

The Supreme Court of Canada agreed to hear three cases involving 11 families who sought Alliance Quebec's support in getting access to Quebec's English-language school system for their 25 children

MONTREAL, April 24, 2003 – The Supreme Court of Canada agreed Thursday to hear three cases involving 11 families who sought Alliance Quebec's support in getting access to Quebec's English-language school system for their 25 children.

“If we win, Bill 104 is toast,” Alliance Quebec President Brent Tyler said at a news conference. He was referring to the latest restrictions on access to English schools passed by the last Parti Quebecois government with support from the provincial Liberals.

Mr. Tyler, who is representing all three parties before the Supreme Court, said he will argue the parents' rights “to equal access to public education and public services in the best interests of the child.”

“What it boils down to is freedom of choice,” Mr. Tyler said. “This debate has never taken place at the Supreme Court level.”

One case involves Roger Gosselin and his wife and seven other French-Canadian families who argue that restricting the access of their children to Quebec's English-language schools contravenes their rights under Quebec's Charter of Human Rights and Freedoms.

Another involving Edwige Casimir argues that requiring a child to have the major part of their elementary level education in English in Canada before having access to English school in Quebec contravenes the Canadian Constitution.

And the third involving Ms Casimir, Consuelo Zorilla and Ikechukwu Okwuobi argues procedures obliging parents to take the case for their childrens' accessibility to English schools through Quebec's administrative tribunal – a process that takes nearly a year – is unfair and not in the best interests of the child. They argue that access to the courts in such cases should be faster.

Mr. Tyler said he hoped other parties affected by the outcome of these cases – The Attorney General of Canada, the Commissioner of Official Languages of Canada, English-language school boards in Quebec and representatives of French-language official minorities elsewhere in Canada -- might also intervene.

“These cases have implications for all Canadians,” Mr. Tyler said.

He said he has asked Premier Jean Charest to suspend enforcement of the latest restrictions of access to English schools until final judgment has been reached. Hundreds of other Quebec parents, many of them French-Canadian, have sought Alliance Quebec’s support against these latest restrictions.

He said there was a difference between the consensus on language or “language peace” arranged by the province’s political elite and what the majority of Quebec’s residents actually want – free access to the schools of the parents’ choice.