



The Honourable Denis Paradis, P.C., M.P.
Chair
Standing Committee on Official Languages
House of Commons
Ottawa, Ontario
K1A 0A6

Dear Mr. Paradis:

Pursuant to House of Commons Standing Order 109, please accept this as the Government Response to the tenth report of the Standing Committee on Official Languages entitled, "*Growing up in French in Western Canada: A review of federal support for early childhood education.*"

We would like to thank the Committee for its hard work and acknowledge the recommendations provided. The Government will consider the recommendations as part of its overall and continuing effort to improve the Government's support to official language minority communities, particularly with respect to early learning and child care.

The Government's responses to each recommendation are below.

Recommendation 1

Since amendments were made to the *Official Languages Act* in November 2005, federal institutions have had a duty to take positive measures to follow through on the commitments set out in section 41 of the Act. These positive measures may vary according to the mandate of each institution. Their implementation must respect the provinces' areas of jurisdiction and powers.

The President of the Treasury Board and the Minister of Canadian Heritage have special responsibilities with regard to official languages.

The Treasury Board has established a number of policy directives to strengthen the implementation of Part VII of the Act by federal institutions, such as the *Policy on Transfer Payments* and the *Directive on the Sale or Transfer of Surplus Real Property*, both of which provide deputy heads with the responsibility for ensuring that the obligations set out in Part VII of the Act are respected.

The Minister of Canadian Heritage coordinates the commitment to “enhancing the vitality of the English and French linguistic minority communities in Canada and supporting and assisting their development; and fostering the full recognition and use of both English and French in Canadian Society”. As such, the Department of Canadian Heritage has developed a number of policy tools to encourage federal institutions to respect their obligations, including guides, training workshops, mentoring, conferences, annual reviews, etc. The Department of Canadian Heritage has also developed a number of measures under its own mandate to advance the equality of status and use of English and French in Canadian society, such as a guide on linguistic clauses which is used when the department drafts grants and contribution agreements with third parties.

Recommendation 2

The *Policy on Transfer Payments* requires that federal government departments and agencies consider the obligations of the Government of Canada as set out in the *Official Languages Act*. More specifically, this includes the core design elements of a transfer payment program, the terms and conditions of a transfer payment program, and funding agreements with recipients.

The *Directive on Transfer Payments* requires that a description, where appropriate, of how services or benefits will be made available in both official languages be included in transfer payment terms and conditions and funding agreements.

This requirement is complemented by the *Guideline on the Directive on Transfer Payments*, which includes an expectation that departmental managers “assess and document the manner in which the obligations of the Government of Canada set out in the Act are to be taken into account and, where relevant, how they are to be applied in designing the transfer payment program”.

The Treasury Board submission template includes a mandatory Official Languages appendix. Transfer payments are subject to Treasury Board approval when the program is creating terms and conditions and undertaking major design changes.

The Treasury Board Secretariat will include a question in the Management Accountability Framework to confirm the actions being undertaken by federal government departments and agencies with respect to their obligations as set out in the *Official Languages Act*.

Recommendation 3

Since 2012, the Treasury Board’s *Policy on Official Languages* requires that deputy heads ensure that their institution respects the principle of substantive equality in its communications and services to the public and that they respect the equal status of both official languages by making communications and services in both official languages available simultaneously. The principle is also defined in the Policy.

The Government of Canada will continue to monitor the compliance of federal institutions with

obligations under the *Official Languages Act* through evaluation and review activities. Official language compliance assessment tools, such as, for example, the Review on Official Languages, will be reviewed and updated to capture and analyze information regarding the extent to which the principle of “substantive equality” is being applied.

The Government will also continue to support federal institutions to ensure the concept of “substantive quality” is well understood by promoting the Treasury Board Secretariat’s analytical grid and by using various existing fora such as the departmental and Crown corporations advisory committees on official languages and the Council of the Network of Official Languages Champions to advise and train them in concrete terms about substantive equality.

Recommendation 4

The Government shares the Committee’s view that early learning and child care is closely connected to the vitality of official language minority communities. In June 2017, federal, provincial and territorial governments reached an historic agreement on a Multilateral Early Learning and Child Care Framework. The Multilateral Framework is guiding new investments in early learning and child care towards five key principles – quality, accessibility, affordability, flexibility and inclusivity. Through the Multilateral Framework, governments acknowledge that early learning and child care systems should be respectful of language and culture and in particular recognize the unique needs of French and English linguistic minority communities.

To implement the Multilateral Framework, the Government of Canada has reached bilateral agreements with provinces and territories and is transferring \$1.2 billion over three years for early learning and child care programs. The current bilateral agreements, those that have been announced are publicly available, are in place until March 31, 2020 after which the agreements will be reviewed and adjusted as needed.

The bilateral agreements allow jurisdictions to identify their priority areas and their ability to design and deliver programs that address the five key principles of the Multilateral Framework. Through those bilateral agreements, provincial and territorial governments are expected to provide particular consideration to programs and services that would benefit families that need child care the most, including those families with limited or no access to programs and services in their official language.

In order to further support families living in official language minority communities through its bilateral agreements, the Government of Canada is expecting provincial and territorial governments to:

- Consult with official language minority community groups on their early learning and child care investments;
- Identify investments in their action plan that could benefit official language minority communities; and

- Report annually on the impacts of those investments.

As a result, a number of measures to support official language minority communities have been identified by provinces and territories and will directly benefit these communities, notably in western provinces:

- British Columbia has committed to support early learning and child care for Francophone communities by translating their Early Learning Framework, ensuring that the number of francophone educators within the Bursary Program is consistent with the proportion of francophone families in the province and to hold a specific information session for the Francophone School District to receive their input and increase awareness regarding the opportunities under the space creation initiative. Furthermore British Columbia will collect new data on the number of francophone educators who receive funding from the Bursary Program in 2018 to be able to report on the impact of planned investments.
- Alberta will launch 78 additional Early Learning and Child Care Centres, based on a maximum fee for all parents of \$25 per day, and will encourage proposals from francophone child care providers with a particular emphasis on cultural and linguistic diversity. Alberta intends to work pro-actively with Francophone communities to ensure successful applications for the new Centres. Alberta will report on the number of early childhood educators receiving training in French, on the number of French programs offered, and on pilot programs offering care to children in French.
- Saskatchewan has committed to work with the Conseil des écoles fransaskoises and the Fransaskois community to develop additional child care spaces - up to 65 spaces - in Francophone schools and communities. In addition, the province will continue to build curriculum and foundational documents in the French language to ensure culturally appropriate, quality environments and equitable opportunities for Francophone children in child care and early learning programs.
- Manitoba has committed to expand access to affordable child care, creating up to 94 newly funded spaces supporting the French language community in Manitoba. In addition, Manitoba commits to increase the number of qualified and trained early childhood educators through piloting a Competency-Based Assessment program as part of the Rural and Northern Strategy with a specialized focus on targeted communities such as Indigenous and French. Manitoba will also pilot a Minister's Advisory Committee with members representing the French language child care sector.

In addition to these measures outlined in the early learning and child care bilateral agreements, the Government of Canada's Action Plan for Official Languages 2018-2023 dedicates \$20 million over five years for early learning and child care to support professional learning opportunities and training for early childhood educators; and entrepreneurs in opening more Francophone daycares and child care services. These additional federal funds will aim to complement the initiatives undertaken by provinces and territories in supporting official language minority communities.

Recommendation 5

For nearly 50 years, the Government of Canada has supported minority language education and the teaching of French and English as a second language in Canadian schools across the country.

This support stems from the recommendations of the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism (1968), which proposed that Canada help provincial and territorial governments cover the "additional costs" they incur in providing education in their language to members of minority communities and second-language instruction.

This desire is also reflected in the *Official Languages Act*. The *Act* commits the Government of Canada to fostering the recognition and use of English and French in Canadian society. It gives the Minister of Canadian Heritage the mandate to take measures to encourage and help the provinces and territories in offering education to members of official language minority communities in their language and in offering everyone the possibility of learning English or French as a second language.

This support takes the form of bilateral agreements with each of the provincial and territorial governments signed following the conclusion of the Protocol for Agreements for Minority-Language Education and Second-Language Instruction with the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada.

In its new Action Plan for Official Languages 2018-2023, the Government of Canada announced a new investment of nearly \$500 million over five years to ensure the vitality of official language minority communities and to promote bilingualism in Canada. The Action Plan provides for significant support in education, including \$67 million dollars to be added to the \$80 million announced in Budget 2017 for the construction and renovation of educational and cultural infrastructure, such as daycares and educational community halls. The Government of Canada understands the need for increased access to spaces that support community development.

Negotiations are currently underway for the next Protocol. The Government will continue working closely with official language minority communities so that future bilateral agreements on education with the provinces and territories meet their needs and priorities.

Recommendation 6

The *Official Languages Act* will be 50 years-old in 2019. The *Act* has quasi-constitutional status and is fundamental to Canadians' identity and Canada's brand.

In May 2017, the Standing Senate Committee on Official Languages undertook to "examine and report on Canadians' views about modernizing the *Official Languages Act*". The Committee plans to travel across Canada over the next two years to consult the public, including youth, seniors, minority communities, the health and justice sectors, and federal institutions.

The final report should be ready no later than June 30, 2019. While awaiting the tabling of the final report, the Government of Canada is closely monitoring the study and the appearance of witnesses from official language minority communities.

We would like to again thank the Committee for its hard work and support of official language minority communities across Canada.

Yours sincerely,



The Honourable Scott Brison, P.C., M.P.
President of the Treasury Board
and Minister of Digital Government



The Honourable Mélanie Joly, P.C., M.P.
Minister of Tourism, Official Languages and
La Francophonie



The Honourable Jean-Yves Duclos, P.C., M.P.
Minister of Families, Children and
Social Development