

Montreal West, Westmount join CSL legal fight against Bill 96

By Joel Goldenberg
The Suburban

Montreal West council passed a resolution at its April 24 council meeting to join Côte St. Luc's legal action against articles of the new language law Bill 96.

Westmount council did so as well at its recent meeting.

"This includes the filing of a stay of proceedings and the eventual contestation of the merits in order to avoid the detrimental and financial effects that Bill 96 will have on bilingual municipalities," said Montreal West Councillor Lauren-Small Pennefather.

She added that while the cost of the legal challenge will be shared amongst participating municipalities, the amount will be on a pro-rated basis based on the size of each city or town. As well, CSL will be the representative of all the co-plaintiffs in communication with Grey Casgrain s.e.n.c, the law firm of noted constitutional lawyer Julius Grey.

"This is the first step of a challenge and this step is very limited," Mayor Beny Masella told the meeting. "It's not all encompassing. So we're signing on for their first step of the challenge. Right now, they're figuring it's going to be anything between 50 cents and a dollar per resident, so we're talking between \$2,500 and \$5,000 to have this be part of the first challenge of Bill 96."

At their March council meeting, CSL

council authorized applying for a subsidy from the Union des municipalités du Québec under its "Request for subsidy or intervention to municipal legal action funds" program for future legal proceedings contesting the law.

"What we're working on is partnering with cities with bilingual status throughout the province of Quebec," Councillor Steven Erdelyi explained at the time. "We have reached out to those cities and are working on a legal case that will be based on five provisions of Bill 96. In a perfect world, we'd go after all the provisions, but we have to focus on those we consider most harmful and unacceptable to municipalities, including Côte St. Luc."

The provisions being targeted are the prohibition for contracts to be written in a language other than French, "even if both parties agree,"; allowing OQLF inspectors to inspect and seize, at any time without notice, any documents, equipment and computers from any municipal body; that cities have to declare in resolutions that they want to maintain their bilingual status if the English mother tongue population is below 50 percent; that the Language minister or another designated minister can withhold provincial government grants to a city if they don't comply with any provision of the law; and that a city has to punish any employee who does not comply with Bill 96. ■



"Rather than governing for all Quebecers and striving to build bridges between citizens of different backgrounds," says Ortona, "Quebec City has seemed determined to divide us."

EMSB stages leaders conference on Bill 96

By Joel Ceausu
The Suburban

"It's been some 10 months since adoption and the impact is being felt 'throughout our education system as well as our community,'" said EMSB chair Joe Ortona, opening a conference on Bill 96 Thursday night.

Some 60 guests attended the invitation-only event at board headquarters in NDG, which was broadcast live to the public.

"For the Cégep system there are more unknowns than known at this point," said Champlain College campus director Nancy Beattie. "The ministry is not particularly responsive. We get meetings but not a lot of answers... We do know that this has the potential to be very devastating."

She said the imposed admissions cap with stiff financial penalties "is significant from a financial perspective, but there's a whole lot more," adding the French exam and new French courses as of fall 2024 will shock some anglophone students coming from English boards with a high level of French proficiency – but as a second language. Hard access limits also means English Cégeps will be increasingly selective in admissions, particularly for non-certificate holders. "This ultimately means limiting diversity and cultural richness."

She questioned the courses' effects on students who thrived in high school and need high R-scores to enter their professional school of choice. "They're effectively guinea pigs that were pushed into this," adding restrictions mean enrolments will decline "and you have the slow strangulation of the anglophone college."

That slow, continued linguistic chokehold not only affects public schools and colleges, said Lower Canada College Head Christopher Shannon, who also chairs the advocacy committee of the Quebec Association of Independent Schools. "There were a couple of schools that, I think, based on declining demographic in terms of who could enroll with the rolls of eligible students falling, closed say largely related to that reality."

Shannon says LCC is saying farewell to Quebec grants in two years, "in a proac-

tive way," adding he was told by an advisor to the premier that "if you want to do things your way, say farewell to the grants." That's exactly what we're going to do. It's a very significant financial initiative on our part, but we're doing it because on principle it's against our values, and we have to stand up for our values, and indeed that's what we're planning to do in two years."

The conference also heard from lawyers Mark Power, Perri Ravon and Audrey Mayrand presenting the EMSB's constitutional challenge to the bill and outlined the host of other legal challenges underway.

Suburban editor-in-chief Beryl Wajzman said while "everybody should be in court," the best way to fight against the bill and its pernicious effects, "is to change ourselves" and forgo – as a community – being polite and accepting two fundamental assumptions about the current government: "That there is good faith and there is rule of law: there is neither, not by exception but by pre-determination. This bill is based on anonymous denunciations and warrantless search and seizure. Foreign ideas in democracies."

"We also have the problem of urban ridings with 60,000 people and rural ridings of 20,000 people. That's where (Legault's) vote is," he said noting François Legault is playing from the same playbook as Maurice Duplessis, "who spoke and dog-whistled against religious minorities and even what he called 'cosmopolitan' francophones."

On a fear of French decline, he said, "they don't believe it, it's simply a path to electoral victory. This has nothing to do with what's right," he said, because language data reports that prompted the latest legislative zeal didn't consider Quebec's immigrant population. "It's prejudiced and discriminatory, not because they believe there is a threat, but because it politically suits their purpose. It's not about language, they need us as whipping boys to keep up their majority in the regions."

President and CEO of Montreal's Repare Therapeutics Lloyd Segal says he

See EMSB, page A12



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WICS Executive Director Sophie McCann receiving a National Assembly Medal from Robert-Baldwin MNA Brigitte Garceau and Nelligan MNA Monsef Derraji after they had each pledged \$25,000 to the organization.

WICS does record \$1.5 million distribution

By Dan Laxer
The Suburban

West Island Community Shares – celebrating its 25th anniversary this year – has announced it will be distributing a record-breaking \$1.5 million to more than 40 local community groups on the West Island.

The organization has spent the last two-and-a-half decades raising money for several community groups and organizations. Over the past 25 years they'd invested more than \$20 million dollars to West Island community organizations. Board President Frederica Jones said WICS is "thrilled to have reached this fundraising milestone, especially in our 25th year of serving the community. It is a true testament to the generosity and dedication of our donors, volunteers, and staff, who have worked tirelessly to support our mission of creating a stronger,

more inclusive and healthy West Island community."

The past year has seen significant increases in food prices leading some of the community's most vulnerable to have to choose, sometimes, between paying their rent and feeding their families. WICS Executive Director Sophie McCann says the community really came through. "I'm grateful for the outpouring of support," she says, highlight the donors and sponsors who have made this investment possible.

The money will mean that more than 40 organizations will receive substantial funding ranging from \$10,000 to \$50,000 in six key areas: supporting vulnerable populations, developing strong and resilient children and teens, fostering healthy bodies and healthy minds, empower women, providing basic necessities such as food and shelter, and supporting green initiatives. ■

EMSB

Cont'd from page A8

needs global investors who understand how cancer drugs are developed and can help him do that in Quebec. While his labs are abuzz with French, and written communications are more likely in French than any other language, investors who put up half a billion dollars for a company that's capitalized in Quebec, he says, want to know that they can conduct a board meeting in English, minutes can be written in English, and if they are facing a suit, can actually understand it.

"Businesses like ours need certainty. I can't say to an investor 'I'm not sure if I'm going to be able to communicate with you in English,' which is the international language relevant to the business that we do," noting his Swiss, American and Japanese customers communicate only in English. "I can't tell my board today for certain that I can hire people who are capable of speaking English to serve those clients."

Hiring from Sloan Kettering, from Harvard, Stanford, Cambridge, and Oxford, "We must now tell those immigrants who are dying to work on our

team because of the really ground-breaking work we do" about uncertainties of educating their children in English.

Ortona said the past few years have been challenging as the CAQ government's Bills 21, 40, and 96 "repeatedly put us on the defensive. Rather than governing for all Quebecers and striving to build bridges between citizens of different backgrounds, Quebec City has seemed determined to divide us."

The EMSB is committed to helping graduates develop linguistic skills to work and thrive and live in French, said Ortona, "but we don't want French language skills to be an impediment to our students continuing their studies after high school, and we're worried that the cap on English enrollment will hurt our Cégeps, making them less likely to innovate and making them less of a meeting place for Quebecers of different backgrounds." He insisted the EMSB "will continue to stand up for our community while providing forums for dialogue and coalition building." ■