

## **Brief**

Submitted to the National Assembly of Quebec's Committee on Culture and Education by the English Language Arts Network for the general consultation and public hearings on Bill 14 : An Act to amend the Charter of the French language, the Charter of human rights and freedoms and other legislative provisions.

**Montreal**  
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## Introduction

1) This brief was prepared by the English-Language Arts Network (ELAN), an incorporated not-for-profit organisation that represents 8,000 English-speaking artists in Quebec. ELAN is a meeting place for English-language artists and cultural workers of all disciplines from every region of Quebec, where they can share expertise and resources, build audiences and alliances, seek support, advocate for their interests, and make common cause with the Francophone arts community.

2) ELAN and its members recognize the vulnerability of the French language in Quebec, which is surrounded by more than 300 million neighbours who speak English, the current international lingua franca. ELAN and its members also recognize the benefit of a shared common language which allows all citizens to engage in a shared public discourse.

3) The majority of English Quebecers are bilingual (69%), and the rate of bilingualism increases to 77% among the 25-44 cohort, and 80% among 15-24 year olds. The increasing level of French language skills among Anglo Quebecers demonstrates their deep commitment to the French language, and to Quebec

4) Quebec has a long history of English-language arts and culture, as documented in *Minority Report: An Alternative History of English-Language Arts in Quebec* (Guernica Editions, 2011). These historical essays are available on the Recognizing Artists: *Enfin Visibles!* section of ELAN's website. ([www.raev.ca](http://www.raev.ca)) During the past 20 years the number of English-speaking artists in Quebec has increased dramatically. The vibrancy of Quebec's culture is an important reason why English-speaking artists choose to live and work in Quebec.

5) When Arcade Fire won a Grammy Award in 2011, millions of television viewers were watching when the group said, '*Merci, Montréal.*' All of Quebec was proud of their success. The National Assembly voted a motion to 'recognize the contribution of our francophone and anglophone artists in promoting our culture on the world stage.' Simon Brault of Culture Montréal commented that 'This expresses the idea that Montreal is an international hub'. Quebec provides stimulation and inspiration for English-speaking artists who help create a vibrant, modern, diverse society.

6) The vast majority of these English-speaking artists support the original intentions of the Charter of the French Language, which was designed to make French the public language of Quebec. The facts demonstrate that Anglos are increasingly able to use French as a public language. Allophones are obliged to attend French schools. From the point of view of English-speakers and allophones, the use of French as a public language has increased immeasurably since the implementation of the Charter of the French Language. Anglophones and allophones have made considerable efforts to contribute to this vitality.

7) It is therefore disturbing that some of the key arguments supporting revisions to the law are not based on the state of French as the public language. Three arguments in particular ring alarm bells.

8) The first alarm bell concerns the private use of language. Mother tongue and language used at home have no direct correlation to public language. Not everyone is born francophone, but people from every language group can learn French and use it in public situations. This is a unifying social vision. Classifying citizens by mother tongue is inherently divisive. Anglos cannot change their mother tongue, and they speak English in the privacy of their homes some or all of the time. The state has no business prying into the private language used by citizens any more than into their personal religious beliefs or sexual lives. No one should be regarded as an inferior citizen because he or she speaks other languages in addition to French. The moment public policy exceeds its jurisdiction beyond the language used in the public space, disturbing issues arise against which legitimate questions will be raised.

9) The second alarm bell concerns treating the interests of ethnic francophones as synonymous with defence of the French language. An article in *La Presse* (10 sept 2011) with the headline '*Les francophones minoritaires en 2013?*' reported on studies which announced the decrease of francophones living in Montreal. Use of the French language was not presented as the direct object of concern, but rather the number of ethnic francophones. Marc Termote, a demographic researcher at the Université de Montréal, was quoted as saying that for the first time in 40 years fewer and fewer anglophones were leaving Quebec, "which could have a negative impact on the *poids du français*" and that «Pendant longtemps, la baisse des francophones avait été freinée parce que les anglophones sortait.» It was irresponsibly alarmist to suggest that a decrease in the exodus of Anglophones is viewed as a problem for Quebec. Such statements imply that no matter how bilingual the English-speaking population becomes, the only way they can make a positive contribution is by leaving. For the purposes of public policy, everyone who uses French as a public language is fulfilling the spirit and letter of the law. It may be necessary to designate a new word to describe this status. 'Francophile' is not specific to language use, and 'francophone' has historical and ethnical connotations which do not naturally encompass French-speaking anglophones and allophones. A word like francisé(e) could encompass everyone who has attained competency in the French language.

10) The third alarm bell concerns the failure to distinguish local use of English from the global presence of English as a language of commerce, diplomacy and mass culture. Quebec is not alone in experiencing the consequences of this international English-language phenomenon; many large countries throughout the world experience its influence. It is essential for public policy to clearly distinguish between appropriate measures that combat an external threat coming from outside Quebec, and the presence of a unique local English-language culture, which has long contributed to society and remains an asset to Quebec.

11) English-speaking artists also share the concern of their francophone colleagues about imported culture and would prefer to see more attention given to local culture, more presence for it in the schools, and more visibility for local artists throughout Quebec.

12) ELAN recognizes that there may always be some discomfort when local artistic creations are made in languages other than French. However, as people like Oliver Jones, Margie Gillis, Kevin Tierney, Louise Penny, Martha Wainwright, Patrick Watson, Linda Leith, Steve Gallucio, David Homel, Magnus Isacsson and Melvin Charney demonstrate, English-speaking artists have made important contributions to Quebec culture, locally and internationally.

13) If public policy in Quebec is based around mother tongue and a 'francophone' ethnicity, anglophones and allophones will feel alienated and may become hostile to the idea of participating. If public policy is based around the promotion of French as the shared public language, then all Quebecers can participate in a unifying project.

14) Therefore, we maintain that any revisions to the Charter of the French Language must focus on the defence and promotion of French as the public language in a manner that includes francophones, allophones and anglophones. There must not be different classes of citizens based on linguistic ethnicity. Private language remains a private matter. Anglo-Québécois citizens must not be treated as a threat simply because they speak the language that is currently so seductive and domineering around the world. ELAN maintains that a healthy inter-cultural dialogue can be achieved – amongst other methods – through artistic expression and collaboration, and without the imposition of divisive and punitive laws.

15) The preamble to the original Charter of the French Language stated that “The National Assembly intends to pursue this objective in a spirit of fairness and open-mindedness, respectful of the institutions of the English-speaking community of Quebec, and respectful of the ethnic minorities, whose valuable contribution to the development of Quebec it readily acknowledges.” If the current government intends to pursue revisions to the law, we urge them to do so in the same spirit.

## PRÉAMBULE - Charte de la langue française

Langue distinctive d'un peuple majoritairement francophone, la langue française permet au peuple québécois d'exprimer son identité.

L'Assemblée nationale reconnaît la volonté des Québécois d'assurer la qualité et le rayonnement de la langue française. Elle est donc résolue à faire du français la langue de l'État et de la Loi aussi bien que la langue normale et habituelle du travail, de l'enseignement, des communications, du commerce et des affaires.

**L'Assemblée nationale entend poursuivre cet objectif dans un esprit de justice et d'ouverture, dans le respect des institutions de la communauté québécoise d'expression anglaise et celui des minorités ethniques, dont elle reconnaît l'apport précieux au développement du Québec.**

L'Assemblée nationale reconnaît aux Amérindiens et aux Inuit du Québec, descendants des premiers habitants du pays, le droit qu'ils ont de maintenir et de développer leur langue et culture d'origine.

Ces principes s'inscrivent dans le mouvement universel de revalorisation des cultures nationales qui confère à chaque peuple l'obligation d'apporter une contribution particulière à la communauté internationale.