

RESPONSE PACKAGE

PSPC responses to Questions Taken on Notice Standing Committee on Official Languages (LANG) Challenges faced by parliamentary interpreters during the COVID-19 pandemic February 16, 2021

Question 1: (Bloc member Mario Beaulieu) Can you share the results of the study carried out by the National Research Council testing audio systems to help prevent hearing injuries incurred by interpreters?

Response: The results of the tests are included in the report titled, “Characterization of the Translation Bureau Hearing Protection Solution”. The report is attached and was provided by the National Research Council in English only.

Question 2: (LPC member René Arseneault) Can you provide statistics and information related to the impact of virtual sittings on the health and safety of interpreters?

Response: Below is a series of statistics and information highlighting the demand for parliamentary interpretation services pre-pandemic and during the pandemic, incidents of injury among interpreters, health and safety standards, capacity to provide service, and terminology that is helpful to understanding the parliamentary interpretation field.

Increased Demand

**comparison years: 2018–2019 and 2020–2021 (as 2019–2020 was an election year)*

Requests for official languages interpretation from the House and its committees have increased by 12%:

2020–2021 (as of December 2020): 1,460

2018–2019 (as of December 2018): 1,296

The average length of a committee meeting during a sitting week doubled during the pandemic:

2020–2021: 3.5 hours

2018–2019: 1.6 hours

The average number of committee events during break weeks increased significantly during the pandemic:

2020–2021: 125

2018–2019: 13.5

**break weeks = when the House is not sitting*

The average number of hours committees sat during sitting weeks is the highest in the last five years:

Five-year average: 71

Pandemic average: 84

Reduced Capacity

- The Translation Bureau's capacity is affected by the number of events and the number of interpreters available. Both of these numbers fluctuate.
- When the Translation Bureau can plan ahead, it is better able to manage these fluctuations. Last-minute requests are harder to manage.
- Some freelance interpreters have chosen not to work due to COVID-19 risks (since interpreters work on site) or because distance interpreting is more difficult.
- The Translation Bureau's capacity is also reduced because of the preventive measures we have put in place to mitigate the risks associated with distance interpreting, including:
 - The maximum duration of an interpretation assignment for a three-person team has been reduced from six hours to four hours. The average length of an assignment is three hours.
 - The number of interpreters per assignment has been increased to ensure they can take breaks more frequently.

Translation Bureau official languages staff interpreters

January 2021: 53 interpreters are available to interpret, either full time or part time

Freelance interpreters

February 2021: 76 interpreters have contracts to work for Parliament

- Data shows that the Translation Bureau relied on freelance interpreters less in 2020–2021 than in 2019–2020:
 - 2019–2020: 34% freelance interpreters vs. 66% staff interpreters
 - To date in 2020–2021: 31% freelance interpreters vs. 69% staff interpreters

Incidents / Injuries

- Staff interpreters are required to report all potentially hazardous incidents by submitting a Hazardous Occurrence Investigation Report.
- Since 2020:
 - 46 staff interpreters filed a total of 141 reports related to sound quality.
 - 15 filed a total of 30 reports involving a disabling injury – injuries requiring time off or an accommodation.
 - 2 interpreters are currently on sick leave because of an injury related to sound.

European definition

The European Parliament has no definition of distance interpreting. They have modified working conditions provisionally and informally by reducing the number of hours, similar to the approach taken by the Translation Bureau.

Working in B language

All Translation Bureau interpreters (staff and freelancers) are tested and accredited to work bi-directionally, which means in their A and B languages.

Interpreters are never required to work into a language when they are not comfortable doing so.

Team strength

The Translation Bureau assigns interpreters based on meeting length and team strength, among other factors.

A team of three interpreters works six hours in the booth for traditional in-person meetings.

A team of three interpreters works a maximum of four hours for distance interpreting, given the increased cognitive load.

Interpretation hours

Interpretation hours for remote interpretation have not changed since May 2020 when they were reduced as a result of the pandemic.

In fact, the maximum length of an interpretation assignment was reduced from 6 to 4 hours in a team of 3. The average assignment length is 3 hours.

The Translation Bureau is not proposing an increase of 25%.

Pool of interpreters

The conference interpretation profession is a shortage group, not only in Canada, but around the world. As such, the Bureau has been working for the past 30 years to increase the number of qualified staff and freelance interpreters it can rely on:

The Translation Bureau holds accreditation exams annually to increase the pool of qualified interpreters.

The Translation Bureau supports, both of the Master of Conference Interpreting programs in Canada as well as the University of Ottawa's School of Translation and

Interpretation by providing Senior Interpreters as adjunct professors to teach and the Bureau hires all graduates as interns.

The Translation Bureau also has partnership agreements that support the University of Ottawa and York University's Glendon College, where its staff interpreters have provided both teaching support and workshops for students to prepare for Bureau accreditation.

The Translation Bureau also participates regularly in outreach events to promote the conference interpreter profession and to attract interpreters.