

Policy Matters Blog #26 – Bill 96

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY ADOPTS BILL 96

May 25, 2022 – Members of the National Assembly yesterday delivered their final speeches and remarks on Bill 96, [*An Act respecting French, the Official and Common Language of Québec*](#) and commentary from the Committee on Culture and Education, which had reviewed the bill on a clause-by-clause basis.

In the morning's sitting, Liberal MNA Jennifer Maccarone criticized the bill for creating two classes of English-speaking Quebecers: "historic Anglophones" and everyone else. Liberal MNA Gregory Kelley also said that Bill 96 divides Quebecers.

During the afternoon, in response to questions from Liberal MNA David Birnbaum, Minister of the French Language Simon Jolin-Barrette repeated that no portion of the bill takes away the right to access health-care services in English. He said that Bill 96 maintains "the status quo" for members of the Anglophone community to receive health care services in the language of their choice. He again described the opposition to the legislation expressed by the Liberals as reluctance to defend the French language.

Liberal Leader Dominique Anglade reminded MNAs that the professional order of doctors in the province, the Collège des médecins du Québec, had stated that "the text of the bill, as formulated, contains grey zones and gives reasons for worry."

Quebec Premier François Legault, leader of the Coalition Avenir Québec (CAQ), dismissed the Liberals' criticisms. He said the bill carves out an exception for the right to receive health-care services in English under Section 15 of the *Act respecting health services and social services*. Neither the Premier nor the Minister addressed specific concerns raised in this regard by the English-speaking community during the past several weeks. Medical professionals and legal experts alike have expressed unease that the bill's French-exclusivity rules could lead to confusion and disruption within health-care institutions. Could doctors sometimes feel pressure to refrain from speaking English to patients out of fear of being anonymously reported by a bystander to the Office québécois de la langue française (OQLF)? Or could a nurse of Algerian origin, for example, be reported, anonymously, to the OQLF for speaking to a patient in Berber? Such questions were neither raised nor answered during the Assembly sitting.

Québec Solidaire MNA Ruba Ghazal reiterated her party's concern that the six-month limit on a newcomer's right to be provided government services in English is arbitrary. This restriction, she added, does not provide immigrants or refugees with sufficient time to learn French well enough to be able to navigate Quebec's public institutions in their second or third language. Minister

Jolin-Barrette repeated his party's position that the rules and exceptions provided under Bill 96 must protect the French language and counter its decline in Quebec. He stated that it is the government's responsibility to integrate newcomers into Quebec's French-speaking society, and that the bill's measures have that objective at their core.

Minister Jolin-Barrette then tabled a motion to adopt Bill 96. This was met with extended applause from his colleagues in the CAQ.

All 78 MNAs of the CAQ and Québec Solidaire voted in favour. All 29 MNAs of the Liberal Party and Parti Québécois voted against. There were no abstentions.

With this vote, Bill 96 has been adopted by the National Assembly. The major changes it makes to the Charter of the French Language will take effect in coming days, once it receives assent from the Lieutenant Governor.