

THE LAVAL/NORTH SHORE CHAPTER: PRESENTATION TO THE ESTATES GENERAL ON THE FRENCH LANGUAGE

1.0 Introduction:

1.1. This brief is being presented solely on behalf of the Laval/North Shore Chapter of Alliance Quebec. The Provincial Executive Committee of Alliance Quebec will submit a brief during the national hearings in March.

1.2. The Laval/North Shore Chapter of Alliance Quebec was founded in 1982. It has over 300 members and represents approximately 47,000 English-speaking residents. Our mission is the promotion and enhancement of the English-speaking community and its institutions, particularly in the Laval/North Shore region. To that end, we strive for acceptance of an open and multicultural society, a commitment to a united Canada, a participative and an integrated approach toward community retention and development.

1.3. Most of the Laval/North Shore's English-speaking community is located in the western half of the island, centred in the Chomedey area, but also on the North Shore in communities like Lake of Two Mountains and Rosemere. The English-speaking community has always been a vital part of the Laval/North Shore region and has contributed to its development and progress, socially, economically and culturally. Our community in Laval has the highest ethnic diversity of any region in Canada.

1.4. Laval's English-speaking community once felt it was a vibrant part of society. Today, many residents feel isolated, ignored and alienated. Services do not reflect the needs of the English-speaking community. Of particular concern is the health and social services system. Health care in Laval is in turmoil as far as creating access to services in English, and the community is extremely concerned about its future. Residents believe their rights under the law guaranteeing access to services in English are being ignored and they feel powerless to influence regional authorities to correct the situation.

1.5. For almost two decades, the Laval/North Shore Chapter has worked tirelessly to ensure access to English-language health and social services in our region, to ensure access to English-language education for all English-speaking children in Laval/North Shore, employment equity at all levels of government in the region and for the enhancement and protection of English-language institutions.

1.6. In recent years, the Chapter has campaigned diligently on behalf of English-speaking residents in Laval/North Shore in an effort to ensure the municipal government guarantee that all municipal documentation is also available and distributed in English. The Chapter has supported the publication of the region's only English-language weekly newspaper.

1.7. Clearly, the Laval/North Shore Chapter has been a strong advocate on behalf its English-speaking residents. It is for this reason we are pleased to present a brief to the Estates General on the Status and Future of the French Language in Quebec, on behalf of the Board of Directors of the Laval/North Shore Chapter.

2.0 The Status and the Future of the English-language in the Laval/North Shore Region

2.1. As we examine the consultation document on the status and future of the French language in Quebec it must be noted that the document confirms that the French-speaking community is indeed thriving in Quebec. More Quebecers speak French than ever before, and the French language in Quebec is currently in a very strong position. It is our contention that no additional laws or regulations are required to protect the French language. It should be stressed that the status and the future of the English language must be taken into consideration as you make your recommendations. The English-speaking community of Laval/North Shore now feels threatened in its ability to protect our numbers and our place in Quebec society. We ask the commission to acknowledge the needs we face in order to grow and flourish.

2.2. The Laval/North Shore Chapter's brief will focus on some of the issues of primary concern to members of the English-speaking community we represent, notably:

- Economic Concerns
- Economic Implications Of The Charter Of The French Language
- The Needs and Concerns of the Minority Language Communities
- Two Communities - Living and Working Together

3.0 Economic Concerns:

3.1. As referred to in the section on the origin of language policies in Quebec, in the Commission's consultation document, the historical perception of economic inequality between the English-speaking and French-speaking communities in Quebec played a significant role in the creation, adoption and implementation of language legislation in Quebec. While that legislation produced positive results for the French-speaking community, it was detrimental to the growth and development of the English-speaking community. The legislation contributed to the departure of hundreds of thousands of Quebecers and left many of the English-speaking Quebecers who remained with the feeling that they were not welcome in Quebec government positions or the para-public sector.

3.2. The English-speaking community in Laval/North Shore faces a number of challenges as a result of this legislation. To outline a few:

3.3. **Youth exodus** - A significant percentage of Laval's English-speaking youth are so discouraged by the combination of limited opportunities and their perception that they do not have a future in Quebec because they are not Québécois, that they leave the province after completing their education. As a result, we lose large numbers of highly trained people, who can fill positions, purchase homes and contribute to Quebec's economic vitality. To ensure Laval's English-speaking youth flourish, grow and remain in our region, we recommend that the Quebec government makes every effort to ensure that Laval's English-speaking youth are provided with equitable employment opportunities at all levels of government and are provided with proper training and support.

3.4. **Language of Work** - Today, most Quebecers generally accept the use of French as the language of work, and it is used to an extent where it is no longer in danger. In this age of globalization and technical advancement, we believe that if Quebec is to flourish and prosper in this global economy every opportunity must be provided for our youth to learn the proper skills to compete in today's markets. That being said, it is our belief that English-speaking youth must be provided with an opportunity to learn French proficiency as a job skill and that our French speaking youth must be provided with an opportunity to acquire an adequate knowledge of English as a job skill.

4.0 Economic Implications Of The Charter Of The French Language

4.1. There have already been language laws and regulations imposed on Quebecers that have been burdensome and unnecessarily intrusive, which have imposed costs and inefficiencies in businesses. The effect has been to discourage or minimize new investments and job creation in Quebec.

4.2. Even companies that have attempted to expand their operations in Quebec have been hampered by their inability to attract job seekers from outside the province due, in part at least, to language restrictions. The Royal Bank and Matrox, amongst others, have publicly reported this.

4.3. Poor economic performance, partly as a result of language restrictions, has necessitated the imposition of higher taxes on Quebecers, which fuels a spiralling effect to further discourage investments.

4.4. The net result of Quebec's language laws has resulted in a lacklustre economic performance, compared to other North American jurisdictions and a lower standard of living for Quebecers. Any changes that add new restrictions to businesses will only discourage economic investment or expansion.

5.0 The Needs and Concerns of the Minority Language Communities

5.1. Prior to the introduction of Bill 22, by the Quebec Liberal Government, Quebec was deemed officially bilingual. Since the inception of the Charter of the French Language, the English-speaking community has seen a gradual erosion of English language services specifically at the provincial and municipal levels. All federal government services in Quebec are officially bilingual, as well as those few municipalities and public institutions that qualify as being designated as bilingual. The Constitution provides for the right to plead in court in either English or French. Despite this, the Quebec government claims that only French is the official language here. The English-speaking community rejects the concept that Quebec is a unilingual state. It is our contention that English is also an official language in Quebec.

5.2. Since the mid 1970's our English-speaking schools shrunk by 2/3. This decrease is cause for great concern to our community. Consequently, rules that forbid English-speaking children who lack an eligibility certificate, such as those who have immigrated from the U.S., from attending English schools, have been particularly detrimental to our community's development. How can preventing English-speaking students from attending English schools contribute to the status and the future of the French Language? Paragraph 23 (1) (a) of the Canadian Charter of Rights guarantees the right of English and French speaking minorities to send their children to the schools of their choice, but a separate clause in Section 59 of the Charter allows the Quebec government to decide when to allow Para. 23 (1) (a) to come into effect. The most important recommendation of the Chambers Report on English Education was to allow English-speaking students access to English schools. At this time we request the Commission accept this recommendation to help sustain our community.

6.0 Two Communities - Working and Living Together:

6.1. Members of Quebec's English- and French-speaking communities get along with each other better than in most other regions of the world, where conflicts exist between cultural societies. We work, socialize and interact with each other on a daily basis. In fact we have built homes, businesses and watched our families grow together as neighbours, colleagues, friends and even families. We should appreciate how fortunate we are if we compare our situation to several other areas of the world, where there is violence and harassment between different communities.

6.2. Wherever there are serious problems between identifiable cultural groups elsewhere in the world, the root cause is often due to a serious economic disparity between them. In contrast, French and English-speaking Quebecers have statistically similar economic standards of living. This has enabled our communities to live and work together in a harmonious and prosperous manner for generations. As a result, Quebecers are in an excellent position to set standards and show the world that two culturally diverse communities can get along despite their differences.

6.3. As an illustrative example, I am a self-employed professional businessman. When I work with French-speaking Quebecers, I make attempts to converse in French, not because the government or any laws say I have to, but because it is common courtesy to do so. My knowledge of French is not very good, and I struggle to carry on a conversation. Usually, the conversation switches back and forth between French and English. Frequently, when asked to submit a proposal for a project, I usually inquire if I could submit it in English. In most cases, the response is positive. I would then ask, "*Est-ce que je peut soumettre mon rapport en anglais?*". "*Pas de problem*" is the most usual response. In business meetings, the language used often switches between French and English. This is working together for our mutual benefits.

6.4. Similarly, many people work in social and sporting clubs and in community centres, where bilingualism is rampant. In particular, we want to point out how well the Centre du Sablon Community Centre works. Located in the Chomedey district of Laval, it offers a wide range of activities to a mixed English-French clientele. Its board of directors has mandated that all signage within the building and all activities be done bilingually to the extent that it is feasible. Interestingly, the City of Laval owns the Centre Du Sablon, but its operation was turned over to a private corporation to run. This was partly done in order to avoid being subjected to Law 101, which would have prevented it from serving its members bilingually, since the City of Laval does not have bilingual status.

6.5. We are two communities with similar goals and lifestyles that are intertwined. It is not feasible to be able to live as separate communities, and we must strive to live in an atmosphere of full co-operation and respect.

6.6. There is always a danger when government passes laws that encourages the use of one language over the other, and forbids the use of any other language under many prescribed circumstances. In this particular case, the Charter of the French language has enabled the French-speaking community to prosper and flourish to the detriment of Quebec's English-speaking community. We must ensure equality of opportunity for both language groups in Quebec is maintained. This means ensuring that rules and laws do not give any economic advantage to one group over another. With this in mind we recommend that the Commission consider the needs and concerns of the English-speaking community, particularly with respect to access to English language education, access to English-language health & social services and providing equitable employment opportunity.

7.0 Recommendations

The Laval/North Shore Chapter is pleased to make the following recommendations to the Commission studying the status and future of the French language in Quebec.

7.1. The Laval/North Shore Chapter recommends the Commission seriously consider the status and the future of the English language in Quebec, in all its recommendations.

7.2. Do not add or modify any new language laws or regulations, or change any enforcement provision that would have an effect of increasing the severity of the Charter of the French Language.

7.3. The needs and concerns of Laval's English-speaking community should be identified and addressed in any legislation that will have an impact on employment equity and youth development. The government should follow through with the previously announced intention to hire more English-speaking candidates for positions in the Quebec Civil Service and other government agencies (such as Hydro Quebec), to address the serious lack of representation of English-speaking Quebecers in the civil service.

7.4. Amend the Charter of the French language to lower the threshold for a municipality or institution to be accorded bilingual status from 50% to 10%, as is done in Ontario. Municipalities or institutions with less than 10% English-speaking residents or users should be accorded bilingual status automatically if a resolution expressing their desire to be recognized as bilingual institution is adopted by its Council.

7.5. Allow parents the right to choose to send their children to either French or English language schools, without requiring any English language eligibility certificate. Until this change is adopted, the government should immediately accept, as an interim measure, the recommendation of the Chambers Report on Education to allow all English-speaking children to attend English schools by accepting Paragraph 23 (1) (a) of the Canadian Charter of Rights to apply in Quebec.

7.6. Recommend curriculum reform to ensure the achievements and contributions of the English-speaking community, and other societies in Quebec, are properly reflected in the teachings of history and geography.

7.7. Ensure that all government documentation intended for public distribution is made available in both English and French.

7.8. Recommend the Quebec government cease to sponsor or contribute any financial subsidy that supports any cultural or commercial activity that bans the use of any language other than French in their documentation or signage.

7.9. Eliminate rules that require all companies to deal with the Quebec government exclusively in French, as this makes it more difficult for small companies to obtain government contracts.

7.10. Ensure that all Quebec government documents that require a signature be available in both English and French.

7.11. Retain the requirement for French to be obligatory on all commercial signs, but any other languages used must be equal to or less predominant. This provision should apply to all signs without exception.

7.12. Remove all prohibitions on the use of non-French signs on roads, particularly where they pertain to safety issues.

7.13. Finally, one of the most important recommendations is to encourage the government to substitute positive methodologies to encourage the public to appreciate the ability to function in French. This will achieve more in the long run.

Presented by:

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