

For immediate release

Action Plan on Official Languages Offers Opportunities for Quebec's English-speaking Community

Ottawa, April 26, 2023 – The Quebec Community Groups Network (QCGN) welcomes the Government of Canada's new Action Plan for Official Languages 2023–2028: Protection-Promotion-Collaboration, launched today by Official Languages Minister Ginette Petitpas Taylor, accompanied by Prime Minister Justin Trudeau.

The Prime Minister made special mention of the federal government's continuing leadership role in protecting Quebec's English-speaking communities: "We firmly believe that it is both possible and necessary to do more to protect the French language in Canada, including in Quebec; that the Government of Canada must continue to play a leadership role in protecting official language minority communities across Canada, including Quebec's English-speaking communities; and that a coherent, coordinated, whole-of-government approach can foster collaboration, particularly with the provincial and territorial governments, to ensure broad support for the vitality of our two official languages."

"Supporting the needs of English-speaking Quebec is a cooperative effort between the federal and provincial governments," observed QCGN President Eva Ludvig. "Today, the Government of Canada has unveiled an ambitious, five-year Action Plan with \$1.4 billion in new Canada-wide funding that our community hopes will help address long-standing vitality goals."

Added QCGN Director General Sylvia Martin-Laforge: "There are important new investments available for our education, access-to-justice and health and social services sectors in this Action Plan. We are particularly pleased that the government heard us on the need for more help in addressing unemployment within English-speaking Quebec, as well as the new program to assist the critical work done by our arts, culture, and heritage organizations."

"The QCGN and community stakeholders have worked hard over the years to ensure the needs of 1.3 million English-speaking Quebecers are equitably addressed by the 2023-28 Action Plan," Martin-Laforge continued. "We began to see recognition of the special needs of English-speaking Quebec in the last Action Plan and we are pleased to see that serious effort has gone into recognizing the challenges specific to our community."

The areas of greatest concern to English-speaking Quebecers, like access to justice, health and social services, and education, all lie within Quebec's jurisdiction. Quebec has made progress over the last several years in taking the needs of its English minority seriously. This must be balanced against the genuine concerns English-speaking Quebecers have over the enjoyment of fundamental rights and freedoms in the face of Bills 21 and 96. It is clear, however, that there are opportunities to work with the

federal and provincial governments to address priority areas, and the Action Plan presents an attractive mechanism to bring federal dollars into Quebec.

“We are particularly pleased with this Action Plan’s emphasis on diversity, inclusion, and equity,” Ludvig said. “There is real opportunity within this plan for under-represented groups to get the support they need to serve their communities.”

“This Action Plan represents more than just getting ‘our piece of the pie.’ There are specific programs in here for English-speaking Quebec, and there is work to be done by our community sectors to take full advantage of the opportunities presented to us,” said Martin-Laforge.

“We will always insist that English-speaking Quebecers be treated equally before and under the law, and that the language rights of English- and French-speaking Canadians be equally protected,” Ludvig said. “English-speaking Quebec understands full well the special need to protect and promote French in Canada. The positive news in today’s Action Plan is tempered by our community’s continued concern around C-13 and that federal bill’s tacit support for Quebec’s pre-emptive use of the notwithstanding clause and its effect on the interpretation of language rights for English-speaking Quebec.”

Our community has a culture and identity unique from Canada’s English-speaking majority, and this Action Plan contains important initiatives and investments to help our arts, culture and heritage sector.

“There is work to do with the government of Quebec,” said Martin-Laforge. “The government of Canada is offering significant investments in educational and community infrastructure. But this money for the most part flows through the province, and it will have to agree on the ways the funding is used to support Quebec’s English-speaking community.

“We are pleased with the Action Plan’s additional investments in community-based employment assistance services, and we look forward to discussing these aspects of the Action Plan with community partners through the QCGN’s community roundtables.

The QCGN is prepared to work with the community and all levels of government to make the most of the opportunities presented in this new Action Plan.

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.

For further information:

Rita Legault, Director of Communications | rita.legault@qcgn.ca

Telephone: 438-270-0680