



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

An Act respecting French, the official and common language of Québec:
**Filing of an Application Today for a Judicial Review to Uphold the Ancestral
Rights of First Nations in Education**

Wendake, April 20, 2023 – The Assembly of First Nations Quebec-Labrador (AFNQL) and the First Nations Education Council (FNEC) announced today the filing of a legal challenge before the Superior Court of Québec concerning An Act respecting French, the official and common language of Québec. The application for judicial review is for 14 articles of the *Charter of the French Language*.

This application for judicial review will enable First Nations to have their rights heard in a court of law. It is a clear demonstration that the provisions of this law infringe on the generic ancestral rights held by Aboriginal people.

The First Nations do not question the importance of the French language to the Québécois. On the contrary, they recognize the vital importance of language and education for the identity of a people. However, the right to self-determination and self-government in education are the prerogative of the First Nations, and not the provincial government, and the provisions of c. 14 are in conflict with these rights. Section 35 of the *Constitution Act 1982* recognizes and affirms the Aboriginal rights of the Aboriginal peoples, especially in matters of education and teaching, but also in the practice of their ancestral languages.

Despite the issues raised, and the recommendations brought proactively by First Nations, the government of Quebec did not take these into account or consult with First Nations adequately before tabling the bill. The provisions in question reinforce, unjustifiably perpetuate, and intensify existing disparities in education, in addition to hindering efforts to reclaim, preserve, and revitalize First Nations languages.

“In face of the offhand treatment by the government of Quebec, and its indifference to our concerns about a Law that will have significant medium and long-term impacts on several spheres of our development, we have no choice but to assert our rights before the Court. We repeat we will never stop defending our rights to self-determination and self-government in education, which are the prerogative of First Nations, and not those of the provincial government.

The government of Quebec must listen to reason and halt these insidious assimilation methods that date back to another era” declared Ghislain Picard, Chief of the AFNQL.

“First Nations are the ones best positioned to choose the measures necessary to provide culturally appropriate education to ensure our survival as distinct peoples. The extinction of our languages is unacceptable. This law promotes the exodus of our learners outside of the province” stated Chief John Martin, Chief of the community of Gesgapegiag and member of the FNEC Chiefs Committee.

“Assimilation policies and residential schools have caused enormous damage to our languages. As UNESCO has indicated to the international community, Indigenous languages in Quebec and Labrador are under threat of extinction. Not only must we revitalize and nurture them, but we must also defend them against Quebec’s language policies. The new reiteration of the *Charter of the French Language* erects multiple systemic and discriminatory barriers in the educational pathway of Nations youth and jeopardizes the transmission of our languages. Today we can state unequivocally that c.14 is a direct attack on our languages and our cultural identities, as continues a policy of fostering systemic racism toward First Nations and Inuit” said Chief Sipi Flamand, Chief of the Conseil des Atikamekw de Manawan (Atikamekw Council of Manawan) and head First Nations languages portfolio holder.

About the AFNQL

The Assembly of First Nations Quebec-Labrador is the regional political organization that brings together the 43 First Nations Chiefs of Quebec and Labrador. For more information, visit their website at www.apnql.com.

About the FNEC

The FNEC is the association of 22 First Nations of Quebec that has been working for more than 35 years towards the realization of the right of First Nations to exercise their full jurisdiction in education through the implementation of a comprehensive education system, endowed with adequate resources, designed and managed according to their values and culture. For more information, please visit www.cepn-fnec.com.

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