

For immediate release

QCGN Cautiously Optimistic About Ottawa's Plan to Overhaul the Official Languages Act

Montreal, February 19, 2021 – The Quebec Community Groups Network is pleased that Official Languages Minister Mélanie Joly has reaffirmed the Government of Canada's continued leadership on matters of official languages. At the same time, the QCGN calls on the federal government to address our community's longstanding concerns about the provision of public services in English, as well as employment in federal institutions in Quebec.

Minister Joly's reform document for official languages in Canada, *French and English: towards substantive equality for official languages in Canada*, released earlier today, captures important requests made by Quebec's English-speaking community during the consultation process.

The QCGN is enthusiastic about proposals to strengthen the role of Treasury Board in the coordination of the Act and expand the powers of the Commissioner of Official Languages to ensure compliance. It also welcomes the transfer of the Court Challenges Program into the Act, thus securing this important mechanism for protecting language rights before the courts.

QCGN is also optimistic about increased support for our community's institutions and provisions that would provide more transparency on federal transfers directed towards our vitality. We note, this will be largely dependent on provincial cooperation.

"However, English-speaking Quebecers should remain wary of proposals to extend French language obligations to federally regulated businesses in Quebec. We demand that English-speaking consumers and workers be able to communicate with these businesses in the official language of their choice," QCGN President Marlene Jennings said.

"We are also disappointed that these proposals fail to address our long-standing concerns related to Part VI of the Act, which covers the participation of English- and French-speaking Canadians in the federal public service," QCGN Vice President Kevin Shaar added. He remarked that English-speaking Quebecers remain under-represented in nearly half federal institutions operating within Quebec outside the National Capital Region.

"English-speaking Quebecers are highly educated, bilingual, and their presence in federal institutions ensures employers' obligations to provide services in both English and French are met," Shaar said.

The paper talks about recognizing "the predominant use of English in Canada and North America and the fact that, given this context, it is imperative that French receive increased protection and promotion." This, Shaar predicted, "will affect the interpretation of federal and provincial language

rights for English-speaking Quebecers and will be used by attorneys general to justify restrictions of these rights for the English minority.”

The Quebec Community Groups Network 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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