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Francophone parents in N.W.T. may challenge school act

The Canadian Press

Francophones in the Northwest Territories are threatening to take the territorial government to court over French language education rights.

The French parent association and the French school council in Yellowknife argue a proposed new education act is unconstitutional.

They believe it violates minority language guarantees in the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, said Garth Wallbridge, the association's lawyer.

The act, to be debated in the legislative assembly this week, is the government's last major legislation

before a mid-October election.

The Supreme Court of Canada has ruled in two cases that the charter guarantees minority language parents control and management of their children's education, Wallbridge said. The N.W.T.'s new education act doesn't go far enough to provide that, he said.

There are 11 official languages in the territories — English, French and nine aboriginal languages. Census figures show 1,545 people in the N.W.T. list French as their mother tongue.

Education rights for natives are protected more than rights for francophones, Wallbridge suggested.

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