

Access to essential services crucial for minority-language communities, federal language commissioner says

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MONTREAL, June 12, 2026 – Canada’s new Commissioner of Official Languages, Kelly Burke, extolled the values of bilingualism and the importance of minority-language communities in a speech to a TALQ Signature Series event Friday morning.

Burke, formerly Ontario’s Commissioner of French-Language Services, spoke of her bilingual family background growing up in Cornwall.

“My parents, grandparents, and great-grandparents, who were Anglophone, Francophone and bilingual, instilled in me a genuine and lasting appreciation for both of our official languages,” she said. And she left no doubt that access to services in both official languages is crucial.

“I will continue to be a staunch advocate of minority-language access to essential services like health care,” Burke said. “It is a matter of respect and safety for everyone in Canada.”

This applies to both French and English, she said. “We are also, across the country, chipping away at the French language,” she said. “There are vulnerabilities on both sides.”

Burke also confirmed that 1.3 million English-speaking Quebecers represent an Official Minority-Language Community in Canada. “More needs to be done on promoting the understanding of the community’s contributions,” she said, noting that more than 70 per cent of anglophone Quebecers are bilingual. “You are to be congratulated.”

Burke’s warmly received keynote speech preceded a panel discussion featuring leaders from the Quebec English School Boards Association (QESBA); Community Economic Development and Employability Corporation (CEDEC); Community Health and Social Services Network (CHSSN); English Language Arts Network (ELAN); English Parents’ Committee Association (EPCA); and Seniors’ Action Quebec (SAQ).

In a detailed discussion, these groups agreed that today’s English-speaking community is resilient, but vulnerable and under pressure, thanks to provincial legislation and changing regulations. They also noted that protecting the French language and promoting the English community should be seen as complementary.

The community is asking itself whether it will be seen as a partner in defining Quebec’s future or whether it will be relegated to manage decline of one sort or another.

Subjects ranged from education to seniors’ issues, economic development, and employment.

In a “fireside chat” with TALQ President Eva Ludvig following the discussion, Burke said she has a mandate to promote the community’s viability and find solutions to address its vulnerabilities. “We need to hear the voices and views in order to create a vision that includes the viewpoints I heard today.

“I will ensure that those voices will resonate beyond this room,” she said. “No Canadian should feel vulnerable as the result of language.”

Ludvig was delighted with the morning’s discussion.

“This was an important event in terms of providing our new commissioner with insight into the challenges and aspirations of Quebec’s English-speaking community, as well as its diversity,” she said.

“We are very pleased she could be here to deliver her first speech in Quebec and are grateful for the time and attention she devoted to this. We are counting on her be our champion.”

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TALQ (www.talq.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.