

For immediate release

Use of French in Federally Regulated Private Businesses Act Abandons English-speaking Quebecers, QCGN tells Senate Committee

Montreal – June 13, 2022 – Under the dramatic overhaul of the Official Languages Act currently being considered, the federal government would in effect abandon English-speaking Quebec by discarding the fundamental principle of linguistic duality from coast to coast to coast, QCGN President Eva Ludvig today told the Senate Standing Committee on Official Languages.

Ludvig and QCGN Board Member Joan Fraser spoke during the Committee's pre-study of *C-13, An Act to amend the Official Languages Act, to enact the Use of French in Federally Regulated Private Businesses Act and to make related amendments to other Acts*.

The Committee's initial focus is on the federal government's proposal to create new language rights for French only, which would apply to communications with federally regulated businesses including banks, telecommunication companies, and airlines. These new rights would immediately apply in Quebec and later be expanded to include regions of Canada with "significant Francophone presence." In addition, federally regulated enterprises operating in Quebec would be given a choice whether to be subject to federal law or to Quebec's Charter of the French Language, which under Bill 96 was recently substantially amended.

"The federal government is proposing to walk away from linguistic duality from coast to coast to coast," Ludvig told the Committee. "It is making major concessions to Quebec, which we believe upsets the careful Constitutional balance and equality in law between English and French with unknowable interpretative effects." She underscored that this would constitute an unprecedented policy shift to "create a regime for language rights in private communications, in one official language only, on a territorial basis for federally regulated businesses."

"How could the Government of Canada create new language rights for French only, as if the members of our minority community do not work for or communicate with federally regulated businesses? How will it explain to English-speaking Quebecers that they have fewer language rights under federal legislation than Francophone citizens?" Ludvig asked.

"There is no evidence-based reason for this Act," she noted. A 2013 Industry Canada study examined language of work in federally regulated private businesses in Quebec not subject to the Official Languages Act (OLA) and concluded that "employees of federally regulated private-sector businesses in Quebec (not subject to the OLA) seem generally able to work in French in their workplaces." Christian

Paradis, at the time federal Minister of Industry and Minister responsible for Quebec, concluded that “there is nothing in the study that indicates the need for legislation to regulate language of work in Quebec,” Ludvig pointed out.

Former Senator Joan Fraser commended the Committee for having shown the foresight to request an independent analysis of the financial cost of C-13 from the Parliamentary Budget Office. The recent report concluded that the initial cost of implementing these new provisions would reach \$250 million, with recurring annual costs of \$20 million.

“Until now,” Fraser pointed out, “the federal government has refrained from imposing language obligations within private communications, which is what the Use of French in Federally Regulated Private Businesses Act proposes. And of course, the revised Charter of the French Language contains quite stringent rules about certain private communications. Encouraging enterprises to submit to those Quebec rules seems like another example of the revolutionary changes being presented in C-13.”

The QCGN’s detailed brief on C-13 is posted on the Committee’s website:

https://sencanada.ca/Content/Sen/Committee/441/OLLO/briefs/2022-06-13_OLLO_SM-C-13_Brief_QCGN_e.pdf

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.

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