



BRIEF IN RESPONSE TO BILL 1 — QUEBEC CONSTITUTION ACT, 2025

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**Submitted to the Committee on Institutions
Government of Quebec**

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Summary

The French language is unquestionably the central element of Quebec's identity and culture. We support the objective of ensuring its vitality. However, the fundamental rights of minorities — including vulnerable populations such as English-speaking seniors — must not be compromised in pursuit of that goal.

Bill 1, as written, would marginalize the legacy and contributions of English-speaking seniors. The right to receive services in English, to rely on English versions of legislation and official documents with equal assurance, access employment and to remain engaged members of one's community is not a peripheral issue - it is fundamental to one's dignity, health, autonomy and quality of life.

We believe Bill 1 would erode the legal protections, institutional supports, employment opportunities, and essential services that English-speaking seniors depend on to age with dignity and remain active contributors to Quebec society.

Most troubling is that this bill was drafted without prior consultation with opposition political parties in the National Assembly of Quebec or with key stakeholders in civil society, including organizations representing minorities.

This lack of consultation directly contradicts Article 17 of Chapter 1 of Title 4 of Part 1 of Bill 1, which says: "The State derives its legitimacy from the will of the people inhabiting its territory."

Bill 1 lacks democratic legitimacy and should be withdrawn.

Introduction

Seniors Action Quebec, founded in 2012, is a not-for-profit organization funded by both the Quebec and federal governments, associations and individual members. Our mandate is to identify, address and advance the needs of English-speaking seniors across all regions of Quebec.

Seniors Action Quebec also supports and partners with other organizations working with and on behalf of English-speaking seniors throughout Quebec.

By 2031, seniors overall are projected to comprise over 25% of the province's population, with an even larger share in regions outside Montreal.¹ According to Statistics Canada's 2021 Census of Population, Quebec's English-speaking population represented 14.9% of the total Quebec population. There were 193,685 English-speaking seniors in Quebec, representing 15.6 per cent of that English-speaking population.² Recent research demonstrates that nearly half of English-speaking seniors cannot speak French. Bilingualism also declines with age, with older seniors being the least likely to speak French.³

As seniors who have contributed to Quebec's society and economy over decades, we seek to ensure that any legislative reform preserves our rights, dignity, access to services in English, as well as our ability to fully participate in Quebec life.

¹ [A Complex Puzzle: Realities of English-Speaking Seniors in Quebec](#) | QUESCEN | 2025

² <https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2021/dp-pd/prof/index.cfm?Lang=E> | Statistics Canada | 2021

³ [A Complex Puzzle: Realities of English-Speaking Seniors in Quebec](#) | QUESCEN | 2025

While Seniors Action Quebec supports the government's objective to enhance the vitality of the French language and to protect Quebec's distinct identity, we believe that Bill 1 as currently drafted poses serious risks to the rights and well-being of the English-speaking minority, including English-speaking seniors.

This brief outlines our key concerns and includes a recommendation. Seniors Action Quebec would also appreciate the opportunity to appear before the public hearings on Bill 1.

Key general concerns

Seniors Action Quebec shares the same broad general concerns about Bill 1 as other organizations representing the English-speaking community across different sectors and regions. Among them:

- The lack of prior consultation. For an undertaking as important as proposed constitutional change, it is a mistake to table a bill without having had a prior consultation.
- The lack of any clear articulation of English-language rights in Quebec.
- Bill 1 prioritizes majority rights over minority rights and collective rights over individual rights. This focus fundamentally contradicts the purpose of a constitution: to protect civil society from the state and to safeguard individual and minority rights.
- The prohibition on the use of public funds to contest Bill 1. With this provision, the government is quite aggressively trying to handicap judicial oversight of the state and expand government power at the expense of recourse to the courts to uphold democratic safeguards.

Key specific concerns

a) Access to government services for seniors

English-speaking seniors experience significant challenges in accessing not just health and social services in English but other public services as well.

A 2023 survey by the [Community Health and Social Services Network \(CHSSN\)](#) on access to health and social services in Quebec, for example, found that 36 % of English-speaking seniors reported not being served in English at CLSCs, and 30 % reported not being served in English by the Info-Santé line.⁴

Despite expressed legislative guarantees, our own members and professional colleagues from various regional access committees in the field and health and social services, have revealed continuing concerns about accessing services in English.

⁴ [English-language Health and Social Services Access in Quebec](#), 2023-2019 | Pages 100 and 123 | CHSSN | 2024

While Bill 1 does not explicitly repeal existing language rights, a more rigid promotion of French could constrain English-language seniors' programs or regard them as "unrealistic" rather than standard services.

Service quality or availability could be overridden, reinterpreted or bureaucratically eroded in light of a new higher-order constitution that emphasises strengthening French or certain collective rights of the "Quebec nation" over individual or minority rights.

b) Legal clarity and the importance of the equality of French and English versions of laws and legal documents

Bill 1 insists that in case of any discrepancy in the meaning of the French and English versions of laws and legal documents, the French text shall prevail over English text. This provision undermines the Canadian legal principle of the "equal authority" of English and French, which dates back to section 133 of the Constitutional Act of 1867.

This proposed hierarchical shift is particularly relevant for seniors, who often rely on legal documents—such as wills, powers of attorney, and elder-care directives—where language clarity is essential. When an individual drafts a will in English and then translates it into French, whether by choice or legal requirement, they naturally want assurance that their original English expression carries the same legal weight as the French version.

For seniors whose first language is English and who may not as easily navigate French as younger people, this hierarchical shift weakens their confidence in their rights and recourse. English speakers repeatedly report experiences of frustration and isolation because of linguisticism and language-related barriers in Quebec.⁵

c) Uncertainty over the future vitality of the English-speaking senior community of Quebec

If Bill 1 were to have the effect of gradually shifting institutional resources and administrative emphasis to French only, English-speaking seniors would face marginalization. Many anglophone seniors choose to live in Quebec because of long-established ties in English and French-speaking communities and are dependent on their historic institutions and community vitality. Proposals to shift the foundational legal status without clear protections create profound anxiety for this population.

The sentiment among many English-speaking Quebecers, not only with seniors but across all age groups, is one of: "They say they respect us, but we've heard this before, and we've been disappointed."

Assurances of protections for the English-speaking community are made on the one hand, but on the other hand protections have been eroded through regulation, directives, policies and bureaucratic interpretation.

⁵ [Beyond Stereotypes: Understanding English-speaking Mature Workers and Ageism in Québec](#) | PERT | 2025

Unemployment tends to increase as workers get older in Quebec. This is the case regardless of mature workers' linguistic identity, indicating that age may be a larger contributing factor to unemployment among mature workers than their official language spoken. At present however, a higher proportion of mature English speakers live in poverty, below the low-income cutoff.⁶

Recommendation

Withdraw Bill 1 and hold a preliminary consultation on any future proposal to enact a constitution act for Quebec, or a “law of all laws.” Recruit the broadest possible collaboration from key civil society stakeholders and work toward a consensus before tabling any new draft legislation affecting the constitutional order.

Conclusion

We support efforts to protect the French language and Quebec's distinct identity. However, lack of prior consultation with civil society—including English-speaking Quebecers—undermines Bill 1's own foundational principle. Article 17 (Chapter 1, Title 4, Part 1) of Bill 1 states: “*The State derives its legitimacy from the will of the people inhabiting its territory.*” Without inclusive consultation, this legitimacy is compromised.

We respectfully urge the Government of Quebec to withdraw Bill 1 and to engage in genuine consultation. A truly foundational document must uphold the essential promise that we are all Quebecers—equal in the eyes of the law, without discrimination.

Thank you for your consideration of our submission.

Seniors Action Quebec requests the opportunity to present these concerns in person at the upcoming public hearings on Bill 1.

⁶ [Beyond Stereotypes: Understanding English-speaking Mature Workers and Ageism in Québec](#) | PERT | 2025