Claude Charron, recommendation on Bill 96, the official and common language Act of Quebec, the French language

Presentation

My name is Claude Charron and I have been a francophone resident of Lennoxville (a bilingual borough of the City of Sherbrooke) for 30 years. I have created and developed businesses in our downtown area and I have always been very involved in the everyday life of my community as a volunteer for charities and various community organizations.

I have been the Lennoxville Borough President since 2017, after serving as a councilor for 4 years.

I familiarised myself with the projected bill on official and common language of Quebec, French, which is currently before the National Assembly. I would like to share with the Committee on Culture and Education my concerns about the consequences that this bill will have on the daily lives of all those who live in Lennoxville.

Introduction

Lennoxville was founded by American Loyalists at the end of the 18th century, is a town in the Eastern Townships that became a borough of the City of Sherbrooke at the time of the amalgamation in 2002.

Once predominantly English-speaking, Lennoxville has seen its English-speaking population decline over the years. At the time of the last census, it stood at 41% of the population.

Despite the loss, Lennoxville is still enhanced by its English-speaking roots shaping over time, a welcoming, different and ultimately multicultural community. Today, Lennoxville's bilingualism is valued by all, English-speaking and French-speaking residents alike, and even by newcomers whose first language is different.

Older residents who speak little or no French greatly appreciate being able to receive services in English, in stores, for health services or at their Borough office.

The Stats Can data used by the government to determine our bilingual status reports we are less than 50% of Anglophones, it is important to acknowledge that this method of calculation does not take into account the reality of our Borough.

Our students from Bishop's University (3000) and Champlain College (1200) also appreciate the unique environment in which they can experience bilingualism, also contributing by their presence in the community.

Thanks to the dynamic and dedicated community, Lennoxville is a warm and welcoming place to live in, and its cultural effervescence in both languages continues to attract visitors from all over the city and surrounding areas.

The **Fondation pour la langue française**, identifies the French language in decline in Quebec, we can recognise that it is dominantly in Montreal and not in regions like our own. In fact, in our Borough the French language is not in decline. The English language is in harmony with the French language.

Today, Bill 96 threatens the quality of life of many citizens of Lennoxville, since this bill will eventually put at risk the natural access to many services presently offered in English, and permanently deprive them. It is also the fundamental right to equality that is being questioned.

For this reason, I would like to express my opposition to Bill 96 in its current form.

The situation in Lennoxville

The borough of Lennoxville is a recognized organization by the Office québécois de la langue française since January 1, 2002.

Section 6 of the Charter of the City of Sherbrooke (DECREE 850-2001) provides that :

Borough No. 3 is deemed to be recognized in accordance with section 29.1 of the Charter of the French Language (R.S.Q., c. C-11), as amended by section 6 of chapter 57 of the statutes of 2000.

This recognition is retained by the borough until it is withdrawn by the government, at its request, pursuant to section 29.1 of the Charter.

Section 29.1 of the Charter of the French Language, in its current version, provides that a municipal body, such as Lennoxville that no longer meets the conditions that led to its recognition by the Office de la langue française retains its bilingual status.

Paragraph 3 of section 29.1, however, gives the organization or municipality concerned the freedom to no longer benefit from recognition by the Office de la langue française, i.e. its bilingual status. To do so, it is the municipality or organization that may make the request to the government.

The Bill

Section 19 of Bill 96 provides for the introduction of sections 29.2 and following into the Charter of the French Language. They read as follows:

" 29.2. Where the Board finds, in the light of the linguistic data from each census taken in accordance with Canadian statistical legislation, that a municipality recognized under section 29.1 does not meet the condition set out in subparagraph 1 of the second paragraph of that section, it shall send the municipality a written notice informing it of that finding.

The recognition obtained by the municipality is then withdrawn, in accordance to law, with a period of 120 days of expiry from the receipt of the notice sent by the Board. However, the recognition is maintained if the municipality adopts a resolution to that effect before the expiry of that period, in which case the municipality shall notify the Agency without delay.

The notice sent under the first paragraph shall be published by the Office as well as by the municipality that receives it.

" 29.3. Where the recognition obtained by a municipality is withdrawn under the third paragraph of section 29.1 or the second paragraph of section 29.2, the Board must send a written notice to

any organization recognized under section 29.1 and under the authority of that municipality informing it of that fact. The Board shall send a copy of the notice to the municipality.

The recognition obtained by the organization is withdrawn, by the application of the law, and expiring after a 120 day period that the organization has received the notice sent by the Agency.

The notice sent under the first paragraph shall be published by the Board and by the municipality and the body that receive it.

These writings provide for the automatic loss of the bilingual status of the borough when the census data show that the proportion of residents whose mother tongue is English is less than 50%.

The logic that prevails today in the Charter of the French Language would be reversed in the future: the municipality or borough would be required to adopt a resolution expressing its desire to maintain its bilingual status.

This procedure has serious consequences, since it makes the fate of entire communities depends on the vagaries of municipal politics.

Today, the municipal council of the city of Sherbrooke supports the resolution of the Borough of Lennoxville in order to keep its bilingual status. The major concern is that eventually a future council has the power to decide over the Borough wishes not to support, then the loss would be irreversible.

The bill requires that for each census of the population of Canada, the French language office may notify the municipality or Borough of the loss of its bilingual status based on the most recent statistics. This has the effect of making the English-speaking minority vulnerable and regularly threatened to lose essential services in English.

For all these reasons, I ask parliamentarians to return to the status quo by not voting to insert sections 29.2 and following of the Charter or to modify it in accordance to our all citizens needs including the minorities.