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ETHICS IN THE MUNICIPAL SECTOR Government fails to set its own standards

The Union of Quebec Municipalities (UMQ) is dissatisfied with the amendments brought down today by the minister of Municipal Affairs, Regions and Land Occupancy to Bill 109, the draft Municipal Ethics and Good Conduct Act. We condemn the two-tier policy that has guided the government since the start on this issue and reiterate the UMQ position demanding that the same basis and principles on matters of ethics must apply to all elected officials in Quebec.

“If the government is serious and truly wants to restore the people’s trust in their institutions, it must allow municipal officials supportive and preventive resources, in other words an ethics and good conduct delegate acting upstream, as it does for MNAs in Bill 48,” said UMQ president Marc Gascon, mayor of Saint-Jérôme.

The UMQ deems it crucial that the municipal sector should get the benefit of a preventive system similar to the one for members of the National Assembly, which would make it possible for any elected official to obtain advice freely and voluntarily so as to avoid undesirable conduct. In matters of ethics, we must try to prevent misconduct rather than punishing it. The UMQ strongly believes, as do many professional ethicists, that this is the way to dispel people’s doubts and strengthen trust among citizens and residents.

Readers may recall that Bill 48, the “Code of Ethics and Conduct of Members of the National Assembly,” unlike Bill 109, provides for the appointment of an ethics commissioner with power to act preventively before problems arise, by providing MNAs, on request, with a written advisory

opinion containing reasons and any recommendations the commissioner considers appropriate on any question they may have regarding their obligations under the code of ethics. This advisory opinion of the commissioner’s will have bearing on any new request on the same subject, provided that the relevant facts an MNA is aware of have been given fully and accurately. The bill also stipulates that an MNA is not guilty of misconduct if he or she has previously made a request to the commissioner and the commissioner’s opinion found that the act or omission did not violate the code of ethics.

“On matters of ethics, the UMQ considers it essential to act in a proactive and preventive manner by making available to municipal officials the sort of resources that will help them think through and resolve the dilemmas associated with uncomfortable or unsure situations that arise in their daily occupation,” said UMQ ethics committee chair Lucie F. Rousseau, mayor of La Prairie.

Source:

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