

Policy Matters Blog #14 – Bill 96

COMMITTEE CLOSES DEBATE ON CEGEPS AND TURNS TO UNIVERSITIES

March 18, 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 continued their discussion of clause 58 of the bill, covering Article 88.0.12 of the [Charter of the French Language](#). There were three absences during parts of the hearings, Liberal MNA David Birnbaum, Québec Solidaire MNA Ruba Ghazal, and Parti Québécois MNA Pascal Bérubé.

The session began with an amendment proposed by the government, to add Art. 88.0.12.1. This would require any student seeking to receive an Attestation of Collegial Studies (ACS) to show a sufficient knowledge of French. The means by which this would be evaluated would be determined by the Minister of the French Language in consultation with the Minister of Higher Education, Research, Science and Technology. This measure would be applicable to all students except for students who received their elementary and high school teaching in English, also referred to as historic Anglophones. Liberal MNA Hélène David stated that it would be nonsensical to evaluate the French abilities of students coming from the French education system. The amendment was passed, with the Liberals abstaining.

The committee moved on to Art. 88.0.13. This states that when university classes are offered in French, the class must be given in French. This question arose from instances when classes were taught in English even though they had been advertised to be given in French. The government presented an amendment to clarify that this provision does not prohibit language classes from being taught in a language other than French (for example, classes to teach German). This was adopted, with little debate.

The government proposed another amendment, adding Art. 88.0.14, with the effect that research funding agencies must give priority to the support and enhancement of research conducted in French. Liberal MNA David, as well as her colleague, MNA Gaétan Barrette, stated that that this approach would disadvantage Quebec researchers on the international scene given that the common language is English. Nonetheless, they indicated they would not vote against the amendment. It was adopted.

With review of clause 58 completed, committee members were invited to comment on the entirety of the clause before its adoption. Liberal MNA David said that while the Liberals agree with the objective of the bill – to strengthen and protect the French language — they disagree with the manner and speed with which the government intends to implement changes. They therefore voted against this article. It was adopted. Québec Solidaire MNA Ghazal later joined the session and requested to be able to vote on this article through recorded division (whereby each member states their vote verbally). The Liberals refused to consent. MNA Ghazal stated that she would have voted in favour of the article.

The committee then moved to clauses 59 and 60. These were adopted with no discussion.

Turning to clause 61, the government presented an amendment that would introduce two changes. First, it would impose the responsibility of implementing a linguistic policy on the most senior executive of the university (the president). Second, and most importantly, it would require that all English CEGEPs include

in their linguistic policies measures to prioritize the admission of students applying from the English education system. The Liberals asked questions regarding the type of measures that would be included in this last point. Minister of Justice and Minister Responsible for the French Language Simon Jolin-Barrette explained that these would be left to the discretion of the CEGEP. The amendment and clause were adopted with no opposition.

Moving on to clause 62, the government proposed an amendment to Art. 88.3 to mirror earlier changes. This was adopted with no debate. Articles 88.4 through 88.9 were then read without discussion. At this point, the government presented a new amendment which would add Art. 88.9.1. This amendment would require that the provincial policy on immigration be in line with the objective of making French the common language. Liberal MNAs David and Barrette responded that the government could not simply introduce important amendments such as these without the possibility of consultations or discussions with relevant stakeholders. The government then agreed to suspend consideration of this article until next week.

Finally, the committee turned to Articles 88.10 and 88.11. These refer to Francisation Québec (Quebec Francization), a program which provides French language courses to any resident of Quebec who is not an elementary or high school student. The government presented an amendment to Art. 88.11 to state that these courses must also draw a link between the French language and the Quebec culture. The committee agreed and the amendment was adopted. MNA Barrette proposed another amendment, to further clarify that these courses be available to all persons covered under Art. 88.10. The minister responded that this provision would be redundant. The meeting adjourned before members voted.