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DIOCÈSE ANGLICAN MONTRÉAL

Monday, May 16, 2022

Mr. Simon Jolin-Barrette
Minister Responsible for the French Language
1035, rue des Parlementaires
1er étage, Bureau 1.39
Québec (Quebec) G1A 1A4

Minister,

We represent communities and institutions that have been present and active in Quebec for more than 250 years. While we remain deeply and historically rooted in many of the English-speaking communities of Quebec, Anglicans seek to contribute to the common good of all Quebecers, regardless of the language they speak.

We not only accept but embrace the notion of French as the common language of Quebec. We also recognize the need to promote the French language in a globalized context where English is not only the dominant language of the rest of North America, but of the world. However, we fear that in attempting to do so, Bill 96 risks doing unnecessary harm to at least two groups of people who are already vulnerable, and for whom our church has a particular concern.

The first group is Indigenous youth from communities such as Kawawachikamach, Kahnawake, and Odanak, where the traditional languages of Naskapi, Mohawk, and Abenaki, respectively, are in an even more perilous state than French. Heroic efforts are underway in these communities to save these languages from extinction—languages which were spoken on this land centuries before the first words of French or English were ever heard. However, Bill 96's requirement that students attending an English-language CEGEP take three additional courses in French will burden Indigenous students with the obligation to master a third language. We request that Indigenous students attending English-language CEGEPs be exempted from this requirement.

The second group is immigrants. In its current form, Bill 96 will prohibit public servants from communicating with immigrants to Quebec in a language other than French more than six months after their arrival here. It is unreasonable—bordering on cruel—to expect someone newly arrived to Quebec to master the French language within months, while at the same time trying to navigate the multiplicity of other factors involved in settling into a new and foreign context. This is especially true for refugees, who on top of everything else are often carrying the trauma of a violent escape from their country of origin. We request that you extend this provision from six months to at least two years.

Making these two amendments to Bill 96 before its passage into law would show compassion to two groups of people who do not need further obstacles placed on their journey toward fulfilling their potential, and to contributing to the common life of this place we all love and call home.

Sincerely yours,

The Rt. Rev. Bruce Myers
Bishop of Quebec

The Rt. Rev. Mary Irwin-Gibson
Bishop of Montreal