

## Statement by the Quebec Community Groups Network

### Premier Legault Attempts to Muzzle English-speaking Community

**Montreal, February 7, 2020** – This has been a difficult week for Quebec’s English-speaking community as our rights continue to be dismissed and our relations with the Quebec government deteriorate further.

On Monday, the Alliance for the Promotion of Public English-language Education in Québec (APPELE-Québec), an alliance of 16 groups representing parents, educators and the community, urged the Quebec government to seek a court ruling on the constitutionality of Bill 40, which seeks to abolish our school boards. Within hours Education Minister Jean-Francois Roberge rejected our suggestion of a reasonable and responsible way of ending this impasse over his ill-conceived legislation. This approach that has been frequently used in other provinces by French-speaking minority communities. We continue to maintain that abolishing our school boards and replacing them with powerless service centres does not respect our constitutional right to manage and control our school system.

After tabling more than 80 amendments, and then amendments to the amendments, the Coalition Avenir Québec government announced Thursday it would invoke closure. This will terminate the debate on a Bill that is strongly opposed by English-speaking parents, teachers and community leaders. This complex and unnecessary change to the governance of our schools will become law by the end of today. Once again, we urge the Quebec government to pause and refer the legislation to the Quebec Court of Appeal so that we can avoid a costly and unnecessary court battle.

Another troubling development was Premier François Legault’s response to the English Montreal School Board obtaining funding from the Court Challenges Program. This program was first set up by the federal government in 1978 to support minorities defending their constitutional rights. The program recently awarded \$250,000 to support cases related to Bill 21 and the closing of English schools in the east end of Montreal. Following pressure from the Quebec government, the English Montreal School Board (EMSB) has turned down the legitimate offer of support for these important minority rights cases.

And now the Premier has gone even further in stating that school boards should not have the right to go to court to defend the rights of our minority community.

As the former Chief Justice of Canada Right Honourable Beverley McLachlin stated, “Courts are the venues for solving disagreements rule on legislation alleged to be unconstitutional for violation of the Charter, and in doing so define the scope of constitutional rights and freedoms... the judicial branch’s role is to interpret the law and resolve disputes arising from the law.”

English-speaking Quebecers are justified in turning to the courts to protect our rights. Our differences of views with the Quebec government must be resolved. It is wrong for Premier Legault to refuse this as a legitimate way forward and to use his bully pulpit to try muzzle our community. Fortunately, he will not succeed.