

For immediate release

English-speaking Community Will Not Abandon School Boards, QCGN Advises Premier

Montreal – December 14, 2018 – Quebec’s English-speaking community has absolutely no intention of heeding Premier François Legault’s advice that we abandon any plans to challenge the Coalition Avenir Quebec government’s scheme to abolish school boards and replace them with service centres.

Acknowledging that he and his Education Minister, Jean-François Roberge, have yet to discuss their plan with Quebec’s English-speaking community, the Premier told *The Gazette* yesterday that he is forging ahead with the controversial reform. Premier Legault dared to forecast that once service centres are in place, our community “will realize they lost nothing.”

“We disagree most emphatically,” the President of the Quebec Community Groups Network, Geoffrey Chambers, stated. “The Supreme Court of Canada’s ruling in *Mahe v. Alberta* was crystal clear. The Court ruled that minority language communities have the right to control and manage the educational facilities in which their children are taught, to both ensure and enable that our language and culture can flourish.”

“*Arsenault-Cameron v. Prince Edward Island* made clear that although the Minister of Education is responsible for making educational policy, his discretion is subordinate to the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms which protects the specific needs of the minority language community and confers on its representatives the exclusive right to manage minority language instruction and facilities,” said Chambers. He reminded Premier Legault that the Government of Quebec cannot invoke the ‘notwithstanding clause’ in matters pertaining to Section 23 rights.

It is the view of the QCGN that the community has a right to independent school boards which have control over those aspects of education which pertain to or have an effect on our language and culture. Court precedents have determined moreover, these boards must, in turn, have exclusive authority to make decisions relating to English language instruction and facilities, including: (a) expenditures of funds provided for such instruction and facilities; (b) appointment and direction of those responsible for the administration of such instruction and facilities; (c) establishment of programs of instruction; (d) recruitment and assignment of teachers and other personnel; and (e) the making of agreements for education and services for minority language pupils.

“School boards are not just about pupils and desks. They are vital to the very survival and identity of our English-speaking community,” Chambers said. “In this context the courts have consistently ruled in favour

of minority-language minority communities across Canada. This is not just about Quebec's English-speaking minority. This is about the rights of all official language minorities across Canada."

"Nova Scotia abolished majority school boards earlier this year while respecting the Constitutional Right of French school boards to remain intact," Chambers said. Provincial and territorial governments in New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island and the Yukon have also maintained their minority-language boards.

"If Premier Legault decides to go forward with this ill-considered plan to dismantle our boards, he should first verify he has the authority to do so by referring the matter to the Quebec Court of Appeal for a declaratory judgment," Chambers suggested.

"The government cannot dictate how our schools shall be governed. If reform for the governance of our boards is needed, then it is English-speaking Quebec's responsibility to make these reforms," Chambers added. He is calling on the Government of Quebec to work together with its English-speaking community to reform school board governance.

The Quebec Community Groups Network (www.qcgn.ca) is a not-for-profit organization bringing together 59 English-language community organizations across Quebec. Its mission is to identify, explore and address strategic issues affecting the development and vitality of English-speaking Quebec and to encourage dialogue and collaboration.

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