

QCGN Urges All Participants in Debate over Bill 96 to Act with Civility and Respect

MONTREAL, September 13, 2021 – When it adopted the Charter of the French Language more than 40 years ago, the Quebec National Assembly embraced an enduring and essential commitment: to pursue the Charter’s objectives “in a spirit of fairness and open-mindedness, respectful of the institutions of the English-speaking community of Quebec, and respectful of the ethnic minorities, whose valuable contribution to the development of Quebec it readily acknowledges.”

Bill 96 fails to live up to this commitment. This proposed legislation represents a serious danger to the linguistic peace that Quebecers have worked so hard to achieve over the last half-century. Instead, many of the measures proposed evoke a distant past, an oppressive era prior to the Quiet Revolution. Bill 96 is not befitting of an inclusive vision of our society and our collective future.

The Quebec Community Groups Network, through our Statement of Principles, recognizes the official language of Quebec is French.

We oppose many elements of Bill 96 in much the same way, and for many of the same reasons, as we opposed Bill 21. A particular danger which we – among many – pinpointed in the opening stages of the debate over Bill 96 is the preemptive use of the notwithstanding clause. As currently constituted, this legislation discards many of our core Constitutional protections. It has been structured in a way that rides roughshod over common rights of all Quebec citizens – basic rights and freedoms long enshrined in both the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms and the Quebec Charter of Human Rights and Freedoms.

The Quebec government has failed to properly explain why fundamental rights must now be thrust aside. Why, for instance, should those entrusted to enforce Quebec French-language policy be empowered to unilaterally seize computers and other equipment – without a judicial warrant? The QCGN website offers a very detailed breakdown and analysis of the many shortcomings and potential consequences of Bill 96.

We maintain that Quebec can promote and protect the French language while respecting fundamental individual rights.

To simply raise serious questions and objections is not Quebec-bashing – regardless of the responses from some who prefer to resort to rhetoric rather than to reason.

As it is currently constituted, Bill 96 would seriously damage the English-speaking community and other minorities. Its effects would include, but certainly not be limited to, further constraining our access to justice; imposing yet more impairment on our ability to exercise our legal right to receive health and social services in English; and further narrowing the scope of government services available in English.

In addition, many measures embedded within Bill 96 would severely damage the health of Quebec's economy. They would render it more difficult to do business; to attract investments; and to recruit specialized talent necessary to nourish our common prosperity.

Of course, all recognize that language and identity are a sensitive and emotional topic in Quebec. We strongly encourage all to take part in the debate. We acknowledge that discussions in the coming months may become heated. We urge all to remain civil, to step away from any name-calling, to engage with contrary views in a respectful and constructive manner, to consider the concerns of our neighbours with open hearts and clear minds, and to work hard – together – to chart a positive and welcoming path forward.

Events resulting from the opening question in the English-language leaders' debate have proven regrettable. It is up to all of our political leaders to set the tone and to ensure the debate will, as it evolves, be conducted with civility and respect, without name-calling.

The Quebec Community Groups Network (www.qcgn.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.

For further information:

Rita Legault, Director of Communications | rita.legault@qcgn.ca

Telephone: 514-868-9044, ext. 223, cellular: 514-912-6555