



Press Release

## **Bill 96 Lacks Youth Perspective and May Create New Divisions Between Linguistic Communities.**

Y4Y Promotes an Incentives-Based Approach, Welcomes Language Courses while Raising Concern About Youth Retention, Employment Opportunities and Measures Affecting CEGEPs.

**Montréal, QC, May 18, 2021**—Y4Y Québec embraces the importance of promoting and protecting the French language in Québec. However, Y4Y expresses initial concern regarding aspects of Bill 96, *An Act Respecting French, the Official and Common Language of Québec*. We regret that the approach taken in Bill 96 imposes measures with little consideration of youth perspective and needs. Efforts should focus on incentivizing non-francophones rather than risk fostering resentment by burdening them.

Y4Y is actively engaged in building bridges between francophone, allophone and anglophone communities. Likewise, francization efforts should emerge through collaboration with non-francophones. A participatory approach would demonstrate a desire to work alongside a population that is committed to celebrating both the official language and culture of Québec. It would recognize the specific issues facing anglophone and allophone communities while valuing their place within Québec society.

“A more fruitful approach would diversify opportunities for non-Francophones to develop their French language skills through cultural exchanges between communities. We welcome the measure to offer language courses to the general population, a long-standing request from English-speaking youth,” said Y4Y Québec President Madeleine Lawler. “We will, however, remain vigilant to ensure that the accessibility and delivery of these courses meet the needs of our community. Offering these classes is an important first step, but it’s not enough. We fear that other proposed measures threaten to create artificial divisions between communities without providing practical solutions to address the linguistic barriers that non-francophones face in trying to integrate in this province. The key is to work with us to address these obstacles, not against us. Help us help you.”

While capping enrolment at English CEGEPs purports to address their ongoing problems with admissions, Y4Y regrets that this solution must come at the expense of allophone *and* francophone youth. We firmly believe that it is possible to simultaneously address the admissions issue while maintaining freedom of choice for post-secondary education. The solution proposed in Bill 96 may create a two-tiered admissions system in English CEGEPs that could threaten the accessibility of postsecondary education and limit important venues for linguistic exchange. Regarding the application of the French Exit Exam to English CEGEPs, Y4Y is concerned about the unclear exemption criteria and the additional strain on English CEGEPs and their students.

Aspects of Bill 96 may disproportionately impact certain parts of the English-speaking youth community and exacerbate existing problems. For instance, even though Bill 96 provides support for businesses through francization initiatives, the expansive powers and complaints-reporting mechanism for *Office Québécois de la langue française* may nonetheless negatively affect the employment prospects for out-of-province and international students. Y4Y is concerned that these measures may worsen existing issues of retention by further discouraging young English graduates from pursuing employment in Québec. The province's ability to recruit young talent from abroad may also be impacted, as prospective students will face additional challenges in finding employment.

It is crucial that the younger generations be heard during these debates, as it is today and tomorrow's youth that will live the majority of their lives under the new measures. Y4Y will continue to consult with English-speaking youth and community partners from across the province to ensure that youth concerns are accounted for during the debate on Bill 96.

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