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Chair: Mrs. Salma Zahid



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• (1655)

[English]

The Chair (Mrs. Salma Zahid (Scarborough Centre, Lib.)): I call this meeting to order. Good afternoon, everyone. Welcome to meeting number 38 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration.

The Board of Internal Economy requires that the committee adhere to the following health protocols: maintain a physical distance of at least two metres from others; wear a non-medical mask unless seated, and preferably wear a mask at all times, including when seated; and maintain proper hand hygiene by using the hand sanitizer provided in the committee room and regularly wash your hands well with soap. As the chair, I will enforce these measures. I thank you all for your co-operation.

Today's meeting is taking place in a hybrid format pursuant to the House order of January 25. I will outline a few rules to follow.

Interpretation services are available for this meeting. You may speak in the official language of your choice. At the bottom of your screen you may choose to hear floor audio, or English or French. The “raise hand” feature is on the main toolbar should you wish to speak. As a reminder, all comments should be addressed through the chair. When you are not speaking, your microphone should be muted. The committee clerk and I will maintain a speaking list for all members.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2) and the motion adopted by the committee on Wednesday, May 26, the committee is resuming its study of the economic imperative and long-term importance for small rural municipalities outside of major cities to retain new immigrants. Today is the last meeting to hear from witnesses.

Today the witnesses who are appearing before the committee include Colleges and Institutes Canada, represented by Denise Amyot, president and chief executive officer, and Mr. Mark Frison, who is the president of Assiniboine Community College. We are also joined by representatives from Droit à l'Emploi: Martine Groulx, executive director; and Bruno Magnan, coordinator of immigration services.

First of all, thank you to our witnesses for appearing before the committee. Thank you for your patience. I know you have been waiting since three o'clock for the meeting to start. Because of the votes in the House, it was delayed. Also, today the House will be adjourning for the summer recess.

Some members have discussed with me the commitments they have after 5:30. Based on the conversations I've had with some of

the members, those who reached me today from different parties, I would suggest that we hear from both of our witnesses. We will take the testimonies of the witnesses for five minutes each. After that, we'll go into committee business in camera and give drafting instructions to the analyst for the letter to the minister, pass the budget for this study, thank everyone and adjourn.

If that is okay, I will proceed that way, but if members have some other suggestions, I will take those.

Ms. Kwan.

• (1700)

Ms. Jenny Kwan (Vancouver East, NDP): Thanks very much, Madam Chair. I'm okay with that proposal.

I would also just point out that on March 8, at that committee, I had asked the deputy to provide information related to the government's tracking of the application of the paragraph 179(b) exemption with dual intent, after the government had indicated that it has given special notice around the use of dual intent. Ms. Tapley indicated that she would get back to the committee with respect to the changes they have seen and the tracking of that information.

We still have not received that information for the committee, so I wonder if the committee chair could follow that up with the deputy, get that information and share it with committee members.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Kwan, for raising that. I will work with the clerk to be in touch with the ministry officials to find out if they can send us that information. As soon as we get the information, it will be circulated to all the members.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Thank you.

The Chair: Mr. Dhaliwal.

Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal (Surrey—Newton, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

First, how many witnesses will be speaking?

The Chair: We have two witnesses. They will be speaking for five minutes each.

Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal: Thank you, Madam Chair.

MP Kwan has agreed with your proposal. I also agree, but I would suggest that we give each witness a minimum of five minutes and a maximum of 10 minutes. That will give them time to get their points across.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Dhaliwal.

Madam Normandin.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Normandin (Saint-Jean, BQ): Thank you very much.

Along the same lines, I think it's a shame because in some cases, this is the second time our witnesses have come here. They have been very patient and I wish I could have asked them some questions. I believe it would have been beneficial to the committee.

I understand my colleagues' time constraints, but I believe the context warrants more than just five minutes. We could also remind witnesses that, if they want to add anything, they can do so in writing afterwards.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, Madam Normandin.

Thank you to the members for their input. There seems to be agreement among all the members on what I have proposed, but if the witnesses need more than five minutes, I'm fine with that. I will not stop them. They can go ahead and provide the important testimony. If after providing testimony they feel the need to send us a written submission, they can do that as well.

That being said, again, welcome, witnesses. Thank you for appearing before the committee today.

We will start with Colleges and Institutes Canada, with Ms. Amyot, president and chief executive officer.

Please proceed, Ms. Amyot.

Ms. Denise Amyot (President and Chief Executive Officer, Colleges and Institutes Canada): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Good afternoon. *Bonjour*. It's a real pleasure to be here with you today to share how colleges support the recruitment and retention of skilled immigrants and help improve labour market outcomes.

Colleges play a unique role in the immigration ecosystem. They interact at many key touchpoints in the immigration journey by attracting international students, supporting the retention of immigrants through partnerships with settlement organizations, and providing skills training on the way to citizenship and beyond through re-skilling and upskilling as the labour market evolves.

[*Translation*]

Given that 95% of Canadians live within 50 kilometres of one of our campuses, this role is doubly important in rural communities. In these communities, colleges become key partners with the municipalities and employers as part of regional economic development strategies, and help to attract and retain newcomers, among other things.

Colleges often custom-design short courses—and I may come back to this—to meet specific employer needs, including micro-credentials or what are known as micro-certifications.

• (1705)

[*English*]

For example, colleges currently support the rural and northern immigration pilot and the Atlantic immigration pilot.

My three recommendations to you today relate to the rural and regional pilots and the role of international student pathways.

First, as the federal government builds on the rural and regional pilots and considers other immigration strategies with municipalities, it is imperative to increase the recognition and engagement with colleges to strengthen the recruitment, the labour market integration and the retention of immigrants.

Second, engage Colleges and Institutes Canada and member institutions in the development and implementation of permanent residency streams for international students graduating from colleges.

Third, equip post-secondary education institutions to provide support to improve the labour market outcomes of international students.

I'm tabling today Colleges and Institutes Canada's policy brief that came out last week on the role of international students in supporting Canada's immigration objectives. The second paper on the role of colleges in Canada's immigration ecosystem will follow in September.

I will now turn to Mark Frison, who is the president of Assiniboine Community College in Brandon, Manitoba, with whom I'm sharing my time today. He is also a board member of Colleges and Institutes Canada.

Go ahead, Mark.

Mr. Mark Frison (President, Assiniboine Community College, Colleges and Institutes Canada): Thanks, Denise.

I'd like to punctuate Denise's comments about the capacity that institutions can bring to help with rural immigration efforts with three different examples that I've been involved in over the past 20 years.

The first goes back to 2003-04, when I had the privilege of being involved in building an immigration strategy for Cape Breton Island. At that time, one of the members of our association, Cape Breton University, was deliberately starting to increase the number of international students they were recruiting. That number has grown dramatically over the past several years and now represents more than half of the students who attend that institution.

As a result, in 2019, the population of the Cape Breton regional municipality increased for the first time in over 50 years. That's my entire lifetime. It's the first time they'd seen a population increase, and it was directly attributable to the growth in the number of international students at that particular institution.

The second example comes from 2006, when I happened to be the president at a college in Swift Current, Saskatchewan. Many small and medium-sized enterprises began recruiting internationally because of labour shortages there, but there was no settlement agency in the southwest part of the province. The college stepped up and founded the settlement agency, operated it for the first few years to incubate it and then put it out on its own. I think this helps to illustrate Denise's point about how the distributed nature and reach of colleges can be used to build community capacity to support immigration.

Finally, here in Brandon, the college I'm at now has grown from fewer than 30 international students in 2013 to over 600 in 2019-20. Our strategy has been to align with provincial population and labour market goals, as most of the students who come to our institution are keen to eventually become citizens.

As one example, in the agriculture field, where one in five jobs in Manitoba is expected to go unfilled, we've partnered with food processors to develop a program whereby international students can come here to train and do paid work placements, which helps to offset their tuition costs and connects them with employers. This program is now in its third intake, and it has generated significant interest from families who already work at many of the food processors in the area. We know that if you can get folks to come through the program who already have family to live with in Brandon, the likelihood that they're going to settle there for the long term will be that much greater. The program has generated over 150 inquiries from family members about how they can get their family to come through it.

I note, which is important for the Government of Canada, that some of these projects would not have been possible without support for infrastructure, facilities and equipment through folks at regional development agencies. Thinking about how colleges can be unlocked to help with these goals requires that we think about this broadly in terms of the different vehicles that the Government of Canada can bring to bear on such situations.

Thank you.

• (1710)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Frison, for your important testimony.

We will now move to Droit à l'Emploi.

I will ask Martine Groulx to please start.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Martine Groulx (Executive Director, L'accueil, Accompagnement des Nouveaux arrivants et Conseils en Recherche d'Emploi, Droit à l'Emploi): Good afternoon, everyone.

I'm very pleased to be here today and to be able to speak to people across Canada.

We're going to briefly present our organization, Droit à l'emploi, and our division specifically dedicated to immigrants, L'Ancre. We invite immigrants to come and drop anchor in the Richelieu River, which runs through our city.

We'd also like to tell you a little about our region. We're located in Montérégie, Quebec's second largest region, with 1.6 million inhabitants. The area is very large from east to west, it takes two and a half hours to drive across it.

Our region is known for its wide range of jobs in all sectors. At 5.7%, our unemployment rate is very low compared to Montreal's, which is 9.2%. Ours is the same as the average unemployment rate in Canada. Before the pandemic, we were truly fully employed. Our businesses were in dire need.

We're located in Montérégie, in the City of Saint-Jean-sur-Richelieu, which has a population of nearly 100,000. The city is only a 30-minute drive from Montreal.

We have very few immigrants. They make up only 3.5% of our population. We really want to bring that number up, because the employment situation is very much thriving. Another good thing we have for immigrants is we provide all the same services as a big city. We're surrounded by farms and green spaces. Many seasonal workers from South America come to work during the warm season.

Droit à l'emploi is a charitable organization with community experience. Our mission is to fight poverty and social exclusion through employment. We've been around for over 30 years and have about forty staff members trained in a variety of disciplines, including career counselling, psychology, human resources, administration and communications.

We've developed specialized services for women, older workers and immigrants, and we provide support to over 500 people per year. Our job placement or return to school rate is 80%, which is excellent.

We work with many partners, including a large network of more than 300 businesses that hire or offer internships to our participants, and our main funding sources are Quebec's Ministère du Travail, de l'Emploi et de la Solidarité sociale and Immigration, Francisation et Intégration Québec.

We've been helping immigrants through their arrival process for almost 15 years. Our efforts have paid off, as more and more immigrants are settling in our area. When we opened L'Ancre in 2007, the school didn't offer any French courses for adults. Today, we have more than four French classes. Last year, L'Ancre served over 300 people from 50 different countries, mainly in Africa and Latin America.

To promote the success of immigration in our area, we work both with immigrants and in the community. We're recognized in the community as the specialized resource in the field and as a mobilizing force. For the past four years, we've been organizing a roundtable for immigration partners including more than 20 active partners from all sectors, and we take action on four fronts: attraction, welcoming, integration and retention.

In closing, I'd like to share some keys to successful retention that we've found work well back home.

One, you need to make immigrants aware of the opportunity to move to the regions. They don't know about it. Two, you need a network of employers who are interested and willing to hire them. Three, you need to set up services to help children, their parents and those working for businesses to learn the language. Four, you need to inform and teach newcomers the values of their new community and how everything works. Five, you need to equip local stakeholders, elected officials, businesses and workers to welcome and integrate newcomers. Six, you have to raise awareness among the local people to counter prejudice and racism. Seven, you need to organize activities or events that help immigrants build intercultural bridges with members of their new community. Finally, eight, you need to provide easy access to affordable housing and transportation.

• (1715)

I will now turn the floor over to Mr. Magnan, coordinator of L'Ancre, who will give you more details about our immigrant services.

Mr. Bruno Magnan (Coordinator, Immigration Services, L'accueil, Accompagnement des Nouveaux arrivants et Conseils en Recherche d'Emploi, Droit à l'Emploi): Good afternoon, everyone.

We divide our services into three main components, the first one being attraction and regionalization. I don't know about other Canadian provinces, but in Quebec, 85% of immigrants settle in the greater Montreal area, while 55% of available jobs are in the regions. What we call "regionalization" serves to promote our city, its assets and available jobs.

To do that, we have a strong presence [*Technical difficulty*] to provide sessions, training, and conferences in places frequented by immigrants or newcomers, so we can show them our region. We also go to all job fairs as a regional recruitment agency. In addition, we offer guided tours of our region to showcase its assets, including the quality of life of its businesses. We also organize recruiting activities directly with companies at job fairs or corporate tours, followed by flash interviews.

In the past year, we've also explored other avenues, including "job caravans". Here's how the process goes: a bus travels through the industrial park and each bus stop turns out to be a company. Employers share their job openings, and corporate tours are also included, because as we know, it's jobs that attract people to the area—well, training attracts them as well.

The second component, which is key, is onboarding and settlement services. We help search for housing, raise landlord awareness, and show immigrants how to use services. This includes guid-

ance for opening bank accounts, obtaining social insurance numbers and health cards, obtaining hydro and telecommunications services, as well as help to fill out various documents. We really want to make sure that people feel supported throughout the process.

The third component is employment assistance services. I mentioned it earlier. We match available jobs with candidates. Sometimes the spouse of a person who has a job also needs help with their job search. We can help them prepare a resumé and cover letter and, if necessary, show them how apply for a diploma equivalency. We also offer orientation and reorientation services, as well as a job-matching service with businesses.

In closing, I'd like to say that immigration is an economic asset, but it also provides considerable cultural enrichment for the regions. I sincerely believe that any policy favouring immigration to the regions must be supported and encouraged, particularly by ensuring that organizations are on hand both to properly welcome immigrants and to adequately prepare local people through awareness.

If I may, I would recommend tax credits for businesses. Many entrepreneurs have talked to me about this in terms of international recruitment of temporary workers. I'm not talking about seasonal workers, I'm talking about temporary workers who intend to stay for a long time. Entrepreneurs often tell me that they would like to see a clear link between labour market needs and the invitation to come to Canada.

Thank you.

• (1720)

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Magnan, for providing this testimony.

With that, I thank all our witnesses for appearing before the committee. Once again, I'm sorry for starting late. Thanks for your patience. On behalf of all the members, I want to thank you for your time in appearing before the committee.

With that, I will suspend the meeting for a few minutes and request that all members log back in for the in camera portion so that we can give the drafting instructions for the letter. I'll suspend the meeting for a few minutes.

Thank you.

[Proceedings continue in camera]

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