

Standing Committee on
Government Operations



Report on the Review of the 2022-2023 Annual Report of the Northwest Territories Languages Commissioner

20th Northwest Territories Legislative Assembly

Chair: Mr. Julian Morse

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SPEAKER OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

Mr. Speaker:

Your Standing Committee on Government Operations is pleased to provide its *Report on the Review of the 2022-2023 Annual Report of the Northwest Territories Languages Commissioner* and commends it to the House.

Mr. Julian Morse
Chair, Standing Committee on Government Operations

STANDING COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS

REPORT ON THE REVIEW OF THE 2022-2023 ANNUAL REPORT OF THE NORTHWEST TERRITORIES LANGUAGES COMMISSIONER

INTRODUCTION

The Standing Committee on Government Operations (Committee) has reviewed the 2022-2023 Annual Report of the Northwest Territories Languages Commissioner (Commissioner)¹. The Committee thanks Ms. Brenda Gauthier, NWT Languages Commissioner for her appearance before the Committee on April 9, 2024.²

The Commissioner's 2022-2023 report highlights the Office's focus on supporting recent updates to the *Official Languages Act* and public engagement. The Commissioner's work and recommendations are reflected in Committee's observations.

ABOUT THE OFFICE OF THE LANGUAGES COMMISSIONER

The Office of the Languages Commissioner is established under the *Official Languages Act*. The Act recognizes eleven official languages in the NWT and provides that the public has certain rights with respect to using those languages. The Commissioner is appointed by the Legislative Assembly to investigate complaints, make recommendations, and promote the use of Official Languages.

OBSERVATIONS

Review official languages service delivery

Section 29(a) of the Official Languages Act allows the Official Languages Board to "review the rights and status of each of the Official Languages, including their use in the administration and delivery of services and communications by government institutions."³ The Commissioner has called on the Official Languages Board to action this part of their mandate, with a focus on the nine Indigenous languages.

Committee has previously endorsed the Commissioner's advocacy in this area.⁴ However, Committee notes that as of May 16, 2024, the Official Languages Board does not appear to have any active members,⁵ and therefore recommends:

Recommendation 1: The Standing Committee on Government Operations recommends that the Minister of Education, Culture and Employment ensure all official languages communities are actively represented on the Official Languages Board.

During the public review, the Languages Commissioner supported Committee's suggestion that the government should complete a government-wide inventory of Indigenous language speakers working for the Government and whether those speakers are being compensated for providing Indigenous language services. It is therefore recommended that:

Recommendation 2: The Standing Committee on Government Operations recommends that the Government of the Northwest Territories provide Committee with a list of:

1. All Indigenous language speakers that work for the government.
2. Whether those employees receive the Bilingual Bonus for providing service in their Indigenous language.
3. What government services are being offered in an Indigenous language (and in which communities).

Compensate Indigenous language speaking employees

In the annual report, the Commissioner recommended that the Government of the Northwest Territories research and develop an assessment program for the nine Official Indigenous Languages to ensure that language speakers within the government are compensated for providing services in their language. In addition, the Commissioner felt that Indigenous language speaking employees are unaware of their eligibility for the Bilingual Bonus. Committee acknowledges the Commissioner's concerns and therefore recommends:

Recommendation 3: The Standing Committee on Government Operations recommends that the Government of the Northwest Territories develop an assessment program for the nine Official Indigenous Languages.

Recommendation 4: The Standing Committee on Government Operations recommends that the Government of the Northwest Territories launch a communications campaign to ensure all employees are aware of the Bilingual Bonus.

Review Indigenous Languages service offerings

The Commissioner has called on the government to mirror the Indigenous Languages and Education Secretariat (ILES) to the Francophone Affairs Secretariat. The Commissioner believes the Francophone Affairs Secretariat provides services that are not currently provided by ILES, including:

- Providing advice and support to Government of Northwest Territories (GNWT) institutions.
- Developing orientation programs for French Language Service Coordinators.
- Coordinating French translations services for the GNWT.
- Liaising with the Francophone community.
- Ensuring systematic audits of French language communications and services.

Committee is interested in learning why the same services and opportunities are not provided by ILES as are provided by the Francophone Affairs Secretariat, and therefore recommends:

Recommendation 5: The Standing Committee on Government Operations recommends that the Government of the Northwest Territories provide the same services and opportunities for Indigenous languages speakers through Indigenous Languages and Education Secretariat that are offered to French language speakers through the Francophone Affairs Secretariat.

CONCLUSION

This concludes the Standing Committee on Government Operations *Report on the Review of the 2022-2023 Annual Report of the Official Languages Commissioner*.

Recommendation 6: The Standing Committee on Government Operations recommends that the Government of the Northwest Territories provide a response to the recommendations contained in this report within 120 days.

ENDNOTES

¹ The 2022-2023 Annual Report is available at: <https://www.ntlegislativeassembly.ca/tables-documents/northwest-territories-languages-commissioner-annual-report-2022-2023>

² The Legislative Assembly uploads video recordings of public meetings and other special events to its YouTube channel. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1Bgg3oXu9bk>.

³ For more information, see Section 29(a) of the *Official Languages Act*, available at: <https://www.justice.gov.nt.ca/en/files/legislation/official-languages/official-languages.a.pdf#page=20>

⁴ The Standing Committee on Government Operations Report on the Review of the 2021-2022 Annual Report of the Languages Commissioner, available at:

<https://www.ntlegislativeassembly.ca/content/report-review-2021-2022-annual-report-languages-commissioner>.

⁵ Information on board membership is available at:

<https://boardappointments.exec.gov.nt.ca/en/appointments/appointments-full/>