

For immediate release

OQLF has no business in Quebec operating rooms, QCGN says

Montreal – July 24, 2024 – “The Office québécois de la langue française has no business in the operating rooms of the province,” said Sylvia Martin-Laforge, Director-General of the Quebec Community Groups Network.

Martin-Laforge was responding to a Montreal Gazette article today about an OQLF inspection scheduled for Montreal’s Santa Cabrini hospital.

“We thought former Quebec premier Lucien Bouchard had had the last word on language and health care in Quebec when he said in 1996: ‘when you go to the hospital and you’re in pain, you may need a blood test, but you certainly don’t need a language test,’ ” Martin-Laforge added. “Not according to the current government, apparently.

“And if there is anything – *anything* – that will spark fear and anxiety in Quebec’s 1.3-million-member English-speaking community, or among other linguistic minorities, it is the suggestion that they might lose access to health care services in their mother tongue, even in hospitals built largely by their own communities. Or that they won’t fully understand what was being said about vital things during some of the most stressful and vulnerable moments of their lives.”

The story details the latest efforts to ensure total compliance with Bill 96, which toughened Bill 101, the Charter of the French Language, which, The Gazette notes, “requires that all government workers – including those in hospitals and nursing homes – use French exclusively in written and oral communications with their clients, with certain exceptions, like emergencies.”

Today’s article about inspectors from the OQLF roaming the halls of Quebec hospitals, Martin-Laforge said, will have not only have reignited the community’s fears, but raised some serious concerns about priorities in, for example, an operating room.

“A memo from Santa Cabrini’s administration, warning staff about today’s OQLF inspection, spells it out,” she said. “ ‘The working language must be French at all times. All documents, notes and records must be in French at all times.’ ”

“Based on this, one could conclude that two English-speaking neurosurgeons, both trained primarily in English at McGill, would actually be compelled by this law to speak to each other in French while consulting about exactly where to make the crucial incision during a delicate brain operation,” Martin-Laforge said. “The law, of course, doesn’t specify that, but the intent seems clear.

“In our view, this is yet another example of OQLF over-reach, and it undercuts the many reassurances we’ve heard from various Quebec cabinet ministers that nothing in Bill 96 affects our community’s access to or understanding of what transpires in the health-care system.

“One would think that with unbelievably long emergency-room waits, scary surgery backlogs and the sometimes insurmountable difficulty of finding a family physician, the government would have a different set of priorities for fixing what’s wrong with the health-care system,” she said. “Again, apparently not.”

The Quebec Community Groups Network (www.qcgn.ca) is a not-for-profit organization bringing together English-language community organizations and individuals across Quebec. Its mission is to identify, explore, and address strategic issues affecting the development and vitality of English-speaking Quebec and to encourage dialogue and collaboration.

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