



15th Legislative Assembly of the Northwest Territories

Standing Committee on Accountability and Oversight

Report on the Review of the
2004-2005 Annual Report of
the Languages Commissioner

Chair: Mr. Kevin Menicoche

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Northwest
Territories

Legislative Assembly

Standing Committee on Accountability and Oversight

June 1, 2006

SPEAKER OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

Mr. Speaker:

Your Standing Committee on Accountability and Oversight is pleased to provide its Report on the Review of the 2004-2005 Annual Report of the Languages Commissioner and commends it to the House.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "K Menicoche".

Kevin Menicoche, MLA
Chairperson

**REPORT ON THE REVIEW OF THE
2004-2005 ANNUAL REPORT OF THE
LANGUAGES COMMISSIONER**

The Standing Committee on Accountability and Oversight met on May 2, 2006 to review the 2004-2005 Annual Report of the Languages Commissioner. The Committee would like to thank Ms. Shannon Gullberg, the Languages Commissioner, for appearing before us.

The 2004-2005 report does not include any recommendations, however, the Committee would like to take the opportunity to comment on other issues that were raised during our public meeting.

Effective July 1, 2004, the mandate to preserve and promote official languages was transferred from the Languages Commissioner to two new languages boards under the authority of the Minister of Education, Culture and Employment. The Commissioner's role is now focused on ombudsman-like functions: monitoring compliance with the *Act*, reviewing complaints, responding to requests for information and initiating investigations where appropriate.

Members are concerned that we have heard little about the activities of the Aboriginal Languages Advisory Board and Official Languages Advisory Board. Since it is no longer the Commissioner's role to champion the promotion and preservation of official languages, it is essential that those boards be vigorous and action-oriented in taking up that mandate. We have not seen any evidence that this is happening. The Standing Committee on Social Programs will be pursuing this discussion, however, all Regular Members will be monitoring it with interest.

The Commissioner advised us that she is currently preparing a report on interpreter services in health centres. The Committee shares the Commissioner's concern about the lack of interpreters trained in medical terminology in health centres and looks forward to her report. Although health centres often have well-intentioned staff that can assist with interpreting for patients, most of these people do not have training in medical terminology, much of which is very difficult to translate into Aboriginal languages. This creates a safety issue as well as frustration for both patients and the people trying to help them.

We also share the Commissioner's more general concern about the overall availability of interpreters in the Aboriginal languages. The Committee believes it may be time for the GNWT to consider re-establishing in-house interpreter and translation services, which could be located in the appropriate regional centres. We also see a clear need for the GNWT to work with Aurora College to reinstate

interpreter/translator training programs for Aboriginal languages, including specialized training in medical terminology.

Recommendation

The Standing Committee on Accountability and Oversight recommends the GNWT examine the feasibility of re-establishing in-house interpreter and translation services and report back on its findings in its response to this report.

Recommendation

The Standing Committee on Accountability and Oversight recommends the GNWT work with Aurora College to deliver a basic interpreter/translator training program for Aboriginal languages, as well as specialized training in medical terminology.

The Committee noted with concern that the Commissioner received only one complaint in 2004-2005 and believes this is likely the result of a lack of awareness about the *Official Languages Act* and the Commissioner, especially in smaller communities. We therefore encourage the Commissioner to step up her efforts to publicize her office. In particular, we encourage her to undertake community visits to meet with stakeholders and to raise public awareness about her office and to also ensure that printed information about the complaints process is made available in Aboriginal languages.

We also encourage the Commissioner to exercise her powers and make full use of her mandate, which, as outlined in section 20 of the *Official Languages Act*, includes ensuring recognition of the rights, status and privileges of each of the Official Languages and compliance with the spirit and intent of the *Act* in the administration of the affairs of government institutions, and conducting investigations on her own initiative.

Recommendation

The Standing Committee on Accountability and Oversight recommends that pursuant to Rule 93(5), the GNWT table a comprehensive response to this report within 120 calendar days.



