



CANADIAN HELLENIC CONGRESS
ΕΛΛΗΝΟΚΑΝΑΔΙΚΟ ΚΟΓΚΡΕΣΟ
CONGRÈS HELLÉNIQUE CANADIEN

1220, rue de Beauharnois, Suite 109, Montréal (QC) H4N 1J5
chc@chcongress.ca – www.chcongress.ca

September-2021

**BILL 96: AN ACT RESPECTING FRENCH,
THE OFFICIAL AND COMMON LANGUAGE OF QUÉBEC**

- THE POSITION OF THE CANADIAN HELLENIC CONGRESS -

On behalf of the Canadian Hellenic Congress (CHC), I welcome the opportunity to present its views on Bill 96 within the framework of the public hearings held by the QCGN.

The CHC – as the national democratic community organisation that represents, advances, defends and promotes the interests and concerns of Canadians of Hellenic descent and Hellenism in general across Canada – has been the voice of Hellenism in Canada since 1982. Our objective is to speak for Canadians of Hellenic heritage, and their communities and organisations, on matters of education, cultural, social, economic and national Hellenic issues, in an effort to advance and promote Hellenism, democracy, human rights and civic responsibility.

We are deeply concerned about the extensive impact that Bill 96 will have in Quebec. We view the scope of Bill 96 as broad and far-reaching, impacting all aspects of Quebec society, from business to access to justice, health, social services and education, and proposing changes to several statutes, including the Canadian Constitution and the Charter of Human Rights and Freedoms, amongst others.

It is abundantly evident that Bill 96 – which seeks to amend a substantial number of Quebec's laws, as well as, the 1867 Constitution Act – is not simply an update to Bill 101, Quebec's Charter of the French Language. It is our opinion that Bill 96 evidently seeks to fundamentally modify Quebec's governance structure.

The reordering of human rights, the erosion of individual rights, the limiting of options in terms of education and the consequential impacts to minority communities are amongst our concerns with respect to Bill 96.

Overriding human rights:

It is greatly concerning that this legislation recognises the prominence of the French language over the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms and over Quebec's own Québec Charter of Human Rights and Freedoms. Using the *Notwithstanding Clause* to override our

Page 1 of 3

The Canadian Hellenic Congress is a national democratic communal institution that represents, advances, advocates and promotes the interests and concerns of Canadians of Hellenic descent and Hellenism in general. The Congress is the national voice of Hellenes and their communities and/or organizations across Canada.



CANADIAN HELLENIC CONGRESS
ΕΛΛΗΝΟΚΑΝΑΔΙΚΟ ΚΟΓΚΡΕΣΟ
CONGRÈS HELLÉNIQUE CANADIEN

1220, rue de Beauharnois, Suite 109, Montréal (QC) H4N 1J5
chc@chcongress.ca – www.chcongress.ca

CHC; BILL 96 – Sept. 2021 (cont'd)

Charter rights to prioritise French-language rights over fundamental human rights is unconstitutional and a drastic attempt to control how citizens in Quebec live.

We view Bill 96 as following in the footsteps of *Bill 21: An Act respecting the laicity of the State*, or as it is more commonly referred to, *The Law Against Religious Freedom*. Bill 21 was the first time in Quebec's history that the *Notwithstanding Clause* had been used to suspend all provisions in both the Canadian and Quebec Charters. Bill 96 is now the second.

It is not far-reaching to say that we are seeing a troubling pattern. When the majority imposes certain rules on minorities or attempts to limit minority rights, unconstrained by the Constitution, we should all be concerned.

Creating barriers to accessing justice:

Bill 96 challenges the idea that access to justice is a fundamental value of the Canadian justice system. If passed, non-French speaking Quebecers would be required to attach certified French translations to legal proceedings. This would increase costs, add to delays, and make Quebec's justice system less accessible for non-French speaking Quebecers.

Placing restrictions on access to health and social services:

Bill 96 narrows the criteria for those who qualify to receive health and social services care in English, consequently restricting access to care in English for many Anglophones, and allophones, including immigrants and newcomers. Well-known facts are that health and social services are not means for social integration and that the ability to communicate in the language of choice is an absolutely essential component of quality and safe care. As such, Bill 96 would adversely impact Quebec's English-speaking and ethnic minority communities by placing restrictions on their access to health and social services.

Limiting options in terms of education:

As a minority, ethnic group we are strong proponents of trilingualism: French, English and Greek. An example of this is that our community schools are part of the French-school system and also teach English and Greek, with subsidisation by parents. While we support the English community's right to control and manage its school boards, as mandated by the Canadian constitution, we also strongly support French-language instruction in English schools, to ensure fluency in French for our young Quebec graduates. By the same token,

Page 2 of 3

The Canadian Hellenic Congress is a national democratic communal institution that represents, advances, advocates and promotes the interests and concerns of Canadians of Hellenic descent and Hellenism in general. The Congress is the national voice of Hellenes and their communities and/or organizations across Canada.



CANADIAN HELLENIC CONGRESS
ΕΛΛΗΝΟΚΑΝΑΔΙΚΟ ΚΟΓΚΡΕΣΟ
CONGRÈS HELLÉNIQUE CANADIEN

1220, rue de Beauharnois, Suite 109, Montréal (QC) H4N 1J5
chc@chcongress.ca – www.chcongress.ca

CHC; BILL 96 – Sept. 2021 (cont'd)

we support English-language instruction in French schools so that French students can be fluent in English upon graduation. As such, we are opposed to any quotas or restrictions on the number of Quebecers that could enroll in English CEGEPS. We believe such restrictions on freedom of choice may, ultimately, result in a “brain drain” in Quebec. It is our opinion that by providing our Quebec students/youth the tools necessary for success in their future careers and economic well being, including education in their language of choice, we would ultimately allow them to successfully contribute to Quebec’s prosperity.

Bill 96 creates more barriers for minority communities by reducing public services in English and limiting our eligibility for them. It also creates complications to accessing justice for Quebecers from all walks of life. This has the potential to further sideline underrepresented communities from living and thriving in Quebec.

If passed into law, Bill 96 will give the National Assembly the power to legislate in any way it sees fit regarding the French language and the Quebec “Nation”. We believe this decision-making power should lie with the courts and not with the National Assembly.

As a minority group, we understand that preserving language is an important part of protecting identity, however, we also know that – as history has shown – severe and sweeping governmental policy, such as Bill 96, often further disenfranchises minority communities, creates second-class citizens, and contributes to greater discord amongst society.

We believe in building a stronger and more prosperous Quebec, all together as a united front, and that the greatest protector of the French language and culture is a world-class society with a strong economy; a Quebec that attracts the best and brightest of the 21st century.

We urge the government to consider a more balanced approach to preserving language while preserving the rights of all.

Dr. Theodore Halatsis
President

Page 3 of 3

The Canadian Hellenic Congress is a national democratic communal institution that represents, advances, advocates and promotes the interests and concerns of Canadians of Hellenic descent and Hellenism in general. The Congress is the national voice of Hellenes and their communities and/or organizations across Canada.