



HOUSE OF COMMONS  
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES  
CANADA

## **Standing Committee on Official Languages**

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LANG • NUMBER 134 • 1st SESSION • 42nd PARLIAMENT

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**EVIDENCE**

**Tuesday, February 26, 2019**

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**Chair**

**The Honourable Denis Paradis**



## Standing Committee on Official Languages

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• (1105)

[English]

**The Chair (Hon. Denis Paradis (Brome—Missisquoi, Lib.)):** Pursuant to Standing Order 108, we are continuing our study of the modernization of the Official Languages Act.

It is our pleasure to have with us this morning, from the Townshippers' Association, Rachel Hunting, Executive Director; and from the Quebec Community Groups Network, Geoffrey Chambers, President, and Sylvia Martin-Laforge, Director General. Welcome.

We will have some problems this morning because of the votes, as you might be aware. We will try to hear your presentations for the next 20 minutes to half an hour. After that, we will have to go for a vote. We'll come back after that for the members to ask questions or to offer comments and things like that.

You'll have around 10 minutes each for a presentation.

We'll start with Rachel.

Go ahead. Thank you.

**Ms. Rachel Hunting (Executive Director, Townshippers' Association):** Good morning, Mr. Paradis, Mr. Clarke, Mr. Choquette and members of the House Standing Committee on Official Languages.

My name is Rachel Hunting. I am the Executive Director of the Townshippers' Association, a non-profit organization that works in the areas of heritage, culture, community development, access to health and social services and support for seniors and youth retention in Quebec's historical Eastern Townships.

Our region is home to just over 40,000 individuals who identify their first official language as English. Youth retention continues to challenge the renewal and vitality of our communities. The proportion of English speakers aged 45 and up outweighs the proportion of those aged 0 to 44 in our communities. Outmigration, while having somewhat stabilized in recent years, has still left many of our rural communities vulnerable, with high levels of unemployment and low levels of income, even for those with higher levels of education.

In 2016, just over half of English speakers in the historical townships held a high-school certificate or less, and their tendency to have a low income was elevated when compared to their French-speaking counterparts. Low income is higher among English speakers in our region.

**The Chair:** Can I ask you to not speak too fast because of the translators?

**Ms. Rachel Hunting:** Sure.

Before I begin, Townshippers' would like to offer its support and agreement with the concepts put forward in the modernization briefs submitted to this committee by the Fédération des communautés francophones et acadienne du Canada and the Quebec Community Groups Network.

We feel particularly strongly that the Official Languages Act must highlight the principle of the equality of the status of English and French. There can be no separate status or approach for each language. Further, the act must categorically guarantee this equality of status in all institutions subject to the act across Canada.

These are more than just words to us. It must be demonstrated by national official languages' leaders like yourselves who must make a concerted effort to understand and address the concerns of Canada's French and English linguistic minority communities.

Communities like ours must see demonstrable signs that a modernized act is applied in a way that adapts to the specific context and needs of different communities—the concept of substantive equality. This flexibility and customization comes through consultation, which must be robust, mandatory and properly resourced at all levels.

I have a few thoughts on consultation. The best consultations we participate in at Townshippers are discussions with institutions we know that have a clear aim and are properly prepared. It's about joint problem-solving and tackling problems together. This type of relationship takes time, energy and resources to build. These consultations invariably take place between public institutions and community sector organizations with the resources and capacity to engage. There are many community organizations that do not have this ability or those resources, and whose supported communities are muted, and needs go unmet.

In practical terms, we would like to see much more clarity in a modernized act. This means giving definitions to terms like “positive measure”, “enhancing the vitality of”, and “assisting in the development of” official language minority communities. These terms must be defined by the communities that they affect and cannot be externally imposed.

Groups like mine do most of our work with provincial governments that have jurisdiction over areas that are critical to our community, like education, health and social services, and employment. We are naturally curious about federal transfers and the wording related to federal transfers for federal-provincial agreements. We firmly believe that federal official language obligations are attached to federal money, and this means clear and enforceable language clauses that are consistent across the country.

We've been asked to comment on the establishment of an administrative tribunal to give more force to a modernized act. Let me just say that English-speaking communities like ours do not see themselves reflected in many federal official languages' structures—the parliamentary committees, the Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages, the court challenges program, to name a few. It goes back to the principle of equality within the act. If an administrative tribunal is established, its composition must be legislated to contain equal representation from Canada's English and French linguistic minority communities, and the diversity contained therein.

Finally, the current act does not go far enough in bringing English and French Canadians together. This is a shame. In our experience as Townshippers, English and French Canadians can work together in an atmosphere of trust and common purpose. We do it all the time and it's a wonderful thing. We have great success in our region with peer mentorship initiatives, artist networking evenings, community forums and projects dedicated to building the confidence of our French-speaking partners. They need to feel comfortable offering services to members of our community. We would like to see programs that promote the value of bilingualism. And please don't focus your efforts solely on convincing English Canadians to speak French. Where I come from there is a great appetite to learn English, and I hope we're all past thinking of those kinds of aspirations as a threat to the French language.

Thank you very much for inviting me here today. I look forward to your questions.

• (1110)

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Rachel.

We'll now hear Geoffrey.

**Mr. Geoffrey Chambers (President, Quebec Community Groups Network):** Thank you very much.

Good morning, Monsieur Paradis, Monsieur Choquette and members of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Official Languages. It is our pleasure to be with you again as we all continue to contemplate the modernization of the Official Languages Act.

We are reminded, in the year of the act's 50th anniversary, that, sadly, we are a long way from realizing the dream of ensuring respect for English and French as official languages across Canada. We are also reminded of the inherent limitations of a federal act to make this goal a reality in a federal system, where the provinces have jurisdiction over so many areas critical to the vitality of our official language minority communities. We, Canada's English and French minority communities, continue to face provincial governments who do not always respect their constitutional language rights obligations

and who make decisions, within the bounds of their own legislative powers, that negatively impact the ability of French and English Canadians to receive critical services in their official language.

The QCGN has stood and will continue to stand in support of the French minority communities in their fight to acquire and protect their language rights, institutions and public services in French. We commend the members of this committee for their proactive public statements and interest, particularly in support of our Franco-Ontarian cousins and our Acadian cousins in New Brunswick. We also hope that this committee and other leaders in the national official languages structure will speak up to denounce and take to task the Government of Quebec for their unilateral decision to transfer one of our minority schools to a majority board. We would also welcome comment, in this anniversary year of the Official Languages Act, on the pictures of “emergency room” being crudely taped over at the Lachute hospital and a number of other signs being removed.

We remind the committee of the Official Languages Act's purpose of ensuring respect for English and French as the official languages of Canada and the equality of status and equal rights and privileges as to their use and status. This includes the conscious and demonstrated leadership of parliamentarians to equally concern themselves with the challenges faced by English and French linguistic minorities where they exist across the country.

**Ms. Sylvia Martin-Laforge (Director General, Quebec Community Groups Network):** The QCGN appreciates the opportunity to share its recommendations with this committee in the following areas: the advancement of English and French under part VII of the Official Languages Act, the creation of stronger mechanisms to oversee compliance with the Official Languages Act, and the role of the Official Languages Act in bringing English and French speakers together.

We refer this committee to the brief that QCGN submitted in November of last year. The brief includes the QCGN's full proposals on the modernization of the Official Languages Act.

The modernization is an opportunity to make the act equally relevant to English and French minority groups in Canada. It is an opportunity to strengthen the idea that there is a sizable English minority in Quebec and to emphasize the benefits of linguistic duality. It is time to truly give effect to the equality of status of English and French.

With this mind, the QCGN proposes a set of recommendations in three areas of particular interest to the committee today.

On the advancement of English and French under part VII of the Official Languages Act, first, Parliament should clarify the obligations under part VII, partly by including clear definitions of the terms used, such as “positive measure”, “enhancing the vitality of”, and assisting in “the development of” official language minority communities. Parliament must also provide clearer lines of accountability for the obligations set out in this part.

Second, Parliament must strengthen the framework for federal-provincial/territorial agreements. This means several things. Parliament should place strict transparency mechanisms in the OLA to account for official languages investments. It should also ensure that official languages obligations are attached to all activities funded by federal resources. These language clauses must ensure equality of status of English and French, and equal treatment of English- and French-speaking minority communities in Canada. They must not allow, for example, different thresholds for acceptable quality of services depending on whether English or French is the minority language at issue. Finally, Parliament should require that all federal-provincial-territorial agreements be made in both official languages and be equally authoritative.

Third, Parliament should create a federal obligation under part VII to encourage and assist provincial governments to ensure access to the entire justice system in both official languages. We note that the Barreau du Québec has made a similar call in its brief to the Standing Committee on Official Languages.

With respect to the creation of stronger mechanisms to oversee compliance with the Official Languages Act, Parliament should create an administrative tribunal with the power to sanction and order compliance. The tribunal should have the power to hear evidence, make findings, adjudicate claims, order remedies and sanction non-compliance.

The QCGN submits that Parliament does not necessarily need to start from scratch in designing such a tribunal. It could, for instance, create a new division within the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal, which would be specifically designed to hear language rights violations.

Whether Parliament creates a new division within the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal or a new administrative tribunal altogether, it is essential that the members of the new administrative body properly represent Quebec's English-speaking community. Indeed, the relevance of this oversight body across Canada and its capacity to bring English and French speakers together will depend, in part, on a design that affords equal treatment to English and French minority communities.

With respect to the role of the Official Languages Act in bringing English and French speakers together, in addition to ensuring that the equal status of English and French is a guiding principle in the creation and composition of a new administrative tribunal, there are several ways Parliament can modernize the architecture of the Official Languages Act to bring English and French speakers together.

First, the value of bilingualism and the role it plays as an identity marker for a growing number of Canadians should be explicitly recognized in the preamble and the purpose clause of the Official Languages Act.

• (1115)

Parliament should also clarify in part VI of the OLA that bilingualism is a relevant factor in the selection of personnel according to merit.

Under part VII of the act, Parliament should explicitly require that federal institutions involved in the immigration process foster

linguistic duality and the growth and development of English and French official language minority communities.

Finally, Parliament should strengthen part VI of the act. Proper representation of language minority communities in the federal public service on a provincial level and beyond the national capital is key to bringing English and French speakers together and incentivizing linguistic duality in the workplace.

**Mr. Geoffrey Chambers:** The QCGN would also like to lend its support to the motion adopted by the committee last week that a meeting be convened with the Fédération des communautés francophones et acadienne du Canada, the Commissioner of Official Languages, the minister of Tourism, Official Languages and La Francophonie and us, the English-speaking community of Quebec, to discuss a federal-provincial-territorial summit on official languages as part of the fiftieth anniversary of the Official Languages Act.

This is a constructive motion that you adopted, and we'd like to put our full support behind it.

We'd like to thank you for inviting us to be here today.

• (1120)

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

[*Translation*]

As you can hear the bell calling us to a vote, I need the unanimous consent of the members of the committee so that we can continue for a few minutes.

Do I have your consent?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**The Chair:** Perfect. We'll continue for a few minutes.

[*English*]

Thank you very much for your presentations, all three of you.

We'll start a period of questions with Bernard Généreux.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Bernard Généreux (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, CPC):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

It is a pleasure to be back at the committee after being away for a few weeks.

My sincere thanks to the witnesses for being here today.

I have sort of lost touch with the news, but I have nevertheless taken some notes about your requests for a review of the act.

Ms. Hunting, you mentioned that there are currently 40,000 anglophones in the Eastern Townships. Is that correct?

**Ms. Rachel Hunting:** The Eastern Townships, which include administrative region 05, the Estrie, as well as part of the Montérégie region and a small part of the Chaudière-Appalaches, Mauricie and Centre-du-Québec regions.

**Mr. Bernard Généreux:** Do you know how many anglophones there were 10, 20 or 30 years ago?

**Ms. Rachel Hunting:** There were a lot more of us.

**Mr. Bernard Généreux:** Has the number decreased by half? Is it a significant decrease?

**Ms. Rachel Hunting:** The number has decreased by more than half.

**Mr. Bernard Généreux:** Okay.

Do you think that the Official Languages Act has a direct link to the non-recognition or the benefits that could have been granted to anglophones in that particular region?

**Ms. Rachel Hunting:** I think it's related to the shortcomings of the act in terms of strengthening judgments and going one step further than recommendations. This has a lot to do with the programs and investments made based on the demographic weight of the minority language community. It affects us.

**Mr. Bernard Généreux:** So, the more the linguistic community decreases, the fewer services there are.

**Ms. Rachel Hunting:** Yes, there are fewer points of service.

On the cultural side, we can take the recent example of the grants available for Canada's 150th anniversary. In Cowansville, the application of a group of women was rejected because the project did not reach enough people. In the community of Cowansville, this still represents a large portion of the minority language population.

It's sort of because of those shortcomings.

**Mr. Bernard Généreux:** Okay.

I now turn to Mr. Chambers.

In terms of the anglophone school board, you said that the transfer from English to French school affected you—it may not be the exact term you used. Is it mainly because of the way the Government of Quebec does things, rather than the real result of the transfer of three classrooms?

I read that three classrooms in that school had the opportunity to take many more. That is why the Government of Quebec did the transfer. I also understood that you may not have been notified or even consulted.

**Mr. Geoffrey Chambers:** In this case, it was a school big enough for 800 students, but with 458 students. The empty spaces available could be used, based on an agreement between the school boards, by the Commission scolaire Marguerite-Bourgeoys.

**Mr. Bernard Généreux:** Is that the francophone school board?

**Mr. Geoffrey Chambers:** Yes, that's right.

It was already there to serve the francophone population, which did not have enough resources. There was already an agreement.

To transfer a school, the legislation governing education in Quebec requires a very well-defined process, which takes about 18 months. There are 6 months of consultation and one year of planning. In so doing, parents, students and communities in general have the opportunity to provide input on the issue and have a planning period.

That was simply set aside because the minister decided to use a power that has existed for 20 years but has only been used once.

We were more shocked by the process than the outcome. It is important to emphasize that this was not a question of empty classrooms not being used to meet needs. There was already an agreement between the school boards. It was an unexpected intervention and it was very difficult for the community.

● (1125)

**Mr. Bernard Généreux:** Okay, thank you.

**The Chair:** I will now give the floor to Ms. Lambropoulos.

[English]

**Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos (Saint-Laurent, Lib.):** Thank you, guys, for being here with us today.

I guess I'm going to start with Geoffrey. You also came out and spoke in the past, when this happened, about the removal of English signs in the hospital.

Can you go into a little more detail? Obviously, we are the federal government and we don't have much of a say over what happens at the provincial level. What do you expect our government and our committee to do with regard to this removal of the rights of anglophone Quebecers?

**Mr. Geoffrey Chambers:** The act that was done by the hospital administration—which, as you have probably read, was condemned by the local mayors and quite a few other members of the majority population—reversed a practice that had been in place for 50 years and, more interestingly, for 40 years under the provisions of Bill 101. Several previous governments had reviewed the situation and found that the practice was entirely in compliance with Bill 101, so arguing, as this government did, that they were just enforcing the law is just not how we see it.

We actually have quite a lot of expertise in regard to the internal structure of the obligations under the law. In our sense—and this is concurred in by the people running the hospital and many other hospitals around the province—the signs that were up were justified under the health and safety exemption. Basically, when you arrive at the hospital, there aren't that many unilingual anglophones who couldn't read *urgence* for emergency, but if there's one who is going to die in the parking lot, that's a very bad result. The same example would apply to all the internal signs, which were taken down as well. It's not as good an image for the TV spots, but the signs taken down internally make a real difference for the safe functioning of this institution.

For the benefit and with the understanding and complete buy-in of the community, nobody is talking about the French character of the institution being compromised in any way, but that there should be an English sign as well—lower down, to the right and in smaller letters—as has been tolerated, and as has been permitted under the law and as a matter of social consensus. It's a really big disappointment if we're going to move in this direction of effacing the language for no local social reason; there wasn't conflict; there wasn't....

Anyway, I'm going on here.

**Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos:** What can we do in these circumstances?

**Mr. Geoffrey Chambers:** Well, speak up. You've been very effective and diplomatic, but have spoken from a position of moral authority in regard to some matters in Ontario, some matters in New Brunswick. When you look at what happened with the ambulances in New Brunswick—incidentally, in a situation in which there is no guarantee for language services in an ambulance in Quebec—this isn't to say there isn't quite a civilized practice in regard to how ambulances function. I'm just riffing off the issue on which you, I think, have been very constructive in regard to New Brunswick.

If somebody were to intervene with Urgences-santé and say to stop providing service in English as a matter of courtesy and as a matter of practice, because it's not required under the law—and it isn't required under the law—we would have a real issue with that. There is social peace in regard to these matters, and where somebody is intervening to change things away from a good solution, if you speak up, you have a great deal of authority. You have a great platform here, and we'd love to hear you weigh in.

• (1130)

**Ms. Emmanuela Lambropoulos:** Sylvia, I'm going to ask you a question. You mentioned strengthening the frameworks with federal, provincial and territorial agreements. Can you give us some recommendations on what you believe would strengthen these frameworks?

**Ms. Sylvia Martin-Laforge:** In the linguistic clauses, or in your negotiations with the Province of Quebec, as with other provinces.... The federal government has this issue with all of the provinces that when you are giving money to a province, you're not always quite sure where all of the money goes. Certainly in Quebec, that's a huge issue. I venture to guess that in some respects it might be a bigger issue in Quebec.

We need that money coming to our communities. You asked, "How can we help you?" That is one of the ways you can help us to better understand or better focus on what that funding could do in our province to help us do the work we need to do with the institutions.

Mr. Généreux talked about the education piece. You talked about the health and social services piece. These are fundamental institutions to any minority language community. When we get a school taken away or when a sign gets taken away, that's happened in the rest of Canada. It's happening in Quebec. We hope it will not become more frequent, but in the first four months, we are seeing many examples of how the vitality of our community is being impacted by direct or indirect actions.

[Translation]

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Lambropoulos.

I must announce that vice-chair François Choquette will chair the second part of the meeting.

We must now go to the House to vote. We will therefore suspend the meeting and be back right after the vote.

• (1130)

\_\_\_\_\_ (Pause) \_\_\_\_\_

• (1210)

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Alupa Clarke):** We're resuming the meeting.

[English]

Today, it is my understanding that you have already spoken your opening remarks, so you may continue.

I think the next speaker is Mr. Choquette.

[Translation]

Mr. Choquette, you have the floor.

[English]

**Mr. François Choquette (Drummond, NDP):** Thank you very much for your presence here today.

My first question will be for both your groups. You talked about positive measures and vitality and assisting the development that needs to be defined under part VII of the act. Have you started a reflection on those definitions? I know you said that it was very important that we hadn't consulted on this and that we needed to hear about this. Have you started a discussion on that?

**Ms. Rachel Hunting:** At the townshippers' level in our region, the discussion turns around demographic weight and those kinds of measures when making investments in the official language minority communities in Quebec, especially in a rural context. The further we get away from the large urban centres, the smaller the pockets of anglophone communities tend to be. They can sometimes get left out completely in terms of opportunities and investments, as well as service delivery. If you only deliver services based on the number of people who are accessing them or have the potential to access them, then it can be highly problematic.

I think it's really important to have a concrete and specific definition of what is meant by the vitality of an official language minority community. We get asked a lot by partners and other stakeholders what we mean by "vitality". I explain it in my communities and in our region as if a community were a person and had vital signs. How is the health of that person? If you think about your community in that way, is it overweight? Is it aging? Is it ill? What's going on health-wise for your community?

Having those kinds of clarifications makes it easier for organizations like mine to effectively impact those issues and indicators.

**Mr. François Choquette:** Thanks.

**Ms. Sylvia Martin-Laforge:** Mr. Choquette, along the lines of what my colleague Rachel is saying, different departments will have to also determine special measures that can work for them. For example, over the years, there have been many giveaways by the federal government to the province in terms of jurisdiction. Two examples are labour market or employment, as well as immigration.

As the federal government makes investments in official language plans, they sometimes just exacerbate where there are gaps in our communities. For example, special measures around immigration are needed. We have been talking about what IRCC can do in the English-speaking communities of Quebec. For years we have asked. We have come to committee. We have said we'll help you figure it out and we understand that there's a Cullen-Couture agreement, but what is your responsibility around the vitality of the English-speaking community with regard to immigration? Part VII is there for you as well.

The community can have ideas, but in the problematic areas where we've gone further in terms of off-loading into a jurisdiction, the departments have to come up with some very innovative ideas.

I'll give an example of what has happened. I use this example often, but I think it's a good one, so I'll use it again. Air Canada doesn't know what they can really do for the English-speaking community. A few years ago we were in negotiations with them, and now they fund our big community awards in the fall. Maybe there's more they can do, but they were innovative enough to find a way to sponsor an event that is important for our community. They did it, and they continue to do it. I think they're now a gold sponsor every year, and they're paying attention to us. We don't have the same issues as *les francophones hors Québec* in terms of Air Canada, but they know they have a responsibility as a pan-Canadian organization to do something for the English-speaking community of Quebec, and they have.

For part VII, the community can come up with some ideas, but I think the responsibility is with departments to come up with some good ideas as well. They have hundreds of people working there and there are seven of us—10 on a good day.

●(1215)

**Mr. François Choquette:** Regarding the Prime Minister's summit, it's really important with all that's going on in Ontario and in New Brunswick, but also in Quebec. You talked a little about it. I think you met with the Premier of Quebec last week, or something such as that.

Have you met recently with Prime Minister Trudeau or his team? What is going on with this meeting, if it happened? Has it been a long while since you met with Prime Minister Trudeau?

**Mr. Geoffrey Chambers:** We met with the Prime Minister just prior to the morning of the announcement of the new action plan, so it was in March of last year.

This is talking a bit out of school, but we made a request to the Prime Minister's Office this morning, prior to coming here, for a meeting in the next couple of weeks to discuss the evolving situation. We got a reasonably encouraging answer, so we're hoping to be able to ventilate those questions.

We have regular contact with the minister, Madame Joly, who is responsive to our concerns, and with other ministers as and when necessary—not as many, but we have contacts. The government has not been difficult to reach.

[Translation]

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Alupa Clarke):** Thank you for your remarks.

We'll now go to Mr. Arseneault for six minutes.

**Mr. René Arseneault (Madawaska—Restigouche, Lib.):** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Ms. Martin-Laforge, Mr. Chambers, Ms. Hunting, good afternoon.  
[English]

It's always a pleasure to have you here.

Ms. Hunting, I think it's the first time I've seen you here.

It's always a charm to receive all of you from your communities. I can never tell you often enough how your association or your group, or other people you're representing, represent a pure, perfect mirror of where I'm from and all the battles we have in Acadie.

[Translation]

I will be very technical.

[English]

I'll jump into part VII of the act. We're now taking important notes and we want you to participate in the modification of this act.

Under part VII, in order of importance, what would your positive measures be? What would be your dream here, measured as a, b or c, or 1, 2, 3 or 4 in terms of importance?

●(1220)

**Ms. Sylvia Martin-Laforge:** The most important measure is the policy lens brought to each of the policies or programs considered. That means, for the English-speaking community, that has to be taken into account. That would mean the gaps we have had in the past would start to be considered.

I know Canadian Heritage has been taking about a policy lens for many years. I understand that. However, there has to be more to it. Many years ago, I used to work at Canadian Heritage, so I know what a policy lens is, but there has to be some way of attributing perhaps weight, some weighted lens or checkmarks to what is meant for policy.

That policy lens has to be examined, explored, identified and implementable. Right now, the policy lens is an abstract type of thing. I don't think it has been considered strongly enough in the implementation.

The other piece around part VII is where Rachel talks about where numbers warrant, or where numbers are. For us, the question of how many there are in a community and what you should offer to a community just because the weight of the community has diminished has to be understood better and make specific accommodation for where there are fewer of us but we're still very important; our numbers are important.

**Mr. René Arseneault:** It's quite delicate to identify certain regions where the numbers are not the same as on the Island of Montreal. As I've always said, I never hide behind that.

**Ms. Sylvia Martin-Laforge:** Yes.

**Mr. René Arseneault:** For me, the endangered English language in Quebec is more outside the Island of Montreal than in Montreal.

How would you see that?

**Ms. Sylvia Martin-Laforge:** Well, certainly around the institutions, Mr. Généreux, who doesn't seem to be here right now—

**Mr. René Arseneault:** He is always at the food table.

**Some hon. members:** Oh, oh!

**Ms. Sylvia Martin-Laforge:** Oh, he's at the food table.

I'm so sorry. You know when we talked this morning about the 400 students in a school that was for 800 students?

**An hon. member:** That was 450 students.



**Ms. Sylvia Martin-Laforge:** There were 450 students who were in a school that was too large. That should be taken very seriously. That a school would be closed or taken away because we are at 450 students should not happen.

There are millions of dollars that come to us from the *entente en éducation*. Why aren't we using some of that money to bolster our schools? That's an example. I don't know if it's feasible.

I think my president has something to say.

**Mr. Geoffrey Chambers:** Well yes, it seems to me that there's a numbers question on the Island of Montreal and off the Island of Montreal.

The policy that the Government of Quebec applies to language questions is applied generally across the province. And it's true that on the Island of Montreal or in the Montreal region there is a long historical tradition of institutions built by the community for the most part serving the community well. Some of them date from a couple hundred years ago.

However, it's the only official language minority in the country in which the trend is a decline. Our hospitals are not as controlled or as connected to the community as they used to be. Our universities are wonderful organizations, but they are very integrated into the majority community as well.

The service profile that the community used to have, certainly in health and social services and to some extent in education, has declined.

• (1225)

**Mr. René Arseneault:** Would you say that language is the first problem you can identify that causes this?

**Mr. Geoffrey Chambers:** Well there is a demographic pattern, and language fits into it.

Our community is not in numerical decline. There are places where it's in numerical decline, but overall in the province it is not.

**Ms. Rachel Hunting:** Sorry to interrupt, but if you think about it in a rural context as well, you have a large population on the Island of Montreal, but if you take my region as an example, the way the services are delivered by the provincial government is usually through MRCs, so you'll have a disparity of services.

If you take the Estrie 05 region—I know the Cantons de l'Est is different—in just that one administrative region, from one MRC to another, you have a disparity of service for the English-speaking community.

What is available in Coaticook is not available in Richmond, is not available in Asbestos and is not available in East Angus in the same way.

You have a community that operates as one large community. I often say that our community is like a small town spread out over a very large area. Our community knows that this disparity exists within itself and its own membership, and it struggles to understand how legislation at the federal level, like the Official Languages Act, is not impacting or not available to help with those kinds of situations.

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Alupa Clarke):** Thank you, Madame Hunting.

[Translation]

You have the floor for six minutes, Ms. Fortier.

**Mrs. Mona Fortier (Ottawa—Vanier, Lib.):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

[English]

Thank you very much for both of your presentations. It's great to have you here today. We are all working very hard, and I hope to strengthen and modernize the Official Languages Act with you.

I've heard your presentations, and I would invite you to give us some indication of how you think we should define those terms, because I'm not sure you have done so in your submissions. I believe that the terms are really important. Depending where you go, there may not be the same way of defining them. It would be really interesting to have your definition of the terms you presented earlier.

I know, Rachel, you mentioned four terms, and it would be great to hear them if you have them already defined.

**Ms. Rachel Hunting:** I don't have them already defined, but I do have suggestions for the way we can come to those definitions as a community. I don't think they should be imposed; I think it should be a consultative issue.

I think it's of primordial importance to take into account that the English-speaking community in Quebec is a community of communities that are extremely diverse. The needs are as diverse as the population is. We need to move away from legislation, definitions and frameworks that pit Montreal against the regions, and those kinds of things. I think we need to find a more inclusive way of looking at those definitions.

My colleagues at the QCGN might have some suggestions.

**Mr. Geoffrey Chambers:** I'd like to argue that we need an active, interventionist, energetic, supportive attitude from the federal government, always understanding that when there's a dialogue between federal and provincial authorities, there are going to be complications.

I'm going to give you two examples. They're examples of areas in which it would be difficult to solve the problem, but I really think we have to address them. You'll see from the examples why I think that.

There's a transfer of about \$65 million per year in education to the provincial government. Sylvia and I were invited to a consultation about a year ago by the deputy minister to talk about how that money would be spent. We walked into the room, a room sort of this size, with this many people on our side of the table, 20 or so. The deputy minister stood up and said, "It is very important that we spend this money effectively. We get \$65 million and \$40 million is spoken for. Let's talk about the last \$25 million."

What about the \$40 million? No, we don't want to talk about it.

They stole \$40 million and went and used it for something else, nothing to do with our community, and they more or less admitted it to us in a closed room.

Now they're giving us a chance to have some input on the \$25 million, which we didn't used to have, and everybody wanted to have a good day, and they had a good conversation about that. But that's not really right. I'm not saying that that \$40 million isn't very well spent on virtuous projects that really do good, but they're not even telling our community what they are.

That's example number one. I should say, in regard to that example, that we know that Madame Joly has taken a much more aggressive attitude towards transparency and accountability in regard to these matters, and they're negotiating new ententes, so the situation may improve, but if she does that, it is an illustration of what we're talking about, going in and solving the problem, understanding the problem and solving it.

• (1230)

**Mrs. Mona Fortier:** That's also with a linguistic clause that defines the result of using that money, if I understand you well, which is not there at this time.

**Mr. Geoffrey Chambers:** Exactly. It's not there now, and I speak for my brethren in other provinces. As you all probably know, we're not blaming the government of Quebec for being particularly bad about this.

**Mrs. Mona Fortier:** No, no, no, it's the process that needs to change.

**Mr. Geoffrey Chambers:** Everybody does it, I think.

The other example is even messier. We heard this just yesterday. There are 18,000 immigration files that are being discontinued in Quebec, for 50,000 people. There's a class, in that file, of people who are in Quebec and who are acting as caregivers and are very far advanced in the process. They could get citizenship right away or soon under the new rules if they could pass a French test. However, many of them are caregivers who have been recruited from south Asia and who are in Quebec serving English families, and they're not going to pass the French test.

If they could find an English family in Cornwall or Toronto or anywhere else in the country, the next day they could have their permanent residency, but that's a very big thing to ask them.

So can we find some solution for these 8,000 to 10,000 people? These are 3,000 to 4,000 applications; they have families. The federal government has a role to play there now because it's complicated and might possibly require some intrusiveness, but maybe just a spirit of problem-solving.

**Mrs. Mona Fortier:** Thank you.

I have a question for Rachel, and for QCGN also if you would like to share. How can we engage more with municipalities and townships, especially with those transfers of money? If the money goes through the province and then goes to the municipality, I understand there's that, I'll say, disconnect, because I can't find the right word, but, you know, a third party.

How would you see that? How can we strengthen the current process or contracts to help, if I understand, municipalities or townships be able to use that money to service on the ground?

**Ms. Rachel Hunting:** That's a good question.

I think there has to be a campaign that promotes and highlights the official language minority in Quebec as well. I think that's an important starting point, because we're not identified by the provincial government as an official minority, and so for the MRCs, there's no reflex in our policy, in legislation at the municipal level, to include just a thought for the minority language community when anything is developed. In recent years in the province, much of the spending that has been available at the regional level.... There was a *conférence régionale des élus*. There was a forum *jeunesse*. They were available at a regional level. That gave organizations like Townshippers', CASA in the Gaspé, and Neighbours in Rouyn, organizations with a regional mandate, the ability to network and access those opportunities with our francophone counterparts, and they've been abolished since 2015, I think.

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Alupa Clarke):** Can we have a last word from you?

**Ms. Rachel Hunting:** Sure. Opportunities like that are a really good way just to have the community present and at the table.

[Translation]

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Alupa Clarke):** Mr. Généreux, you have the floor for six minutes.

**Mr. Bernard Généreux:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Since the beginning, we have often come back to clarifying words, because we know that words are important in legislation. What has sort of always caught my attention is the "positive measures". Depending on where you are and from which angle you look at things, inevitably you may find that some are positive or some are not. The term is very broad, and it can allow for different factors, which can include or exclude things.

In fact, when I sit on this committee, I always wonder what we are going to achieve. We must achieve something that is clear, precise, and that we are able to define. Would it be possible to do that, or would you still like to see some flexibility in the terminology in the new act that may or may not be adopted?

That's a huge question, isn't it?

**Mr. Geoffrey Chambers:** In terms of drafting the act, we're willing to participate. We have lawyers. We can define precisely what we want and, if you wish, we can submit a brief on it.

We are in the process of drafting a document on our position in general. We have the wording for general principles, but not for the specifics.

• (1235)

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Alupa Clarke):** We invite you to send us that document.

[English]

**Ms. Sylvia Martin-Laforge:** It's a fine line between specifics and ambiguity. The law gives you as much as you can. It's in the modalities and the regulation. There's law, and then there's a regulation, and then there are the guidelines.

We have a law. What are the regulations? What are the guidelines that ministries can use? I'm not sure that the federal government has figured out quite how to get from there to the third tier, to where you can be as precise as you need to be within a frame.

**Mr. Geoffrey Chambers:** Here are some possible examples. The matter that's currently before the courts in British Columbia could be resolved by legislation. The powers of the commissioner are defined vaguely, and we could give you some specific details in regard to those matters.

The list probably is much longer, and if you assign us the task of coming up with specific recommendations, we will certainly do so, but right now we're at the ideas level.

[Translation]

**Mr. Bernard Généreux:** I would also like to talk about accountability. Mr. Chambers, you said earlier that you were receiving \$70 million, but that, in the end, they were taking \$40 million of that to do something else, so that you were ultimately given \$25 million. However, we do not know how the \$40 million is being spent; clearly, we can only hope that it is being spent honestly and correctly by the government. However, the community does not know where that money is going.

Personally, I have a problem with the federal government taking a sum of money in this way. As you said, this is not just happening in Quebec, but across Canada. We have had the opportunity, when we have travelled to various parts of the country, to see that it is the same everywhere. The accountability is incomplete, it is deficient, at very least. It does not allow us to get to the bottom of things to really know whether the money spent is achieving all the expected results.

Would you suggest that the act should impose a definition or, at the very least, a direct link with the provinces to find out where they spent that money? In the western Canadian provinces, we were told that there was money for francophone minority communities, but that they never saw any of it.

**Mr. Geoffrey Chambers:** There's nothing to stop the federal government from setting conditions before it transfers funds.

[English]

Right now, Madam Joly is trying to negotiate a set of ententes that have principles in them, but why couldn't there be a requirement in the law or a *mains libre* that she doesn't give money when she doesn't know where it's going? I'm sure she would feel that that would empower her.

Right now she gives money and the provincial government is able to say that it concerns education: "It's nothing to do with you, and we'll decide". They have some rights to do that, but they don't have rights to require you to transfer the money. You have some leverage in this negotiation to say, "You don't get the money unless we're happy".

**Mr. Bernard Généreux:** Especially when the money is supposed to go to one specific thing and it doesn't go there.

[Translation]

**Mr. Alupa Clarke:** Thank you, Mr. Généreux.

[English]

Now we're going to go to our anglophone member of this great committee, Madam Emmanuella.

**Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos:** You both stressed the importance of promoting bilingualism within the act in general. You said that we should be valuing it and recognizing the role it plays and that we should be bringing anglophones and francophones together rather than allowing them to be divided.

What ways would recommend to the committee to help bring together these two communities and help promote bilingualism?

• (1240)

**Ms. Sylvia Martin-Laforge:** The work that is done in English-speaking Quebec with the French majority, the youth, is done by itself.

They are out there together. They're having a beer together; they're out there.

I believe that one of the great things about living in Quebec is that *va-et-vient* between young people, if we're talking about young people.

I think that the federal government should pay more attention to helping young English-speaking Quebecers understand the value of their minority in Quebec.

There are quite a few very successful interchanges between

[Translation]

francophones in Quebec, to go outside Quebec.

[English]

They are very successful.

[Translation]

Francophones from outside Quebec come to Quebec and meet francophones there.

[English]

I think we have to pay more attention to our generation of young English-speaking Quebecers who, in a certain sense, might be isolated in English-speaking Quebec because they're talking to young francophones.

What we see happening in the rest of Canada around the identity of the young francophone outside Quebec with the FESFO and the FJCF.... We don't have that in Quebec.

I think the federal government has an obligation to our young people in Quebec to invest in them to understand their relevance in the national conversation about being an official language minority community. It's okay.

**Mr. Geoffrey Chambers:** I'd like to take an example from that question, because you were there for this.

We met briefly with the Premier of Quebec. He came into the room and said, "I want to talk about three things: education, health and employment". We said, "Oh, we want to talk about three things: education, health and employment", so we started with an agreement.

We got to employment. One of the things we laid out is that we have a high degree of bilingualism among our youth, but often they don't have job skills in their second language. There's a little bridge, but it's often a bridge that causes them to say, "What about a job in Alberta? I can get it right away" and we lose some. His first reaction was, "We're trying to do exactly that for our immigrants. Why wouldn't we do it for you?" He's making all of the right sounds, and then he turns to the guy next to him, who's his parliamentary secretary, and asks, "Can we get federal money for that?"

I think we're very close to an opportunity where everybody would be pleased. You could have quite strong criteria that money will be spent correctly. They would feel good about it and our community would feel very good about it.

Rachel has some programs in her region that are already functioning a little bit like this, but we need to have it more generally and much more well funded and organized.

**Ms. Rachel Hunting:** Whatever takes place needs to take into account that the English-speaking community of Quebec is not consuming English-speaking community Quebec culture in our home province. We have access to English, yes, and we probably have more access to our minority language than our francophone counterparts in other parts of the country have to French. But the culture that I'm consuming is not my English-speaking Québécois culture. I think that's tremendously important, and it goes back to the identity-building.

[Translation]

The roots and sense of belonging of our young people encourage them to stay in Quebec and feel at home. I am from a ninth generation of Quebecers. I have to feel comfortable, welcomed and involved in my home in Sherbrooke.

[English]

I think that any kind of legislation that comes out of the federal government that speaks to official languages in Canada needs to really highlight that, because that's what happens to our community. We get called

[Translation]

the most coddled minority in the world.

[English]

It's hard for me to hear that and know that I can't go to the hospital and read a sign. That's just a very basic, simple example.

• (1245)

**Ms. Sylvia Martin-Laforge:** Because Rachel was touching on it, Emploi-Québec was devolved. Manpower—it was called Manpower then—was devolved. One of the first places was in Quebec. It had no linguistic clauses. In other provinces, they were somewhat better at it. In Ontario I know they were a lot better at it.

Emploi-Québec is a major, major issue for the English-speaking... and we tell you that employment is an issue...? Manpower was devolved, and now sometimes we hear terrible rumblings that Young Canada Works or some youth programs will be devolved to Quebec. Please, please don't—

**Mr. Geoffrey Chambers:** Or don't, without conditions.

**Ms. Sylvia Martin-Laforge:** —or don't without conditions.

The federal government has a very large role to play in the money that you put in a province, but we're telling you—Rachel and all of us—that employment is a big deal. We are less than 1% of the provincial civil service in Quebec.

**Mr. Geoffrey Chambers:** We're 13% of the population.

**Ms. Sylvia Martin-Laforge:** We're 13% of the population, almost 13.7%, I think.

We are not even at our percentage in the federal government representation.

**Ms. Rachel Hunting:** If you were to bring the levels of unemployment for the French-speaking and English-speaking communities in Quebec together just so they'd be at the same percentage, you would have to employ between 18,000 and 20,000 anglophones tomorrow, and we're talking about bringing in manpower from outside...

[Translation]

There is a pool of people who could be employed.

[English]

**Mr. René Arseneault:** Did you say 13% or 30%?

[Translation]

**Ms. Sylvia Martin-Laforge:** It's 13%.

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Alupa Clarke):** Mr. Gourde, you have the floor for five minutes, please.

**Mr. Jacques Gourde (Lévis—Lotbinière, CPC):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

My thanks to the witnesses for being here.

I would like to come back to the amounts allocated to the initiative that has been set up.

I have been in politics for 13 years. There were problems then, there were problems seven years ago and there are still problems today. I think we'll have the same problems again in 5, 10 or 15 years.

Money from the roadmap is being transferred to initiatives in education, health and other areas. When we move from one institution to another, it is unfortunate, but we do not see the effects of those investments.

It is impossible to ask federal officials to reach an agreement with Quebec officials. Never. The lawyers get involved and find a constitutional reason to say that it's provincial jurisdiction, that it must not be touched and that precedents will be set. That will not change, but money is still being invested in those initiatives. The money disappears and goes into the consolidated fund.

Would it be possible to have initiatives that would help organizations or individuals directly and would have a significant impact? In other words, can the money be given to individuals or non-profit organizations to maximize the benefits? The federal government can give money to non-profit organizations to provide services to the public, but it cannot give money to a school board or a municipality. That is the way it is and it will not change unless the Constitution is reopened, which no one in Canada wants to do right now.

If, in an ideal world, you were offered \$1 billion over the next five years, how would you like to receive that money so that you can use it as best as possible?

**Mr. Geoffrey Chambers:** That's a very important idea, and I absolutely agree that we need to work on it.

[English]

I think that with a little creativity the transfers you're talking about are possible. It's quite correct that the direct granting of federal money to a school board would end up with a problem, but the school boards have an umbrella association that is not constrained by the same limitations. It doesn't have constitutional status. There is a larger coalition inside Quebec to deal with the support of our school systems, with the participation of the teachers' unions, the parent associations, ourselves and regional associations. It's quite a broad coalition. It could be supported.

Just in the example of the education space, there are two very respectable, very well organized...that are already receiving some grant support indirectly. If they were enabled by some long-term contractual undertakings from the federal government, there would be nothing unconstitutional about it.

There is a similar set of opportunities in the health care system, so all of our health care institutions have become state institutions. There is still some residual community involvement, but the corporations own the buildings, and there is a foundation structure that raises money privately and has an NGO-quality association with these ventures. It is not constrained by the constitutional rules that would prevent you from giving directly to a hospital.

In regard to municipalities, it might be a bit more complicated, but if there were the will on the federal side, we would find a solution that would be similar to those two examples. As a partnership opportunity, I think it's a brilliant and timely suggestion.

• (1250)

**Ms. Rachel Hunting:** I think the official languages community is better positioned to let you know how to effectively impact their communities and invest those monies.

[Translation]

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Alupa Clarke):** You have two minutes left, Mr. Gourde.

**Mr. Jacques Gourde:** There is another great injustice in Canada that perpetuates the two solitudes, in my opinion. It is possible for an anglophone family in Ontario or Alberta to send their children to a French-language school. However, it was impossible for me—because I was a francophone and so was my wife—to send our children to an English-language school when they were young.

My neighbour, whose last name is Blaney, sent all his children to the English school in Thetford Mines. He was able to enrol his children, from an early age, in an English-language school board in Quebec because they were descendants of anglophones. However, since my wife and I are native Quebecers, we did not have that right. Constitutionally, this situation bothers me because it is still up to the parents to choose the school their children will attend. I could choose to send my children to any French-language school in Quebec, but not to an English-language school. That's not how it is in the other provinces.

Can you comment on that?

**Mr. Geoffrey Chambers:** Yes, that's an important observation.

This is a challenge for us. For our high school graduates to be fully capable of participating in the Quebec economy, we must reach a level, a quality in training.

[English]

We have high-school graduates from a francophone board or an English board and you can't tell the difference between their language skills because they've been properly supported. That's a standard that's achieved in Israel, the Netherlands, Iceland. Nobody gets out of high school without having a second language, which is really at a level where you can get a job. We've achieved that, and I think the crazy old rules can go.

In the middle term, if we suggest the erosion of the French-language protection that's represented by the school rules now, I think the negotiation would be complex. As much as I think we have to get there, the first move is on our part to get the standard of our education up. We're not far away from that. Ten years ago I would have said, I don't know, but I can tell you now that I think we're close.

**Ms. Sylvia Martin-Laforge:** There's another issue, Monsieur Gourde, that I would like to play out for you. Having worked in French-language education in another province, the critical mass in a school determines what happens and what you feel in a school. In Ontario, for example, it's very important to have a good critical mass and not to be considering French as a service. The feeling of French in the school is

[Translation]

a linguistic arrangement.

[English]

It's about everything. There's a tension, as well, in the schools if you have too many people, *des ayants droit*, or you let any young people in the school. It upsets the promotion of language and culture in a school.

It's a complex issue, but I know, having lived in other provinces, that they also struggle with that issue about the character of the French school. We in Quebec have to consider the character of the English school, as well.

That's just a bit of insight into your question.

• (1255)

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Alupa Clarke):** Thank you, madam. Now it's the turn of Mr. Choquette for three minutes.

**Mr. François Choquette:** As a first point, I really like your idea of creating a new division within the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal. I think it's a great idea. It's wise. I think we need to take a look at that as a committee.

Second, we didn't talk about the census, the enumeration of rights holders. Do you think it should be inserted in the Official Languages Act?

**Ms. Sylvia Martin-Laforge:** Yes. I think we've been quite forceful on that. We have followed our Fédération des communautés francophones et acadienne du Canada folks. We've had many discussions on this and our director of policy is on top of it.

**Mr. François Choquette:** Excellent.

The last question is about the famous summit of the Prime Minister. Do you remember when the Prime Minister and the federal, provincial and territorial ministers met? It was an agenda about the official languages. Do you remember when it was, the last time?

**Mr. Geoffrey Chambers:** You're right. It's deep in history.

[Translation]

**Ms. Sylvia Martin-Laforge:** Known to man.

**Mr. François Choquette:** Or woman!

[English]

**Mr. Geoffrey Chambers:** It's overdue. The fact that you're raising it gives me the opportunity to say that it would be a very welcome event. Speaking for the constituencies that we represent and understand, I think it would be very positively received. It wouldn't be an occasion for friction, blame and tension. I don't say that no one brings that spirit to the table, but I don't think the francophones of Quebec would and I don't think we would.

I also think the majority of the population of Quebec, if it were presented right, would be quite enabled by it. It's talking about strengthening the French fact and it would be talking, partly, about the French fact in Canada, which has to be a popular thing in Quebec.

[Translation]

**Mr. François Choquette:** Do I still have time, Mr. Chair?

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Alupa Clarke):** You have 35 seconds left. If you don't use them, I'm going to ask a question.

[English]

**Mr. François Choquette:** Thank you very much.

[Translation]

I'll let Mr. Clarke ask his question.

[English]

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Alupa Clarke):** I have a question I would like you to answer in writing, because you won't have enough time to answer it now.

Touching on what Bernard said, that a positive measure can be seen as positive by some and negative by others, I think all of us around this table unanimously want to make part VII stronger.

If we were to exchange the word “can” in part VII with the word “must”, it would enable the government to make sure that if there were a precarious situation, like, for example, what happened in British Columbia—and when we say “precarious”, that's my subjective opinion.... What do you think would be the objective factors to make a rough analysis of the situation?

If the minister must introduce a positive measure, we would still need to address it as a government body in terms of objectivity. As the judges confirmed in 1983 when they interpreted the first article of the charter, they had to find a way to interpret it in an objective way.

To summarize my question, let's say that in one year's time, part VII has the word “must”, there's a crisis and the minister has to introduce a measure. It's not his or her own choice. He has to. What would be the criteria, objectively, of knowing for sure that the community is in danger? They can say they're in danger, but it might not be true.

Please send us your ideas as to what those criteria would be. It's immensely important to us.

**Mr. Geoffrey Chambers:** We have given some thought to that. We appreciate your asking us for our opinion and we will provide it to you in detail.

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Alupa Clarke):** Thank you, sir.

Rachel Hunting from the Townshippers' Association, thank you for your time, as well as the Quebec Community Groups Network, Mr. Chambers and Madame Martin-Laforge.

If you have any supplementary information, you can always send it to the clerk.

Thank you very much.

The meeting is adjourned.









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