



## **English-speaking Quebec: an Integral Part of Quebec and Canadian Society**

A Brief submitted by the Quebec Anglophone Heritage Network (QAHN) in the context of the Government of Canada's Consultations on a Renewed Action Plan for Official Languages

Sherbrooke, July 7, 2022

Founded in 2000, the Quebec Anglophone Heritage Network (QAHN) is a non-profit, non-partisan, province-wide organization engaged with its members in the preservation and promotion of the history, heritage and culture of Quebec – and in particular of Quebec's English-speaking communities. Membership in QAHN is open to anyone, or any organization, with an interest in Quebec's history, heritage and culture. Members include historical societies, museums, heritage and cultural groups, individuals and families.

With support from a variety of funders, including Canadian Heritage, the Government of Quebec, private foundations and members of the public, QAHN initiatives have focused on education, youth engagement, publishing, digital technologies, volunteerism, fundraising, oral history, and heritage tourism, among other topics. QAHN hosts conferences and capacity-building workshops for the heritage community and the general public, advocates for historic preservation and funding for local heritage projects, sponsors traveling exhibitions, and encourages student participation through contests and internships. Through our awards program, we recognize the contributions of individual volunteers and community groups working to preserve our history and heritage.

As a provincially-mandated network representing over one hundred organizations across Quebec traditionally linked to the province's English-speaking community, QAHN feels compelled to speak during these consultations on the renewal of the Action Plan for Official Languages.

First, we wish state that the English-speaking minority of Quebec, together with its heritage, cultural and educational institutions, has a long history of distinguished contributions to virtually every facet of Quebec and Canadian society. Our community is an integral part of this province and this country.

QAHN has a long track record of collaborating with our colleagues in the Francophone heritage sector, and firmly believes that relations between Quebec's majority French-speaking population and its English-speaking minority must be based upon mutual respect. We also contend that fostering a vibrant English-speaking community in Quebec, one that can grow and express itself linguistically in all aspects of society is not an attack on the French language. We assert rather that the existence of a strong English-speaking minority in Quebec can only serve to benefit and enrich Quebec and Canada culturally and economically. Our community is an ally, not an enemy.

QAHN fully recognizes the importance of the French-speaking majority of Quebec, and its right to thrive; we also support the rights and privileges of the French-speaking minority communities in other provinces. We reject, however, that the French-speaking majority in Quebec, or French-speaking minorities elsewhere, are in greater need of protection, or more deserving of funding, than those of the English-speaking minority of Quebec. We further reject the assertion that French in Quebec is at risk or in decline.

For over fifty years, Canada's Official Languages Act has represented one of the fundamental protections afforded the English-speaking minority of Quebec, and as such it is essential to the long-term survival and vitality

of that community. All official language minority communities across Canada, French and English, are unique. Each has different needs that must be recognized and addressed – Quebec’s English-speaking minority included.

It is QAHN’s view that the Government of Canada has an obligation to maintain substantive equality in the way it serves, supports and funds minority-language communities in the context of the Official Languages Act. Any renewed Action Plan for Official Languages must reflect this principle which we consider integral to our vision as a nation, and an important part of our cultural heritage. It is also our view that any attempt by the Government of Canada to cede control of Official Language Minority Community support to provincial authorities, either in Quebec or elsewhere, would be an abdication of federal responsibility.

We therefore applaud the Government of Canada’s plan to develop a renewed Action Plan. However, in our view, the document titled “English and French: Towards a Substantive Equality of Official Languages in Canada” does not reflect an adequate understanding of the situation of the English-speaking minority of Quebec, or our community’s contributions to society. In fact, the overwhelming emphasis in this document is on the protection and strengthening of the French language inside Quebec and across Canada. Indeed, the lack of balance in this document, and the bias towards the needs of French-speaking communities in Quebec and across Canada (the so-called “Francophonie canadienne”) – needs that QAHN recognizes as legitimate – is obvious. Also obvious, and this is unacceptable to us, is that the equally legitimate needs (and fears) of the English-speaking community of Quebec are barely mentioned; when they are, they come across as little more than lip service.

Quebec’s English-speaking community, so often disparaged as the “best-treated minority in the world,” is deeply concerned that our needs and our rights seem to be of secondary concern to the Government of Canada. We are concerned that our federal leaders are beginning to accept the tired old cliché that English-speaking Quebecers are a domineering, repressive, exploitative, affluent elite. This representation, of course, is far from the reality. In fact, many of our communities and our institutions, especially outside of Montreal, are actually fighting for their very survival. Indicators such as education or income level point to a community that is, in many parts of Quebec, socially and economically disadvantaged in comparison to the provincial majority. In the case of Quebec’s English-speaking heritage sector, QAHN’s core constituency, many organizations are struggling to preserve the legacy of centuries of contributions by our community to Quebec and Canadian society. In many parts of Quebec, our community is far from thriving, and certainly in no position to threaten the survival of the French-speaking majority.

Finally, the passage in Quebec of the appalling Bill 96 has raised the level of angst within our community as never before. While QAHN fully supports the vitality of the French-speaking community in Quebec and Canada, the protection of one community cannot be at the expense of another. Like all Canadians, English-speaking Quebecers have dreams and aspirations. These include living in a community that is vital and vibrant, and that has a solid future for our children and grandchildren. With all of this in mind, therefore, we urge the Government of Canada to develop an Action Plan for Official Languages that is balanced and fair, and that takes into account the legitimate needs and aspirations of Quebec’s English-speaking minority.

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