

For immediate release

Community leaders demand major changes to Bill 10

Montreal - November 17, 2014 – Dozens of community and institutional leaders gathered Monday morning to demand significant changes to Bill 10.

[More than three dozen groups](#), including some regional associations that viewed the press conference live online, supported the [brief](#) presented by the Quebec Community Groups Network to the National Assembly's Committee on Health and Social Services on October 30. More groups, including school boards and community associations, joined together to support a [community statement](#) decrying the proposed legislation.

Supported by a petition that has been signed by more than 7000 Quebecers (www.bill10.com), the groups said Health Minister Gaéтан Barrette must take the time to look at all the potential side effects, including the major ones Bill 10 will have on the vitality and identity of Quebec's English-speaking community.

If adopted as currently drafted, Bill10 would abolish the English-speaking community's hospitals and nursing homes as stand-alone institutions. As well, it would eliminate community volunteers from the governance of our health and social service system; fatally compromise the bilingual status of our institutions; and exclude these community institutions from the critical role they play in the vitality of the communities they serve.

"Bill 10 goes too far, too fast," warned former Liberal MNA Clifford Lincoln, noting that "suddenly reducing the number of health and social service institutions from 182 to 28 will have an undeniable impact on accountability, transparency, volunteerism and citizen participation. And for Quebec's English-speaking community this means the loss of 23 out of 24 of its bilingual institutions and boards, and their protection under law," he said.

As a newly elected MNA in the 1980s, Lincoln battled alongside former health and social services critic and later Health Minister, Thérèse Lavoie-Roux, for the autonomy of community institutions, and for the right of the English-speaking community to participate in the control and management of the institutions it had built and supported for generations. Claude Ryan, as minister responsible for the Charter of the French Language, later ensured the legal protection of designated institutions. Lincoln said this Liberal legacy is being jeopardized by Health Minister Gaéтан Barrette's hurried and drastic plan that proposes a one-size-fits-all model for massive institutional mergers.

Given the diverse realities of English-speaking minority communities across the province, the government must work with local communities to see what approach fits best, argued Richard Walling, past president of the Provincial Advisory Committee on the dispensing of health and social services in the English language and current president of the Quebec Health and Social Services Foundation in Quebec City.

“In the case of Jeffery Hale-Saint Brigid’s in Quebec City, the community has made it clear that it must preserve this institution and its status under the French language charter, and preserve the continued role of the community in its governance,” Walling said. “If it is swallowed up into a huge structure where it represents less than 2 per cent of the population, this would be a devastating blow to the institution and the culturally and linguistically-adapted services it provides. It would also severely compromise the intricate web of foundations and community organizations that operate interdependently. It would be a blow to the very vitality of the community itself.”

“If the Charter of the French Language saw fit to create exceptions that allow the protection of the English-speaking community’s institutions, the Health Care Act can and must do the same,” added Sara Saber-Freedman, President of the Board of the MAB-Mackay Rehabilitation Centre. “Bill 10 must be amended in order not to abolish institutions -- and especially not those that are designated to provide bilingual services.”

“The goals of the government can be achieved without eliminating this unique and irreplaceable community heritage,” added Saber-Freedman, noting that some important modifications to Bill 10 are essential to ensure that the legislation does not compromise a 30-year consensus that is crucial to the vitality of Quebec’s English-speaking minority.”

Minister Barrette, who has indicated that he will amend the proposed legislation to take into account the concerns of Quebec’s English-speaking community, plans to have his law adopted before the National Assembly breaks for Christmas in early December. “We appreciate Barrette’s solemn pledge to ensure the interests of our community will be protected, and we look forward to an amended bill that maintains our involvement in the governance of our institutions and upholds the legislative guarantees that protect our community’s right to quality services in our own language. However, as the process comes down to the wire, we worry that the Minister has not given himself the time to get things right given the wide-ranging impacts this will have on our community. The QCGN and our partners are more than willing to help him come up with the right solutions.”

The Quebec Community Groups Network (www.qcgn.ca) is a not-for-profit organization bringing together 41 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.

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