

For immediate release

House of Commons Committee Votes to Forsake English-speaking Quebecers

Montreal, February 3, 2023 – The Quebec Community Groups Network (QCGN) is profoundly disappointed that the House of Commons Standing Committee on Official Languages has allowed references to Quebec’s Charter of the French Language to remain in proposed new federal language legislation to amend Canada’s Official Languages Act.

During the committee’s clause-by-clause consideration of Bill C-13, *An Act to amend the Official Languages Act, to enact the Use of French in Federally Regulated Private Businesses Act and to make related amendments to other Acts*, a Liberal proposal to remove a reference to the Quebec language legislation was defeated. Members from the Conservative Party of Canada, the New Democratic Party, and the Bloc Québécois voted against.

Instead, a motion put forward by the Bloc to further entrench Quebec’s Charter into the Official Languages Act was adopted. A second Bloc Québécois motion further entrenching asymmetry within the Act was similarly supported and passed with support from the Tories and the NDP.

“Despite the best efforts of many Liberal MPs led by Anthony Housefather, Patricia Lattanzio, and Marc Garneau, it is clear to us that the deck is stacked against English-speaking Quebec,” said Eva Ludvig, president of the QCGN. The trio received reinforcements this morning from Liberal MPs Emmanuella Lambropoulos, Fayçal El-Khoury, and Sherry Romanado.

“We saw today in Committee how the Conservatives and NDP have clearly abandoned linguistic duality and are working hand in hand with the Bloc to rip apart 50 years of federal official languages policy,” stated Ludvig. “This is a major setback for the rights of English-speaking Quebecers.”

Since the Liberal government signalled a radical change to Canada’s official languages policy in the 2021 Speech from the Throne, the QCGN, jurists, and many others have been warning of serious consequences. “This is a disastrous bill that will profoundly erode our language rights and the relationship between the federal government and our English-speaking minority,” said Ludvig.

“It did not have to be this way,” added Joan Fraser, former Senator and a member of the QCGN Board.

“In 2018, Canada’s English and French linguistic minority communities had reached a consensus on how the Official Languages Act could be modernized,” Fraser explained. “This consensus would not only have

strengthened and fixed long-standing issues with the OLA, but it would also have protected the core national value of linguistic duality and the official language rights of all Canadians from sea to sea to sea.”

Ludvig added: “Let me be clear. The QCGN is in favour of the protection and promotion of French. But we are opposed to the inclusion of the Charter of the French Language in the Official Languages Act because this would not achieve this goal. And we are not alone in this view.” She noted that former Supreme Court of Canada Justice Michel Bastarache expressed concerns about the consequences of including provincial language legislation within the Official Languages Act.

“The government’s own experts also warned the Committee about such consequences,” said Ludvig. “By proceeding on this path, Ottawa would be writing Quebec a blank cheque on language rights in the province and, in the process, signing away our future.”

“On behalf of English-speaking Quebecers, we repeat our plea to Parliamentarians to remove all references to the Quebec Charter of the French Language from this legislation and to ensure that all language rights created by Parliament are equitably extended to both official languages, English and French.”

The Quebec Community Groups Network (www.qcgn.ca) 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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