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PRESS RELEASE
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

The MRC d'Argenteuil expresses its profound disappointment with the decision made by the Québec government to change the signage at the Argenteuil multiservice centre for health and social services, eliminating English on all signs

Lachute, December 20, 2018 – Members of the MRC d'Argenteuil Council received a letter from the Chief Executive Officer of the Centre intégré de santé et de services sociaux (CISSS) des Laurentides on December 18, 2018, informing them that all signs inside and outside the Argenteuil multiservice centre for health and social services (Argenteuil hospital) were going to be renewed and that no English would appear on any of the new signage.

The MRC d'Argenteuil Council deploras this state of affairs and wishes to point out the MRC d'Argenteuil's values of respect and inclusion towards its anglophone community, one of the founding peoples of Argenteuil, which for decades has played a vital and pioneering role within the Argenteuil community in many spheres of society (establishment and development of educational, museum, agricultural and socio-community institutions; promotion of sports, the arts, philanthropy, volunteerism, culture and heritage; introduction of concrete measures to protect our environment, lakes and landscapes, etc.).

For many decades, the Argenteuil community has benefited economically and socially from the significant contribution of its English community, a contribution that often far surpasses the demographic weight of the local English-speaking population.

Argenteuil has long been positively influenced by the coexistence of its French and English communities, in many ways. A few eloquent examples are presented below:

- The Rivière-du-Nord (French) and Sir-Wilfrid-Laurier (English) school boards have been housing their high school students in the same complex for over four decades. Anglophone and francophone students share common facilities such as a swimming pool, athletics track, soccer/football field, cafeteria, auditorium, main reception area, etc. This spirit of sharing led to a remarkable show of solidarity in September 2011 when fire destroyed part of the premises of the French high school, Polyvalente Lavigne.
- In 2012, the City of Lachute concluded an agreement with the administrators of the United Church to acquire its century-old church building on Main Street for the relocation of the Jean-Marc-Belzile municipal library.

- For several decades, the MRC has counted on the presence and commitment of the strong institutions located on its territory. Examples include the Argenteuil Agricultural Society, founded in 1825, organizer of the annual Expo Lachute Fair, one of the oldest agricultural exhibitions in Eastern Canada. The Argenteuil Historical Society created and administered for several decades the Argenteuil Regional Museum, a venerable institution that has been showcasing Argenteuil's history for more than seventy-five years. In both cases, the selfless contribution of the English community has greatly benefitted the community at large.

The members of the MRC d'Argenteuil Council are surprised to note the amount of time and money that will be spent by the CISSS des Laurentides on replacing its present signage, while the Mayors feel that, when it comes to human and financial resources, priority should be given to improving patient care and services.

The MRC d'Argenteuil's elected officials have long been vocal in expressing their sincere appreciation and historical attachment to Argenteuil's anglophone community, as evidenced by the memoire drafted by the MRC d'Argenteuil and submitted in April 2013 to the Minister responsible for the application of the Charter of the French Language at the time, during the general consultation and public hearings on Bill 14. The MRC d'Argenteuil focused on the importance of maintaining the bilingual status granted to some of its local municipalities under the law. It should be recalled that four of the nine municipalities that make up the MRC d'Argenteuil have bilingual status.

The MRC d'Argenteuil is bitterly disappointed by the decision to change the signs currently in place because, even though it is partly in English, this signage in no way constitutes a threat to the quality or promotion of the French language. On the contrary, excluding English signage in a hospital and health-care setting can be seen as a lack of respect toward members of a community that is very important to Argenteuil, the English-speaking citizens who have chosen to live here.

The MRC d'Argenteuil is dismayed and puzzled by the lack of flexibility shown by the Office québécois de la langue française (OQLF) and the Québec government in this affair. For example, the Lachute Residence, a residential long-term care centre (CHSLD) in downtown Lachute, near the Argenteuil hospital, is designated as an English-language service provider under the Charter of the French Language and Bill 10. This CHSLD is home to seniors who receive services from the Centre multiservices de santé et de services sociaux d'Argenteuil (Argenteuil hospital). The MRC d'Argenteuil fears that the signage changes will have the greatest impact on this vulnerable population. Should the Office québécois de la langue française not assess the context before insisting on uniform application without regard for specific regional characteristics?

The MRC d'Argenteuil's elected officials clearly understand and fully subscribe to the objective of protecting, promoting and strengthening the French language in Québec. However, it is questionable whether removing information in English on signs in hospital settings is a measure that will help the OQLF to attain its objectives. Such a measure is more likely to lead to uncertainty and anxiety among a vulnerable population, rather than promoting the use of the French language in Québec society, especially as the signage currently in place in the Argenteuil hospital fully complies with standards regarding the predominance of French over English.

The MRC d'Argenteuil takes to heart the defense of minority language rights in Canada, as it demonstrated with the unanimous adoption of a resolution on November 28, 2018 in support of the Franco-Ontarian community after the Ontario government announced severe cuts to French-language services in the province.

The elected officials of the MRC d'Argenteuil work daily to defend the common good and are concerned about the well-being of their fellow citizens. They are calling on the competent authorities to work quickly on finding a solution that respects the rights of the region's anglophone population. Furthermore, in its capacity as the local government, the MRC d'Argenteuil indicates its desire to be consulted in such a process.

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Source: MRC d'Argenteuil

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