

QCGN Leaders Disappointed by CAQ's Position on Bill 14

For immediate release

Montreal, March 8, 2013 – The Quebec Community Groups Network (QCGN) and its members are disappointed that the Coalition Avenir Québec (CAQ) and its leader François Legault have decided to support parts of Bill 14. Specifically, we are concerned that they intend to support amendments to the Quebec Charter of Human Rights and Freedoms that could weaken protections against linguistic discrimination by influencing how courts interpret the rest of the Charter.

“After careful examination of the bill with our members and community stakeholders it is the position of the QCGN that Bill 14 must be defeated in its entirety,” said QCGN President Dan Lamoureux, noting that the Liberal Party has indicated they will not support the Bill. That leaves the balance of power on this issue in the hands of the CAQ and its 19 Members of the National Assembly. “In order to ensure the bill is defeated it is essential that the CAQ, or at least some of their members, vote against it.”

“Mr. Legault said his party is committed to the promotion and defense of the French language, as long as measures do not lack respect for Quebec’s English-speaking community,” said Lamoureux. “We want everyone to understand that changes to the Charter and other measures the CAQ supports would have negative impacts on our community.”

“The proposal to include provisions regarding the right to live and work in French in the provincial Charter of Human Rights and Freedoms would create grave confusion with regard to the purpose of this Charter. The Charter is there to prevent any kind of abuse of human rights in any domain of social existence,” commented Noel Gates, president of the Regional Association of West Quebecers.

François Legault and Nathalie Roy, the party's language critic, announced Friday they have three main “deal breakers”: revoking bilingual status for municipalities with fewer than 50 per cent English-speaking citizens; preventing French-speaking military kids from attending English schools; as well as imposing more red tape on small businesses.

“This is all good news, but it’s not enough,” said Lamoureux, noting the QCGN and many member organizations have met with CAQ MNAs representing their regions to voice strong opposition to other parts of the bill, including provisions on education.

“We are concerned that proposed secondary school and CEGEP entrance requirements and proficiency conditions for certification could have a prejudicial effect on English-speaking students and the survival of our institutions,” said Helen Walling, president of Voice of English-speaking Quebec that represents the provincial capital region. “These modifications should be opposed because they would change the criteria for admissions to colleges from academic merit to language used, and prevent otherwise academically successful students from graduating.”

“We are also concerned that higher standards of French proficiency may negatively impact the graduation success rates in both English and French schools,” added Rickhey Margolese, vice-president of the Quebec Federation of Home and School Associations. “At a time when drop-out rates are high, unrealistic standards may push an already precarious situation over the edge and discourage more students who are already struggling.”

“Here in the regions, we fear that Bill 14 chips away at our rights in multiple legislative and administrative ways. That is why we believe the bill should not go through,” said Ann Marie Powell, president of Megantic County English-speaking Community Development Corporation (MCDC) in Thetford Mines.

“We agree that the government must take measures to protect and promote the French language, but it is essential that English-speaking Quebecers not be the victims of those measures,” said Lamoureux. “The QCGN and its members invite the Coalition to sit down with us so we can explain the direct and indirect impacts that Bill 14 will have on the vitality of our communities.”

The Quebec Community Groups Network (www.qcgn.ca) is a not-for-profit organization bringing together 41 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 among its member organizations, individuals, community groups, institutions and leaders.

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