawyer Marion Sandilands said. The QCGN is advising the Government of Quebec to refer Bill 40 to the Quebec Court of Appeal for a ruling on whether it complies with Section 23 of the Charter.

“It is time for the Government of Quebec to engage the English-speaking community of Quebec constructively and substantively on issues that affect all Quebec citizens,” Chambers concluded. “The QCGN invites the government to sponsor an inclusive community-based consultation with stakeholders in English-speaking Quebec to ensure the proper application of our minority language education rights.”

The Quebec Community Groups Network (<https://qcgnc.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.