

AQ applauds OCOL's intervention on behalf of minority language rights

COMMUNIQUÉ

For immediate release:

Montreal, Tuesday, May 15, 2001 - Alliance Quebec applauds the efforts of the Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages in seeking intervener status in the Montreal-area municipalities' legal challenge to the provincial government's sweeping municipal reform law, Bill 170. Alliance Quebec previously supported OCOL's intervention on behalf of minority language rights in the Montfort Hospital case currently being heard in the Ontario Court of Appeal.

Alliance Quebec met with Commissioner of Official Languages, Dyane Adam in December 2000 to request that OCOL consider intervening in this file. Since that time, Alliance Quebec has repeatedly reiterated its request to the Commissioner.

“We asked the Commissioner of Official Languages to get involved because, by eliminating municipalities and transferring powers to a mega-city, Bill 170 ultimately serves to take powers away from our bilingual institutions and significantly reduces bilingual services to Quebec's linguistic minority community,” said Alliance Quebec, president Anthony Housefather.

In Quebec, a municipality is prohibited by law from providing services in English or requiring English competence from its employees on a general basis unless recognized as having bilingual status under section 29.1 of the Charter of the French Language. Such status was only conferred on a municipality that had a majority non-francophone population in 1977.

The 14 municipalities with bilingual status in the Montreal area are to be merged into a “French City” (*article 1, an act to reform the municipal territorial organization of the regions on Montreal, Quebec and the Outaouais*). Under law 170, all municipal employees are employed by the Mega-city and the right of bilingual municipalities to automatically require English as a job skill will not apply to any employee hired by the central city.

“Tax services, the municipal court, fire and security services, engineering, all would be run by the mega-city and there would be no more bilingual services automatically provided to citizens of bilingual cities and towns,” said Housefather. “The official

languages commissioner had to get involved to defend the rights of an official language minority community whose rights are being severely threatened.”

Alliance Quebec calls upon the Attorney General of Canada to join the Commissioner as an intervenor in this case.