



Tsi Nahò:ten Karihwanákere Nó:nen'k

PRESS RELEASE

Media Inquiries:

Joe Delaronde
Political Press Attaché
450- 632-7500 ext 63251
MCKMedia@mck.ca

Mohawk Council of Kahnawà:ke

Kahnawà:ke Mohawk
Territory
P.O. Box 720
J0L 1B0

Tel: (450) 632-7500
Fax: (450) 638-5958

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Kahnawà:ke outraged as Bill 96 passes in National Assembly

For immediate release

(Kahnawake – 25, Onerahtohkó:wa/May 2022) The Mohawk Council of Kahnawà:ke (MCK) is issuing the following statement in regard to the passage of the Coalition Avenir Quebec's (CAQ) *Bill 96 - An Act respecting French, the official and common language of Quebec*, by the Quebec National Assembly on Tuesday.

The MCK is not taken by surprise by the widespread support that was given by the CAQ to Bill 96 yesterday in the National Assembly. Quebec has, once again, made decisions that are willfully misinformed and ignorant and of which failed to appropriately consult or meaningfully consider the countless efforts brought forth by Indigenous Peoples to have their concerns heard. Any legislation that has adverse effects on Indigenous self-determination for their lands, cultures, and languages should have the free, prior, and informed consent of our communities. The lack of engagement in such a framework where the outcomes knowingly affect our rights not only is a detriment to our ability to co-exist with our neighbors; it is a deliberate attack on our nationhood as Onkwehón:we (original people).

The actions of the CAQ are not surprising in nature. However, commentary made by the Minister Responsible for the French Language and Minister for Justice, Simon Jolin-Barrette, in the National Assembly is contradictory to the effects of the legislation and evidently tells us that there is a complete disregard towards all Indigenous as distinct and living peoples in our traditional territories:

"[translated from French] I've had the opportunity to say this several times. Aboriginal languages have their place, the French language has its place. We must not oppose Aboriginal languages to the French language. Bill 96 affects the French language. We have to work together. And the Aboriginal nations have the right to develop their culture, develop their identity, develop their language, and they must also be protected, just like the French language. But it is not in the context of the debate on the French language that we are having this discussion, especially since Bill 96 does not change anything in the situation of the Charter of the French language in connection with Indigenous nations. However, it is important to remember this, everything was done with respect for the relations we have with the Aboriginal nations."

The MCK has made it clear to Quebec that there are certain implications the legislation would have on our community, Nation, and institutions, and today has shown those impacts are already underway. Our own communities feared from the beginning that there would be impacts across the board with education, health and social services, and access to government and business services. "Today, Quebec government employees from within have reached out to question whether or not discussions with our community are continuing in light of the Bills passage. This indicates that contrary to statements made by Minister Jolin-Barrette to the MCK, Quebec government employees are already uncertain about what the newly passed legislation means for government-to-government relations," said Ohén:ton Í:iente ne Ratítsénhaienhs Kahsennenhawe Sky-Deer. "The uncertainty that we've been vocal about is already rearing its head from the other side, and it's only a day after the Bill was passed."

While there had been discussions with both Minister Jolin-Barrette and the Minister Responsible for Aboriginal Affairs Ian Lafrenière to explain the concerns, there had been no commitment to adequately address Kahnawà:ke's concerns with the Bill before it was passed. "There is uncertainty about what to now expect at large, but what is clear is this, it is time for us, and for our brother and sister communities, to turn up our voices," continued Sky-Deer. "We are not going to lay down while the Quebec government takes another stab at pulling our futures out from under us. We are prepared to keep fighting the imposition of this legislation in any way our community feels necessary. Quebec's actions to proceed with the passage of this Bill despite our noted concerns have placed our relations into an extremely strained state and forced us to consider whether discussions to date were in good faith. At this point, we have no choice left but to take pause in our relations until Quebec at its highest levels proposes substantive solutions to rectify the situation."

The MCK is engaging with the community in developing plans to fight the implementation of the legislation on the Kanien'kehá:ka. More information is forthcoming.