

For immediate release

QCGN Eager to Contribute to Hearings on Modernization of the Official Languages Act

Montreal, March 11, 2019 – The Quebec Community Groups Network looks forward to contributing to cross-country consultations by Official Languages Minister Mélanie Joly on the modernization of the Official Languages Act, as Canadians celebrate the 50th anniversary of this pivotal law.

“The Official Languages Act is a lifeline for English-speaking Quebec,” said QCGN President Geoffrey Chambers. “It is the only law that protects the linguistic interests of English-speaking Quebecers as a community. Having said that, after 50 years, the Act is somewhat antiquated and is in serious need of an update. We are particularly keen that English-speaking Quebec participates in the forums and towns halls announced by the Minister today. We must make sure that our voices are heard.”

Over the past few years, the QCGN and its Francophone counterparts across Canada have been actively involved in discussions on ways to modernize the Act, including at hearings by both the House of Commons and Senate committees on Official Languages. We now look forward to providing input to Minister Joly, who is responsible for drafting the government’s proposals to modernize the act. (Read our brief [here](#).)

“The interests of Quebec’s English-speaking community align strategically with those of Francophone linguistic minority communities across the country,” Chambers noted. He added that the QCGN fully supports the principles outlined in the [proposed bill](#) put forward last week by La Fédération des communautés francophones et acadienne du Canada (FCFA), which advocates for a complete overhaul of the Official Languages Act to give it more teeth.

The FCFA, QCGN’s counterpart in French-speaking Canada, is recommending that the Commissioner of Official Languages be given new legislative tools to play a more hands-on role as ombudsman for and champion of Canada’s official languages. It also recommends the

establishment of an administrative tribunal with the power to impose sanctions on repeat offenders.

“We also agree with the FCFA that clear and enforceable language clauses accompany all federal transfers to the provinces,” said Chambers. “Accountability has been an ongoing issue for official language minority communities, especially in the area of education.”

“Our thinking throughout this important work was guided by the principle of equality of status between English and French,” said QCGN’s Director General Sylvia Martin-Laforge, adding that an updated act must provide for robust, mandatory, and properly resourced consultations between government and official language minority communities.

The consultation sessions will be held between March 12 and April 24. The schedule is as follows:

In Moncton on March 12, from 9 a.m. to 12 p.m., the theme will be “Promotion of culture and bilingualism.”

In Ottawa on March 18, the theme will be “Federal institutions that embody official languages.”

In Sherbrooke, on April 15, the discussion will focus on “Official languages and Canada’s place in the world.”

In Edmonton on April 23, the subject will be “Mobilization, development and vitality of official-language minority communities.”

In Vancouver on April 24, the theme will be “Official languages and Canada in the digital age.”

There will also be a unifying two-day event in Ottawa on May 27-28, during which experts in a variety of areas will discuss the major issues identified during the cross-country forums.

“Linguistic duality has truly become a fundamental value in Canada,” commented Laforge. “As we celebrate the 50th anniversary of the Official Languages Act this year, we need to rebuild the foundations of this cornerstone legislation so that it reaffirms linguistic duality and reinforces official language minority communities, taking us into the next half-century.”

The Quebec Community Groups Network (www.qcgn.ca) is a not-for-profit organization bringing together 59 English-language community organizations across Quebec. Its mission is to identify, explore and address strategic issues affecting the development and vitality of English-speaking Quebec and to encourage dialogue and collaboration.

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