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# Standing Committee on Official Languages

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Chair: Yvan Baker





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Tuesday, November 4, 2025

• (1100)

[*Translation*]

**The Chair (Yvan Baker (Etobicoke Centre, Lib.)):** I call this meeting to order.

Welcome to meeting number eight of the Standing Committee on Official Languages.

Please wait until I recognize you by name before speaking. All comments should be addressed through the chair. I would like to ask the committee members to raise their hands if they wish to speak. If they're joining us remotely, they can do so by using the "Raise Hand" feature in the Zoom application. The committee clerk and I will manage the speaking order as best we can.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(3)(f) and the motion adopted by the committee on September 25, 2025, we're meeting today to resume our study on the minority-language education continuum.

I would now like to welcome the witnesses participating in the first hour of the meeting.

We're joined by Jane Williamson, executive director of La Société de la garderie le Petit Voilier. She is participating in the meeting by video conference.

Welcome, Ms. Williamson.

We're also joined by Justin Morrow, social entrepreneur. He is participating in the meeting in person and as an individual.

Welcome, Mr. Morrow.

You'll each have five minutes for your opening remarks. We'll then move on to the question and answer portion with the committee members.

Ms. Williamson, you have the floor for five minutes.

**Jane Williamson (Executive Director, La Société de la garderie le Petit Voilier):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

We would like to draw your attention to a crucial issue for the future of language education in minority communities. It concerns the need to preserve the uniqueness of French-language learning in Nova Scotia, from early childhood through to post-secondary education.

The education continuum in minority communities is crucial for learning and mastering French. At this time, to ensure the linguistic success and identity development of our young people, we clearly need a consistent approach starting in early childhood.

The reality of assimilation remains a concern in francophone minority communities, particularly in early childhood. According to Statistics Canada data, nearly 25,000 children in Nova Scotia were eligible for French-language education. Yet, in 2023-24, only 6,763 children attended a school run by the Conseil scolaire acadien provincial, or CSAP. This means one in four children. This discrepancy shows the urgent need to take action starting in early childhood to ensure educational continuity.

Accessing and attending francophone early childhood centres encourages a natural transition to enrolment in a CSAP school. This keeps children on track with their French-language education. Early childhood centres must receive full recognition as francophone educational institutions, alongside CSAP schools and Université Sainte-Anne.

In June 2021, the Nova Scotia and Canadian governments reached an agreement on early learning and child care, which included a commitment to create 9,500 spaces.

On the heels of this agreement, the province launched a major reform of the system to create a single provincial entity encompassing all licensed English-language and French-language centres.

We submitted a proposal to the province to create a separate francophone entity to support Acadian and francophone child care services. So far, this funding request has been denied.

For over 25 years, La Société de la garderie le Petit Voilier and its partners have maintained a strong partnership with CSAP. This has helped us provide high-quality, inclusive and affordable French-language child care services.

Our province currently has 16 early childhood centres and a home-based agency that employs over 150 staff. We provide educational services to over 470 children in the Halifax metropolitan area and 310 children in rural areas. Two expansion projects are under way to add 42 spaces in urban areas and 40 spaces in rural areas by September 2026.

The lack of francophone spaces not only compromises access to child care services, it also compromises linguistic continuity, the retention of francophone families and CSAP's ability to fulfill its mandate.

The reform plans to give families access to child care services at an average cost of \$10 per day by March 2026.

We believe that all Acadian and francophone families should have access to French-language educational services starting in early childhood, alongside French-language education in school.

However, the current funding model doesn't allow for the development of not-for-profit centres. Child care fees have been frozen since 2018. No funding is provided to cover administrative costs or facility improvements.

As a result of the action plan for official languages 2023-28, we can finally build a francophone early childhood support network designed by and for our Acadian and francophone communities.

This network will provide shared expertise in administrative and financial management, in inclusion and in staff recruitment and retention. It will focus on building the capacities of our centres, lightening the load on centre management and ensuring stable, inclusive and sustainable French-language educational environments for every child.

What will happen to these financial commitments and the progress made after March 31, 2028?

The sustainable development of French-language child care and education services in Nova Scotia faces many challenges. These include a shortage of qualified French-speaking staff, particularly in rural areas; high turnover rates; limited access to continuing education in French; a lack of official recognition of francophone early childhood centres; and structural underfunding that fails to take into account the additional costs associated with materials, translation, centre administration and language support.

These challenges are compounded by growing pressure from waiting lists, the geographic dispersion of francophone families and a lack of recognition of the educational role played by home-based services. Yet these services are vital in underserved areas.

To ensure a comprehensive and consistent French-language education continuum, we recommend that francophone early childhood centres constitute the first step in the French-language educational path and that they receive full recognition from the government accordingly.

We also recommend establishing a separate governance entity for early childhood services, run by and for francophones in Nova Scotia.

- (1105)

We recommend a differentiated, sustainable and tailored funding model to ensure that French-language services remain viable after March 31, 2028, along with initial training and professional development in French.

In conclusion, preserving the uniqueness of French-language learning in Nova Scotia and ensuring educational continuity from early childhood services through to post-secondary education isn't a symbolic gesture. It's a commitment to equity, linguistic vitality and the future of our communities. By fully recognizing early childhood as the first stage in the education continuum, Canada is both protecting charter rights and investing in the success, pride and longevity of future Acadian and francophone generations.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Williamson.

I'll now give the floor to Mr. Morrow for five minutes.

**Justin Morrow (Social Entrepreneur, As an Individual):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Chair and committee members, thank you for the opportunity to discuss the minority-language education continuum.

My name is Justin Morrow. I'm a social entrepreneur and advocate for French as a second language, or FSL, education. My expertise focuses on FSL programming and post-secondary transitions. However, for this study, I've expanded my scope to include francophone students in minority communities. Both populations face the same lack of infrastructure at the post-secondary level.

I would like to tell you the story of three students. These three avatars represent nearly two million young Canadians who study French or in French across the country.

I'll start by introducing Marie, who represents more than 290,000 rights holders who attend or who have attended a minority francophone school. Grayson represents 450,000 French immersion students. Priya represents 1.29 million core French students.

Now, let's follow these avatars through to high school graduation, when they step into their own life and begin making economic decisions about their future.

Marie, our francophone rights holder, faces a difficult choice. As you have already heard from witnesses, some of her peers leave the French system as early as grade 7 to prepare for post-secondary studies in English. The programs that they want don't exist in French-language institutions. These students could maintain strong proficiency in both languages. However, without structured support at English universities, we can't really track whether they do so or whether they contribute to their local francophone communities after graduation.

Grayson, our French immersion student, faces a preventable crisis. The 2021 census revealed that 48.6% of his peers lose their conversational proficiency within five years of graduation. They don't lack motivation, but they have almost no opportunities to maintain their French during post-secondary studies. The irony is that, while they're losing their French, 63,000 Canadian businesses were desperately seeking bilingual employees in the third quarter of 2022.

Priya, our core French student, faces even bleaker prospects. We don't have data on the retention rates. However, with much less intensive French instruction, her chances of achieving French proficiency are almost zero without structured support.

Here's what should concern this committee. Marie is almost guaranteed to become perfectly bilingual and able to contribute to the vitality of francophone communities. However, what about Grayson and Priya? Even though the federal government invested more than \$178 million in FSL education in 2023-24, only a small fraction of students will be bilingual five years later. An even smaller fraction will contribute to the vitality of their local francophone communities.

It doesn't have to be this way.

During his post-secondary education, we measured only once—during the 2021 census—the retention rate of Grayson, the French immersion student. This means once in the entire history of his FSL education. This makes the \$178 million invested in FSL education look like a social expense. It's money that we spend to show that English Canada values French, without any expectation of return.

Yet if we regularly measured retention rates and tracked these students into the labour market, we could measure the economic impact of the money invested. It then becomes a capital investment creating skilled employees for the Canadian economy with measurable returns.

So, how do we optimize this federal support? We can do so in two ways, both achievable by reallocating the \$32.7 million that the federal government already allocates to post-secondary FSL programming alone. First, we must regularly measure the level of language retention from graduation through to the labour market. We must do this not every five years, but systematically. Second, we need extracurricular post-secondary support programs that meet students where they are. These programs must offer language development and connections with francophone communities. This is essential. We need this support infrastructure in all post-secondary institutions, both French-language and English-language, inside and outside Quebec.

• (1110)

The question is simple. Will we continue to treat French education as a social expense, or will we transform it into a capital investment with a measurable return?

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Morrow.

We'll now move on to questions from members.

Mr. Godin, you have the floor for six minutes.

**Joël Godin (Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, CPC):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to thank the witnesses for joining us this morning.

Mr. Morrow, it's music to our ears to hear that you have an investment philosophy rather than a spending philosophy. Could we say that the government is currently engaging in window dressing by sprinkling money around without any accountability and without assessing the positive impact that would keep the French language going and growing? It's one of the two official languages, but it's the most vulnerable.

**Justin Morrow:** The government does carry out assessments. The government is there to ensure the proper management of funds. However, I think that this is just about a lack of priorities and the

wrong focus. This isn't anyone's fault in particular. It isn't the government's fault either. When I appeared before the committee 12 years ago, the situation was the same. In my opinion, the government as a whole is responsible, not any particular party.

• (1115)

**Joël Godin:** I understand that this is a sensitive issue for you and that you don't want to get involved in politics. However, you spoke about \$32.7 million sprinkled around post-secondary education. Where is that \$32.7 million being allocated right now?

**Justin Morrow:** Good question.

While doing some research, I found three leads. The following statistics come from the Department of Canadian Heritage. The Association des collèges et universités de la francophonie canadienne offers a \$3 million scholarship program for post-secondary FSL education. The Council of Ministers of Education, Canada offers a program called Explore. It consists of five weeks of intensive French-language training delivered across the country and it costs \$37.4 million per year. We also have the Young Canada Works program, which costs about \$5 million per year.

However, the issue lies in the fact that the students who participate in these programs all ultimately ask themselves the same question. What will they do with the French language afterwards? They don't receive ongoing support during their post-secondary education. They receive support for a short time, and then they're left to their own devices. Yet they need ongoing support for the three to five years of their post-secondary education.

**Joël Godin:** I really enjoyed your remarks. Our committee carried out a study to determine how official language minority communities could take advantage of this attraction, this distinction, to boost their economies. You spoke about 63,000 businesses seeking bilingual employees. That's a great opportunity.

You're talking about a lack of follow-up to make sure that the current spending will turn into investments to help boost the growth of both francophones in Canada and our economies in official language minority communities. Is that right?

**Justin Morrow:** That's exactly it.

**Joël Godin:** How do we go about finding mechanisms that will enable our youth to grow up as ambassadors of the French language and continue to use it?

**Justin Morrow:** I can't speak to the exact measurement methods, as I'm not a methodology expert. However, I do know this: When the federal government spends or invests \$178 million in 2023-24 on programs for French as a second language, and the provincial government invests an equal amount, more than \$350 million is invested or spent on French as a second language per year. That's a big amount.

It's important to find a way to measure that. Although I'm not an expert on the matter, I think the first step is to support students. Once they start getting support, they can be monitored, and measures can be taken to ensure a return on our investment.

**Joël Godin:** You're here as an individual, but you're also the head of Canadian Youth for French. Is that right?

**Justin Morrow:** That's right.

**Joël Godin:** I'd like to know if you receive money from Canadian Heritage or elsewhere in the federal government to help you do your work and ensure that you're a partner so that you can make good use of past investments.

**Justin Morrow:** I'm not here to testify on behalf of the organization, whose representatives you could invite to come speak to you here in committee.

That said, on behalf of the organization, I can still tell you that we haven't received any funding this year.

**Joël Godin:** Have you received any in the past?

**Justin Morrow:** Yes, we've received funding for projects in the past four years.

**Joël Godin:** What are the reasons why you didn't receive funding this year? Is it because the Liberal government has been throwing money around for the past 10 years? It has invested an additional billion dollars over the next four or five years, saying that it has the money, that there's plenty and that it's investing. Isn't that doublespeak? Is there really a desire, an intention on the part of the government, since an organization like yours is being cut?

**The Chair:** Excuse me for interrupting you, Mr. Godin. You have 15 seconds.

Mr. Morrow, please give a brief answer.

**Justin Morrow:** I would ask you to invite the president and representatives of the organization to come and testify on that.

**Joël Godin:** Thank you, Mr. Morrow.

Ms. Williamson, I'm sorry you didn't get a chance to speak. I hope my colleagues will speak to you. I would have liked to talk to you about Darrell Samson, whom we miss very much here at the committee.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

• (1120)

**The Chair:** We would all like to talk about Darrell Samson.

I now give the floor to Mr. Villeneuve for six minutes.

**Louis Villeneuve (Brome—Missisquoi, Lib.):** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to thank the two witnesses for being here with us.

I'll continue with you, Mr. Morrow. Thank you for recognizing that our government is making efforts to promote French. From what I understand, you're making a sort of heartfelt plea to tell us that it's all well and good to invest money, but that those investments could be yielding much more promising results. That's what I'm hearing from you.

**Justin Morrow:** Yes.

**Louis Villeneuve:** If you had one wish to express to the government, just one, what would be the first measure that you'd like to implement?

**Justin Morrow:** Did you say "measure"?

**Louis Villeneuve:** Yes, I'm talking about a measure to be able to get a better return on investment.

**Justin Morrow:** The measure to improve that return would be to increase the retention rate for French as a second language, five years after high school. That's it.

**Louis Villeneuve:** Okay. Thank you very much.

Ms. Williamson, in 2023, our government announced an \$8.2-million investment to build a community centre for francophones on the Halifax peninsula, I believe. Is that correct?

**Jane Williamson:** Yes, that's right.

**Louis Villeneuve:** How will that investment increase your capacity in terms of early childhood services?

**Jane Williamson:** As I mentioned earlier, in the new school, we'll have a 42-space day care, which will be built in the Halifax area thanks to that funding.

**Louis Villeneuve:** That gives you 42 net spaces.

**Jane Williamson:** Yes. That's how many spaces we were given. We maximized the area as much as possible.

**Louis Villeneuve:** That's great.

I also heard you talking about a shortage of francophone staff earlier. Recruiting and retaining staff is obviously a major challenge for you. What strategy has your organization put in place to attract or retain francophone staff?

**Jane Williamson:** We have developed a recruitment strategy that's working well at the moment. We've done trips with Destination Canada. We've connected with schools and institutions outside of Canada to get more applicants. We've also created provincial programs, including a welcome program for immigrants.

People can volunteer to try helping us out in our centres and see whether it's a job that they would like to get involved in. We do recruitment across Canada, but we also try to do it internationally. The goal is to recruit young people who will go to schools in the Conseil scolaire acadien provincial and who will pursue studies in early childhood to come and work in our centres. The main goal is to be able to recruit here in Nova Scotia.

**Louis Villeneuve:** Okay. Thank you.

As we've seen, Le Petit Voilier serves the Halifax region and surrounding areas. From what I understand, though, the francophone community is dispersed. How does that geographic reality affect access to child care services in French?

**Jane Williamson:** Our child care services are actually integrated into the school board's schools. All of our infrastructure is in the schools, so it's a good use of public funds. However, that limits us somewhat. Every time the school board receives funding to build a school, we have to apply for community spaces. That means we depend on the infrastructure that's built for our school board.

Under the bilateral agreement, our province has freed up funding for major infrastructure. Unfortunately, the two projects we submitted were rejected. Only one francophone project was accepted, and that's the 40-space project I was telling you about for the Pomquet region, which doesn't have child care services at the moment.

**Louis Villeneuve:** Were you given any explanation as to why those projects were rejected, despite the needs?

**Jane Williamson:** There was a shortage of funding for the infrastructure we were requesting.

**Louis Villeneuve:** Okay.

In a context where many French-speaking families come from exogamous or completely anglophone backgrounds, how do you work with parents to strengthen the transmission of French at home?

• (1125)

**Jane Williamson:** We communicate with them in French. Families are also offered French courses through a francophone organization that has a program called Family Literacy First. That way, the parents of children who attend our French-language day cares or schools can learn French to better support their children.

**Louis Villeneuve:** Thank you.

Mr. Morrow, as you said, young francophones in various anglophone regions of the country are reluctant to continue their studies in French. How can we increase the appeal of French-language studies? Is that still a matter of follow-up?

**The Chair:** Please answer briefly, as there are about 15 seconds left.

**Justin Morrow:** Okay.

I imagine you're talking about post-secondary education. Students will choose where they want to go. Things can be built in the long term to make French-language universities and colleges more attractive, but, in the short term, it's important to support these young people when they choose to study in English. They shouldn't be excluded from the system. They have to be included, even if they study in English.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Villeneuve.

I now give the floor to Mr. Beaulieu for six minutes.

**Mario Beaulieu (La Pointe-de-l'Île, BQ):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to our guests.

Ms. Williamson, you talked about structural underfunding of education by and for francophones. Could you tell us more about that?

**Jane Williamson:** Yes. First, I can mention the limited availability of educational material in French, as well as the exponential in-

crease in the costs associated with translating documents. Second, when it comes to infrastructure, we obviously have to wait for schools to be built to provide child care services, and funding is limited. There's also an increase in costs. When our project was about to be approved, the cost had increased by \$3 million compared with the original cost. That's what structural underfunding looks like.

**Mario Beaulieu:** It was probably worse in the past. How has that evolved over time, and what is the provincial government's contribution compared with the federal government's contribution?

**Jane Williamson:** Our province used the funding from the bilateral agreement to provide funding for major and minor infrastructure projects, but we weren't able to access it. Some centres had the opportunity to expand their facilities, but we weren't allowed to build new buildings to offer more services. We submitted an application to replace a building that needed a lot of renovations, but that was one of the 50-space projects that our province rejected.

**Mario Beaulieu:** From what you're saying, the provincial government doesn't give much to francophones. Is it like in other provinces, that is to say that you're given old English-language schools, which means that you're treated like second-class citizens?

**Jane Williamson:** Yes, I tend to agree with that statement. It's unfortunate, because we're really trying to develop our system so that we can offer more spaces. Obviously, once children have day care spaces in schools, they're guaranteed to be able to continue their education in French all the way to university. That's what we want for our youth, and we're lucky to have a French-language university here.

**Mario Beaulieu:** You're talking about Université Sainte-Anne.

Earlier, you mentioned a number of children, 6,763 children. Is that the number of francophone rights holders?

**Jane Williamson:** I'm talking about the number of rights holders who attend a school, according to data that was published in a school board report this week.

**Mario Beaulieu:** Those are the ones who go to school in French, then.

• (1130)

**Jane Williamson:** Yes.

**Mario Beaulieu:** That figure represents one in four rights holders.

**Jane Williamson:** Among children, yes.

**Mario Beaulieu:** Is the proportion of rights holders who have a space in a French-language preschool about the same, or one in four?

**Jane Williamson:** I would say it's fewer than one in four, because the number of spaces is more limited. Ideally, all children who are rights holders would have access to day care in French so that it's easier for them to continue in the French-language system afterward. However, one of the problems is the distance between the schools. Some schools are inaccessible to certain families who live an hour's commute away, for example. That means they definitely aren't going to take their children to a day care in a school setting either. For that reason, it's important to find ways to increase the number of spaces in areas that don't have services.

**Mario Beaulieu:** That goes against section 23 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, which is supposed to guarantee equal rights. Those rights have existed for a very long time, and there has been legal action to uphold them. It seems, then, that the provincial government couldn't care less about the Constitution and the case law on the matter.

**Jane Williamson:** I wouldn't go so far as to say that, but it has to be aware that—

**Mario Beaulieu:** Let's just say that it doesn't really comply with the courts' decisions.

**Jane Williamson:** We would like to see more co-operation between the provincial government and the francophone community. Creating a solely anglophone entity to support English-language and French-language child care services wouldn't work for us. That's why we've proposed that the government create a separate francophone entity. To date, our request has always been denied. The government isn't ready to move forward, while we francophones are ready to do so. Thanks to funding from the action plan for official languages 2023–2028, we're able to do what we proposed in 2021. However, we don't know what will happen after March 31, 2028.

**Mario Beaulieu:** A friend of mine used to work at an education centre in Nova Scotia. He told me that the government couldn't care less about Supreme Court decisions and that it was the federal government that had to fill the gaps, albeit not completely, because it was extremely expensive. Would you agree with that?

Actually, no, I won't force you to answer that question. You can't take a position like that. We'll come back to that later.

**Jane Williamson:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Beaulieu.

Mr. Dalton, you have the floor for five minutes.

**Marc Dalton (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge, CPC):** Thank you very much.

Thank you to the witnesses for their comments.

Mr. Morrow, I taught core French for about 15 years. I've also had the opportunity to teach a few French immersion courses at all levels.

You talked about something really important. In committee, we often talk about francophones in minority situations, but we sometimes forget the opportunity that we have as a country to promote and encourage the French language through core French education and immersion. That's important. However, it's sad to see former immersion students who, a few years later, don't speak much French. They're embarrassed to do so, because they don't have many opportunities to practise the language.

That's the committee's big challenge: How do we encourage young people so that they don't lose their French? It's really a gift for us. It's part of a vision. Parents want their children to learn French. Young people want to keep their French too, but they sometimes can't.

I didn't quite understand how we could help young people continue to speak French after their studies. Do you have any examples of measures that are working to achieve that goal?

**Justin Morrow:** Are you referring to how to pursue studies—

**Marc Dalton:** I'm referring to how to encourage students after they finish their studies.

• (1135)

**Justin Morrow:** That's exactly why I founded Canadian Youth for French, to support those students. As I mentioned, I'm appearing today as an individual, and I want to give the organization a chance to speak. I sincerely hope that you will invite it, because it has the perfect solutions to support those students.

**Marc Dalton:** Okay.

Ms. Williamson, is it hard to retain early childhood educators? Are elementary schools losing personnel, for example? We see it happening elsewhere, so is the situation the same in Nova Scotia?

**Jane Williamson:** Yes. We're looking for the same skills, whether it's for a French-speaking day care educator or junior kindergarten teacher. That means our organizations are competing for the same people. However, we've worked out internal strategies to retain our staff, and we've noticed in the last few years that it's working. We're working really hard to keep those who come from elsewhere in the country or from abroad.

**Marc Dalton:** Where do you find them? Where did they get their education, at universities or colleges? Could you give us some information on that?

**Jane Williamson:** Nova Scotia has set some criteria in that regard. Candidates must have completed a two-year post-secondary early childhood program. Internationally, we recruit candidates mainly from Belgium, France, Morocco and Tunisia, where we've built relationships with establishments providing such programs. That's been really helpful. We've established pools of candidates to meet our needs. Without all of this, opening six early childhood centres in Halifax would never have been possible.

**Marc Dalton:** Thank you very much.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Dalton. Your time is up.

Ms. Mingarelli, you have the floor for five minutes.

**Giovanna Mingarelli (Prescott—Russell—Cumberland, Lib.):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to all the witnesses for joining us today.

Ms. Williamson, we know that French-language day cares play an essential role in passing on the language and in enhancing a community's vitality. This week is national francophone immigration week. The contribution of immigrant families to the vitality of French-speaking communities is huge. Do you think the shortage of child care spaces in French-language day cares is hurting their integration into French-speaking communities?

**Jane Williamson:** Could you repeat the last part of your question, on the shortage of spaces?

**Giovanna Mingarelli:** Do you think the shortage of child care spaces in French-language day cares is hurting the integration of immigrants into French-speaking communities?

**Jane Williamson:** Absolutely. We could welcome many more immigrants, but if we don't have day care spaces for the children, the parents can't work. It can have an impact on their integration into the community.

**Giovanna Mingarelli:** Thank you.

Given your experience, how could we improve their access to services beginning in early childhood?

• (1140)

**Jane Williamson:** The solution would be to continue building partnerships with school boards to get floor space in schools, and have the possibility of adding to that space to welcome more French-speaking children. It could be done by adding extensions to existing structures or putting new structures on school property.

We have waiting lists, and we've developed good recruiting strategies to find our staff. If we could get funds to add structures, we could welcome more children.

**Giovanna Mingarelli:** Thank you very much.

One last question. Does your organization recruit or train immigrants to be educators, to meet the need for French-speaking staff?

**Jane Williamson:** Yes, we do.

Depending on their work permit or how we recruit them, some people are allowed to receive training. They're hired through a process that allows them to gain the qualifications they need, meaning they can work while they complete their training at Université Saint-Anne. We do it all the time.

**Giovanna Mingarelli:** Thank you very much.

Mr. Morrow, for mobility or employability reasons, young francophones in many English-speaking regions of the country debate whether they should continue their education in French. How can we make pursuing a full education in French more attractive?

**Justin Morrow:** You mean for anglophones?

**Giovanna Mingarelli:** Yes.

**Justin Morrow:** One way would be to make the link between education and employment. Young people are looking for jobs, getting ready to join the labour force. They need to see that they'll get better job opportunities if they have that education from attending French-language schools. These establishments exist, but some programs may not be offered, because there aren't enough eligible people. Students must also have access to support.

It can be scary for an anglophone to study in a francophone environment. It's not easy. However, it's much easier for them if they have support, and if they feel welcomed. The more anglophones join those programs, the more will come. It's more appealing for anglophones if they see it as a possibility.

**Giovanna Mingarelli:** Thank you. How can we help francophone students in anglophone environments?

**Justin Morrow:** Anglophone students and universities must be encouraged to contribute to the vitality of French-speaking communities. What's important is maintaining a link between education and the French-speaking community.

**Giovanna Mingarelli:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Mingarelli.

Mr. Beaulieu, you have the floor for two and a half minutes.

**Mario Beaulieu:** Mr. Morrow, bilingualism has evolved in Canada. In Quebec, more and more francophones and allophones are bilingual; that number has steadily increased. In the rest of the country, however, bilingualism is stagnant. According to Statistics Canada, there's a decline in native French speakers who are bilingual. Among anglophones, that number has stayed at about 9%.

Given all the money invested in teaching French as a second language, how do you explain this stagnation?

**Justin Morrow:** The reason I'm here today is to say that there's no support at the post-secondary level. We can't give students studying French as a second language any guarantee that they'll keep their level of proficiency in French until they enter the labour market. They lose their French during those five years of education, because they have no support. They think that it's not for them, that they tried. They wanted to succeed, but they can't, so they drop out.

Once post-secondary students can rely on a support system, then we can measure things. Being bilingual gives you a competitive advantage in the labour market. It's up to us to make young anglophones see that.

**Mario Beaulieu:** What do you think of the Canadian linguistic system, meaning sprinkling bilingualism here and there, without having a jurisdiction that tries to make French the common language? People can learn French, but they have few opportunities to practise the language. Wouldn't it be more effective to have a jurisdiction-wide system?

• (1145)

**Justin Morrow:** Yes, it would. I sent the Quebec government a proposal to establish a French immersion program in Quebec, where English-speaking students from across the country could go to study French. My proposal was rejected, but I think it would be a good idea. We need a strong Quebec where things are done in French, so that anglophones can immerse themselves completely not just in the French language, but also in the culture, and everything that comes with it.

**The Chair:** I apologize, Mr. Beaulieu, but your time is up. Thank you.

Mr. Bélanger, you have the floor for five minutes.

**Jim Bélanger (Sudbury East—Manitoulin—Nickel Belt, CPC):** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I will be sharing my time with Mr. Godin.

Mr. Morrow, you say there's a shortage of bilingual workers in the labour force. However, young francophones study in French, but then continue their education in English. Why is that? Does it have to do with the software being used or the programs being offered?

**Justin Morrow:** Why do francophones choose to study in English? My expertise is in French as a second language, so I'll let francophones talk about their reality. I think, however, that it's simply due to a lack of post-secondary programs being offered in French.

**Jim Bélanger:** In my neck of the woods, there are many francophones. Some of the university's school of medicine's courses are offered only in English, not in French.

What could we do to change that?

**Justin Morrow:** Where are you from?

**Jim Bélanger:** I'm trying to understand why there's a shortage of bilingual workers.

**Mario Beaulieu:** Mr. Bélanger, Mr. Morrow's asking where you're from.

**Jim Bélanger:** My apologies. I'm from Sudbury.

**Justin Morrow:** Ah, yes. I'm quite familiar with Collège Boréal.

**Jim Bélanger:** There's also Laurentian University.

**Justin Morrow:** Yes.

To answer your question regarding francophones, I don't know. As for anglophones, the reason is a lack of support. It's a very interesting question.

**Jim Bélanger:** Francophones like me learn English at a young age, because we're in a bilingual environment. Anglophones, however, don't make the same effort to learn French. That means we find ourselves in a situation where, after elementary school and high school, there are really few programs available in French. That's a tragedy, because there's a shortage of bilingual workers.

Thank you.

Mr. Godin, you have the floor.

**Joël Godin:** Thank you.

Ms. Williamson, you say that in Nova Scotia, a quarter of rights holders have access to spaces in early childhood centres. Is that correct?

**Jane Williamson:** I was referring to enrolment at the Conseil scolaire acadien provincial.

**Joël Godin:** Are there more rights holders than the quarter that apply?

**Jane Williamson:** Of course. Some parents obviously go elsewhere, to an English-speaking centre.

**Joël Godin:** You also said that one of the issues is that children need to travel an hour each way. I think that's a common issue; Canada's a big country. Isn't that an excuse for the provincial and federal governments to shrug it off, saying that there are establishments and that it's up to rights holders to figure out how to make the two-hour drive? What do you think?

**Jane Williamson:** I can speak for the early childhood side, but I can't speak for the school board. I know school transportation is a big issue for families. There's a disparity there. People move farther and farther away from towns, because house prices are so high. Immigrant families move even farther away. That's why families choose to send their children to their neighbourhood school day care instead of French-language schools.

That's an important issue that needs to be fixed so that rights holders can get access to the French education system. I think there's a lot of work to be done there.

• (1150)

**The Chair:** Mr. Godin, you have 25 seconds left.

**Joël Godin:** Okay. Actually, I'll give Mr. Morrow the opportunity to finish his answer to a question my colleague asked him earlier. I'll give him the remaining 25 seconds of my speaking time.

**Justin Morrow:** I'll need a minute, but I think that's too much.

**The Chair:** Do your best. I'll have to interrupt you in 25 seconds.

**Justin Morrow:** Very well.

Mr. Dalton, you spoke as an ally of French as a second language; 290,000 rights holders studied or are studying in French. That means 450,000 rights holders. On the anglophone side, only 450,000 students are enrolled in an immersion program, and 1.27 million are enrolled in a core French program, which represents an even higher number.

Mr. Bélanger, you wanted to know how to offer French programs. It's the same thing. You need a bigger pool of candidates. You must invite students enrolled in FSL programs to participate in the francophonie and contribute to the community. It can happen through immigration or integration. I would lean towards integrating francophones with French as a second language into the community and French-language institutions.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Morrow.

I now give the floor to Ms. Chenette, who will be the last person to ask questions of this witness panel.

**Madeleine Chenette (Thérèse-De Blainville, Lib.):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Williamson and Mr. Morrow, thank you for your very constructive comments.

Listening to you, we know the problems are huge. The action plan for official languages 2023–2028 includes a total investment of \$4.1 billion, of which \$1.4 billion is new funding. It is therefore the biggest investment in official languages in Canada's history. However, while listening to you, it was clear that more effort must be made to find solutions. You also mentioned the economic argument in favour of developing both of our beautiful country's official languages. Furthermore, the Francophonie is a growing worldwide.

Ms. Williamson, it is clear that early childhood is key. Generally speaking, we know that early childhood services and the francophone need funding, full stop.

Where do the parents stand? What emphasis do they put on French to promote it? What leads the English-speaking community to recognize the importance of French and send their children to a French-speaking day care? How do we change the mindset to say that we are on the defensive, rather than the offensive?

If you had a magic wand, what would you do to help parents mobilize around the issue of the francophonie and encourage anglophone parents to enrol their children in French-language schools or early childhood education services?

**Jane Williamson:** To start, children coming to our schools and our French-language day cares come from eligible families. That means we can't just tell a unilingual anglophone family to come to our centres and our schools. That's not the reality.

Some of our students travel two hours a day to come to school. It tells me a lot about those families. When people decide to enrol their children in our centres or French-language schools, in our province, it is because they absolutely want their children to learn the language and to develop while integrating francophone culture.

I could show you our waiting list; it's huge. Everywhere throughout the province, francophone families are trying to find day care spots. When children learn the language before starting school, it is so good for their education. It facilitates their entry into school and makes the transition very natural. Teachers told us they see a difference when children have a chance to go to a French-language day care centre for two or three years before starting school.

Therefore, I think the solution is to offer more spots so that these families can stay in the francophone system, rather than turning to the local day care or school. We have to find transportation solutions, obviously. Satellite sites could be set up in some of the province's underserved regions. I don't sit on the school board, but I am sure that together, we can find solutions to increase the number of children in French-speaking schools and allow them to continue their studies in French until the end of post-secondary. That's the goal. Families want it; that's not the problem.

• (1155)

**Madeleine Chenette:** I must have misspoken, so I will elaborate on what I meant. What I am trying to say is that, if we want more corporate and government investment in the francophonie, both languages need to be promoted. That's why I asked the question.

I understand the current rules, but if we want anglophone parents interested in having their children learning French, and want them to continue learning it throughout their entire journey, that seems critical to me. In my case, I used to live in a completely French-speaking environment, but my parents told me I had to learn English. So, I went to Halifax and Thunder Bay when I was young. Through government programs, I was able to work on my English, and I kept it alive afterwards.

On an economic level, we have work to do from coast to coast, as well as in the north of our beautiful country, and both our lan-

guages will have an extremely important role to play in it. On that level, there are opportunities to be seized around the world.

I would therefore like to come back to a question we have not really answered yet. Perhaps it has to do more with Canadian Youth for French, but what concrete steps can be undertaken for learning French? How do we take advantage of new technologies, like artificial intelligence and robotics, to help people practise in another language? Are there other possibilities to consider here, keeping in mind that culture is relational and French is too? I don't want to minimize this, but we have to leave the beaten path if we want to find solutions.

What do you suggest for us, Mr. Morrow?

**The Chair:** I'm sorry, Ms. Chenette, but your time is up. I will let Mr. Morrow answer with a few words.

**Justin Morrow:** There is indeed demand in English-speaking Canada. Anglophone Canadians clearly understand that learning French is important and they want their children to learn it.

As to how to achieve that, technology has a role to play to be sure, but the real answer is to put children in an environment where they are surrounded by French, whether in a francophone community or in Quebec. Technology can be helpful later on, but first they need constant support and an immersive experience.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Chenette.

This concludes our first panel of witnesses. On behalf of the committee, I want to thank Ms. Williamson and Mr. Morrow.

We will suspend to prepare for the second panel of witnesses.

• (1155) \_\_\_\_\_ (Pause) \_\_\_\_\_

• (1205)

**The Chair:** Let us resume.

We are continuing our study on the official language education continuum.

I would now like to welcome our second panel of witnesses. During this hour, we welcome, as individuals, Mark C. Power, lawyer, and Darius Bossé, lawyer. You have five minutes for your opening remarks. We will then proceed with a question and answer period with committee members.

Please go ahead.

**Mark Power (Lawyer, As an Individual):** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Since Mr. Bossé and I have a joint opening statement, perhaps I may have a bit more than five minutes. If not, we are still pleased to be here.

Hello, everyone.

Let's get straight to the point. We have spent some time reviewing the testimony of certain witnesses who have appeared as part of this study, which includes, by reference, evidence gathered during the previous session. Our study has led us to draw three conclusions and make three legal observations. Mr. Bossé and I are lawyers, and no one votes for us.

Our first observation is that a number of witnesses who appeared before your committee called for regulations to be adopted for the implementation of the new Official Languages Act. A number of witnesses said they were anxious to find out what will be in those regulations. The law is clear, though: the Official Languages Act imposes heavy, restrictive and significant obligations, even if there are no regulations, even if the regulations will not be out for a year or two, as some people in the room know, and even if no regulations are adopted for the implementation of the Official Languages Act.

To support that statement, which of course is obvious to lawyers, in the inside-left pocket of the binder we have provided—which is yours to keep—you will find three paragraphs from a recent Federal Court of Appeal decision. You just have to read the last sentence, which is in bold and underlined, at the bottom of the page, to conclude that the Official Languages Act would—I hope—be better if it included one or more regulations, but there is no reason why it would not be implemented even if there are no new regulations.

Our second observation is that a number of the witnesses who appeared before the committee pointed out that education falls under exclusive provincial jurisdiction. They consider that an iron-clad reason that the federal government negotiates just with the provinces, and not with the organizations and institutions that receive funding. We would point out, however, that the Supreme Court of Canada has stated that language is not itself an area of jurisdiction, but rather is ancillary to an existing area of jurisdiction. For example, when the federal government, which of course is responsible for national defence, offers instruction on its military bases, section 23 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms applies.

Moreover, since the 1970s, the federal government has provided funding for early childhood services and primary, secondary and post-secondary education to support its development. Since the Official Languages Act was overhauled in 2023, the federal government is required to take such positive measures. That exercise of its spending power is also bulletproof. In the same binder, inside the back pocket, you will find what is perhaps the strongest support for that proposal, which is nonetheless nothing out of the ordinary for lawyers.

The third observation, based on the testimony of various witnesses who appeared before the committee, is that federal funding structures, including the channels used to redirect funding in support of the official languages, French in particular, do not work or do not work very well.

Mr. Bossé and I keep up with the news. As you know, or at least I hope you know given your role on this committee, last week at the Collège Nordique, the tiny francophone college in the Northwest

Territories, a small number of students were accredited by their territorial government. Among other things, this college offers a two-year diploma program in early childhood education.

• (1210)

Your current study is about the education continuum. This college is a good example of that continuum. It is a francophone post-secondary institution that helps train early childhood educators. If they do their job well, they can help primary and secondary schools. This example alone illustrates the continuum.

As you may have read in the media, assuming that what is reported is true, and I assume that is still the case in Canada, in spite of the overhaul of the Official Languages Act in 2023, funding for that college has decreased, even though they have more people. It doesn't make sense. This flies in the face of what Parliament intended when it enacted the Official Languages Act.

This highlights the fact that there are major problems with the funding structure. That is because a number of colleges and universities are funded every year by what is known as additional funding. Announcing funding during the fiscal year is not a responsible way of managing French-language education. It would be impossible to manage a company that way. The French fact in Canada deserves better, and the act includes a range of tools that have not yet been implemented.

In closing, let me say very quickly that the binder we have provided provides the current version of Canada's Official Languages Act. It is unofficial since our team put together the information in the binder. On the back of the first page, on the left, we outline our methodology. What is in black in the act is from the Official Languages Act that was in effect from 1988 to 2023. What is in green and underlined are items added in Bill C-13. What is in red and crossed out is what was removed by Bill C-13. What is in blue and double underlined is what your committee added. What is in orange and crossed out twice is what you removed, and what is in yellow, is what the House of Commons did, in its wisdom, at the very end.

This act is a significant improvement over the previous one. It provides a broad and restrictive legal framework. The committee should also demand that it be implemented.

Let me conclude with a single example. In the document provided, the page numbers are at the bottom of the page, in the centre. On page 33, which pertains to part VII of the Official Languages Act, you will find the positive measures that must be taken. The only heading on that page is "Potential to take positive measures and negative impacts". Subsection 41(7) says: "In carrying out its mandate, every federal institution shall, on the basis of analyses..." and subsection 41(7)(b) says "consider the possibilities for avoiding, or at least mitigating, the direct negative impacts that its structuring decisions may have on the commitments under subsections (1) to (3)."

This sentence alone pinpoints the exact problem that Collège Nordique is facing, in spite of the new act. The public service must implement the act in a meaningful way and without delay. The future of French in Canada depends on it.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Mr. Power.

We will now move on to the question period with MPs.

Mr. Godin has the floor for six minutes.

**Joël Godin:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, Mr. Power and Mr. Bossé.

You are very involved in defending language laws in official language minority communities. We know about your service record and very high batting average, which is close to 1,000—to use a baseball analogy at the end of the World Series. Before the Supreme Court, you have defended the rights of rights holders of official language minority communities. That is commendable, and I wanted to mention that.

Mr. Power, you said that the Official Languages Act sets out obligations.

Are you implying that the government has not upheld the act since 2023 because it says it is waiting for regulations before it becomes more proactive?

What are your thoughts on that, Mr. Power?

• (1215)

**Mark Power:** I don't know.

I don't know if I have sufficient evidence to say the public service or the government are in bad faith right now. What I do know, legally speaking, is that the act came into force immediately on the day of royal assent or the day after, in 2023. It is of course to be expected—and a judge would agree—that the implementation of major legislative changes can take some time.

You will recall that, in the past year or two, there were issues at the Royal Canadian Mounted Police. Thanks to the work of the committee and the adoption of new linguistic requirements, it was difficult to replace senior executives.

A delay of six months is fine. A year is okay. Two or three years is not okay.

It is clear that the public service in general, specific departments and Treasury Board, which is now ultimately responsible for all of that, have had time to think about it seriously and develop effective structures. If the work has been done, I don't think we have seen the results or the evidence of that yet.

**Joël Godin:** Thank you, Mr. Power.

In your second observation, you referred to education and provincial areas of jurisdiction. You said that, according to the Supreme Court, education is not an area of jurisdiction.

Did I understand that correctly?

**Darius Bossé (Lawyer, Power Law, As an Individual):** I meant language. Language is not an area of exclusive jurisdiction.

**Joël Godin:** Mr. Bossé or Mr. Power, when the federal government states that the provinces are responsible for education and its role is limited to dealing with the provinces, isn't that an excuse?

In that case, the federal government would not have to provide the necessary funding because the provinces have full jurisdiction over education.

**Darius Bossé:** The federal government could certainly take a different approach.

Legally, there is nothing forcing the federal government to deal with the provinces in the way it does. With its federal spending power, it can take action in provincial areas of jurisdiction as it sees fit. It can even attach conditions to funding transfers.

**Joël Godin:** In your third observation, you talked about an absurd situation. I would describe the current situation at Collège Nordique absurd.

In the past few years, the government has been bragging that it has provided billions of dollars for additional tools and has shown its good will and intention. In September, however, it made cuts.

I saw an article in the publication *Francopresse*. The article says that, in July, the manager of Collège Nordique was in the process of planning for the start of school in September. He had not even heard that budget cuts were coming. He didn't hear about them until September.

How can the government claim that it is in good faith and intends to help educational institutions across Canada protect the French fact?

**Darius Bossé:** One thing is clear. When the previous government decided to modernize the Official Languages Act, its intention was certainly clear. The goal was to improve the Official Languages Act. We should therefore also expect to see some improvement on the ground. Every time we observe the status quo, we should seriously question whether the act is being implemented.

In the case of Collège Nordique, we are not seeing the status quo. Things have gotten worse. The alarm should be sounded. In this case, it is clear that the act has not been upheld.

**Joël Godin:** Thank you, Mr. Bossé.

Mr. Power, in your remarks, you said that the act based on Bill C-13 is significantly better than the previous version. I say that with all due respect.

I have to ask you a very honest question. Mr. Beaulieu and I were members of this committee when we were considering the modernization of the Official Languages Act.

Couldn't the act have been even better than the one in effect now?

In all of my communications, I have always said that we ended up with very little for our efforts and that the government did not show its willingness and intention to serve francophones across Canada well.

**The Chair:** Mr. Power, you have 35 seconds left.

• (1220)

**Mark Power:** The act is significantly better, Mr. Godin, and I say that with all due respect.

Although I am not an MP, I think the most helpful thing the committee can do in the short term is to try to guide or help the public service in its implementation of the act.

Our binder includes the beginning of part VII as it was rewritten. There is no comparison with the previous version.

That said, if more people read it and applied it and if internal tools were developed for the implementation of the act, Collège Nordique would not be in its present situation.

**Joël Godin:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Mr. Godin.

Mr. Deschênes-Thériault, you have the floor for six minutes.

**Guillaume Deschênes-Thériault (Madawaska—Restigouche, Lib.):** I want to thank the witnesses for their testimony. Thank you also for the tools you have provided us today.

In part VII of the new act, the education continuum has been expanded from early childhood to the post-secondary level. In the past, early childhood and post-secondary education were not specifically included.

We know it took a long time to modernize the Official Languages Act. Some of my colleagues made great contributions, including my predecessor Mr. Arseneault, Mr. Darrell Samson and Ms. Petitpas Taylor, who showed leadership on the file as the responsible minister.

In what way does its modernization, including the expanded education continuum from early childhood to post-secondary education, provide a more secure foundation for federal support for the expanded continuum?

**Darius Bossé:** Once again, we should expect results. Comparing the situation before June 2023 to that after June 2023, the only way one can interpret the legal impact of these provisions, specifically subsection 41(3) on page 31, along with subsection 41(5) on page 32, is that the federal government and the public service should be taking very practical steps to support early childhood and post-secondary education.

I would also point out that this provision is in every colour. There is no black because it was not even in the 1988 Official Languages Act. As a result, with the modernization of the act, there is also a continuum from kindergarten to grade 12.

**Guillaume Deschênes-Thériault:** Thank you.

So the modernization process has led to the strengthening of the continuum or strengthening of what the government should be doing to support that continuum.

Our study also includes early childhood. We talk about primary and secondary education, as well as early childhood. Section 23 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms protects the right to minority-language education, but does not mention primary and secondary education.

The official languages action plan 2023–2028 makes historic investments in the official languages. That has in particular allowed us to increase investments in early childhood because supporting francophone early childhood education was one of the Liberal government's priorities.

That has not always been the case. In its 2013 road map, the previous government had allocated very little funding to early childhood education.

To what extent does the updated act provide better protection for the early childhood sector, knowing that Section 23 of the charter does not necessarily apply to early childhood?

**Mark Power:** I think it goes beyond partisanship. We need funding, increased funding and targeted funding. We need that money to actually get through.

With due respect, one of the premises of your presentation is probably mistaken. The Supreme Court of Canada actually teaches us—I say “us” because I am a Franco-Ontarian—that we are entitled to real equivalency in our schools.

Further, we are entitled to what is required to achieve that objective. The Supreme Court goes so far as to say that it requires a gymnasium. It also requires employees and staff on the ground. If there were not enough classroom teachers in Ottawa where my daughter attended grade school, that would have been very bad.

Those teachers are needed for the implementation of section 23, which is why I was surprised, to put it mildly, to hear that the federal government might reduce funding to colleges and post-secondary institutions that help train the educators needed to pass on the language and culture.

Section 23 also applies to the federal government, not just the provinces. We could discuss the questions that have been raised, but we are waiting for a Federal Court decision that might clarify the issue soon.

**Guillaume Deschênes-Thériault:** You are getting ahead of me because my next question was in fact about section 23 of the charter.

In your opinion, even though the charter only mentions primary and secondary education, shouldn't its scope of application be broadened to include early childhood and post-secondary education in particular?

• (1225)

**Mark Power:** Yes, the scope of application should be broadened.

A few years ago, Franco-Albertans had built a case against their provincial government, claiming that section 23 provided a right to certain aspects of post-secondary education in French. The Alberta government defended itself, saying that the case made no sense and that it was so frivolous that it should not even have to defend itself.

The dispute over the foundation for the legal action was decided in favour of Franco-Albertans. The Court of Queen's Bench determined very clearly that section 23 does in fact include obligations for post-secondary training and that they apply to the provinces, as a minimum.

In my opinion, this also clearly applies to the federal government to the extent that it provides funding, since those human resources are needed to implement the right to primary and secondary education. It takes more than bricks and mortar to pass on the language and culture. It takes human resources.

**The Chair:** Mr. Deschênes-Thériault, you have 40 seconds left.

**Guillaume Deschênes-Thériault:** The investments set out in the official languages action plan 2023–2028 are therefore intended to support early childhood education programs in particular.

Collège Éducacentre, colleges in western Canada and in Nova Scotia and in various parts of the country have benefited from that funding. That is consistent with the spirit of the updated Official Languages Act, which seeks to strengthen the continuum by increasing early childhood education training capacity.

**Mark Power:** Yes, but once again the government has to listen, Mr. Deschênes-Thériault.

In the middle of page 34 of the binder, under “Dialogue and consultation activities”, it says that, “In carrying out this objective, every federal institution shall: gather relevant information; seek the opinions of English and French linguistic minority communities about the positive measures; be prepared to alter those positive measures” after considering their point of view.

Note that it says “federal institutions shall” and not “federal institutions may”.

More money is needed. The recent action plan is a good start, but the money has to be spent wisely, after consulting people on the ground and making adjustments, as in the case of Collège Nordique francophone.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Deschênes-Thériault.

Mr. Beaulieu, you have the floor for six minutes.

**Mario Beaulieu:** I want to thank the witnesses for being here.

Based on the decision made in British Columbia, you say we don't have to wait for new regulations to implement the Official Languages Act.

The new Official Languages Act includes the principle of asymmetry to some degree, which requires that the French fact in Canada be defended since it is a minority in North America.

The purpose of the act includes advancing the existence of a majority-French society in Quebec where the future of French is assured.

The positive measures, which are also included on page 33 of your binder, pertain to the need to protect and promote French in every province and territory.

As to the official languages action plan 2023–2028, although consultations were held, hardly any groups that defend French participated. I encouraged them to do so, but there was no interest in consulting with groups that defend French in Quebec.

The action plan does not contain a single new measure for French in Quebec. The minister of the day mentioned measures for the teaching of French to anglophones in Quebec, but those were

already part of the act and the positive measures. So there is really a lack of political will in this case. The act is not being implemented in that sense.

Do you have any thoughts on that, Mr. Bossé?

**Darius Bossé:** I come to the same conclusion because, not only was the new act strengthened for linguistic minorities, but as you point out, it was also strengthened as regards French in Canada on the whole. The result is the same.

Considering what the federal government did with regard to French in Quebec before June 2023 and what it has done since June 2023, we should expect consistent, positive and practical measures that have an impact on the ground.

To the extent that we are not seeing that on the ground, we must once again wonder whether the federal government is disregarding its own commitment under subsection 42(1) of the act.

• (1230)

**Mark Power:** I'd like to add something, Mr. Beaulieu.

I don't have the dates on hand, but if it's true that the consultations leading to the action plan precede the implementation of the act, I would certainly expect the Government of Canada to consult groups again based on the new framework, even if it means creating a new action plan that would start in 2025 or 2026.

**Mario Beaulieu:** I agree with you, especially because, since 2020, the government, ministers and the Governor General of Canada have recognized that the federal government has a responsibility to defend French in Quebec, as well. So I would have expected it to already be included, given that this responsibility was already in the draft legislation.

Could that then pave the way for people in Quebec to launch legal proceedings to ask the federal government to implement the modernized act?

**Darius Bossé:** That's exactly right. That's the very concrete legal consequence of adding subsections 41(2) and 41(5).

That said, all federal institutions—over 200 of them—must take positive measures to support French in Canada.

**Mark Power:** I would add that the action plan covers the period from 2023 to 2028. It makes no sense. We shouldn't wait until 2028 to seriously implement the Official Languages Act as it currently stands. It would probably be illegal to do so. We need a new plan now.

**Mario Beaulieu:** Thank you very much. I couldn't agree with you more.

I would also like to ask a question about the federal government's right to spend.

Historically, it has always been more or less the same. The provinces banned the teaching of French, and the federal government did not intervene. Today, at the Standing Committee on Official Languages, meeting after meeting, we see that francophones outside Quebec are treated like second-class citizens.

For example, they are given old, dilapidated anglophone schools. The federal government is sprinkling subsidies to try to make up for that, but it is not succeeding.

Based on what you said in the documents you submitted to the committee, the federal government has the power to make up for these shortcomings in a more significant way.

Would it also have the power to adjust provincial transfers to align funding and further favour francophones outside Quebec?

**The Chair:** There are about 35 seconds left.

**Mark Power:** The short answer is yes.

We would be pleased to provide a more detailed answer when the chair gives us the time to do so. However, the answer is definitely yes, Mr. Beaulieu. There's no grey area.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Beaulieu.

I now give the floor to Mr. Bélanger for five minutes.

**Jim Bélanger:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'm a new member of Parliament. Based on the Constitution and the new version of the Official Languages Act, could you explain to me the federal government's role in the education of official language minority communities?

**Darius Bossé:** First, section 23 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms provides for a right to education in the language of the French linguistic minority. During your study, you have heard witnesses say that education is a provincial jurisdiction. Nothing in the charter actually says that section 23 does not apply at the federal level.

However, by adopting the latest amendments to the Official Languages Act in June 2023, Parliament imposed obligations on the federal government with respect to education in the minority language. It also imposed an obligation on it to take positive measures in that regard. Therefore, the federal government must act accordingly.

**Mark Power:** I would add, Mr. Bélanger, that the University of Sudbury, which is located in your riding, is entitled to receive regular, predictable, multi-year, intelligent and transparent funding.

It is also entitled to receive that funding directly, instead of receiving it through Toronto, where a certain percentage may or may not be withheld on the grounds that matching provincial funds may be sought. That is allowed under the Constitution, as Mr. Bossé just explained. I would even go so far as to say that it's required by the new version of the Official Languages Act. That would certainly be the best way to implement the act, especially part VII.

What is certain, Mr. Bélanger, is that things have to change. The status quo since 2023 is, at first glance, illegal under the Official Languages Act.

• (1235)

**Jim Bélanger:** I spoke to a speech therapy teacher at Laurentian University last weekend. She explained a few things to me.

I'd like to understand how federal funding works. According to the figures before me, the federal government spends about \$250 million a year to support minority-language education and second-language instruction. However, if I understand correctly, federal funds are sent to the province, and the province then decides how it will use them.

Is that correct?

**Mark Power:** Yes, that's usually the case.

That said, this is all too often the case, even now. That's why Mr. Bossé and I emphasized the fact that the Government of Canada can spend as it wishes. It can give the funds directly to the University of Sudbury or Laurentian University, for example. It can say that these funds are earmarked for speech therapy and that it is out of the question to spend them on something else.

What we're trying to get across—I hope politely enough—is that the public service, the Government of Canada or, at the very least, the President of the Treasury Board must take up more space and ensure that these positive measures or significant sums of money achieve the stated goal, without worrying too much about what the provinces or territories think or worrying about their smokescreens.

**Jim Bélanger:** Would that be a better way to manage federal funds?

**Mark Power:** You don't have to be a businessman, a gifted person or a Ph.D. student in business administration to know that the more intermediaries there are, the more opaque the situation becomes, increasing the likelihood of waste.

**Darius Bossé:** There's even a legal principle that confirms your intuition. It's the principle of subsidiarity. The Supreme Court of Canada has explained that, in general, things are best managed when managed by the level of government that is closest to the population served.

**Jim Bélanger:** If I give someone money to do something, I want to know how it is spent. Why is that not being done?

People say money is lacking. How much more money would be needed?

**The Chair:** Mr. Bélanger, your time is up.

I would ask the witnesses to be brief.

**Darius Bossé:** The Federal Court will be looking at this issue very soon.

In this case, the Conseil scolaire francophone provincial de Terre-Neuve-et-Labrador shed light on the fact that the federal government wasn't tracking the funds and wasn't too concerned about how the money was being spent.

**Mark Power:** Here is my recommendation. The report the committee will write as a result of this study should propose steps to follow rather than simply asking questions.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Mr. Bélanger.

I now give the floor to Ms. Chenette for five minutes.

**Madeleine Chenette:** Thank you very much, gentlemen. Your lawyerly look at everything that's happening is very informative.

I'll come back to what you just said. In your opinion, since official languages do not fall under provincial jurisdiction, the Government of Canada can intervene directly. You gave the example of the University of Sudbury. You also say that this must be managed by the level closest to the population. I immediately hear my provincial colleagues saying that the provincial level is the level of government closest to the people and that it is therefore up to the provinces to manage this.

I'm not a legal expert. The discussions here don't necessarily concern everything that will affect Treasury Board and all its policies. They're more about education.

Knowing that education is a provincial jurisdiction, isn't there a contradiction between provincial legislation and the Official Languages Act?

This could lead to hours of discussions among lawyers.

You say that the federal government can intervene in education. However, I'm already hearing provinces telling us to watch out because we don't have the right to do that.

We're not going to fix the problem while we're debating legal issues.

• (1240)

**Mark Power:** Madam, in the past, the Government of Canada has been in the habit—perhaps it is still doing so today—of supporting French outside Quebec by sending funds directly to organizations. Health care is a good example.

Of course, health care is an area of provincial jurisdiction, but the Government of Canada has chosen from time to time, and for a long time, to send funds directly to health care providers—that is to say to francophone or majority francophone hospitals—without going through the province.

It does that because francophones, except Acadians, are in a better position to determine the best way to spend those funds to meet their needs. As long as they comply with provincial legislation in this area, of course, and don't discriminate or anything like that, there's no question that it's more effective.

So, even though I am here as a witness, I would like to pass the buck to you. Why wouldn't the Government of Canada, especially in today's economy, spend the money as intelligently as possible, maximizing the chances that the money will get to where it needs to go?

I would remind you that the Official Languages Act, which is still in force, was mainly passed to anticipate economic downturns and not just good times.

The best way to do that is to remove the unnecessary intermediaries. If she were still alive, my mother would say that charity begins at home. It's not really a matter of preventing the province

from knowing where the money is going. Ultimately, the province could prohibit it.

That said, it makes no sense to claim that funding is limited and then not implement the winning strategies that have proven successful in terms of the best way to support francophone communities outside Quebec.

**Madeleine Chenette:** We've heard from a number of witnesses so far. They came to talk to us about ways in which the federal and provincial governments can spend the funds better and work better together. No one has told us that we should advocate for direct funding.

I understand your legal interpretation, but isn't there a constraint coming from the stakeholders, based on their beliefs and the current culture? That may explain why direct funding is not being used.

We put the question to all the witnesses, and we can see that they didn't tell us that at all.

**Mark Power:** Madam, you're trying to reinvent the wheel. This House of Commons committee, as well as the Senate, have studied this very issue in the past.

This goes back to the 1980s. If people who support the work of the committee want to get those primary sources, we can find them and send them to you. This is not a new issue.

**Madeleine Chenette:** In our study on the entire education continuum, from early childhood to post-secondary education, some witnesses also talked about the importance of complementary activities to support French in the communities.

Knowing that language is an area of federal jurisdiction, if you had a magic wand, what would you do to promote the learning and retention of French by means other than direct education?

**The Chair:** Please give us a brief answer, as there are only 20 seconds left.

**Darius Bossé:** We touched on the issue of increased funding, for example. That's certainly part of the solution.

It would also be a matter of dealing directly with school boards. The best way to design jurisdictions is to have the federal and provincial governments share them.

Education of the majority is indeed a provincial jurisdiction, but education of the linguistic minority is a jurisdiction that belongs to school boards.

Essentially, section 23 of the charter creates school governments. It's a third level of government with exclusive jurisdiction. They are on a non-exhaustive list from the Supreme Court of Canada.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Chenette.

Mr. Beaulieu, you have the floor for two and a half minutes.

• (1245)

**Mario Beaulieu:** We see that most of the grants provided under the official languages support programs are used to support education in English. However, there is a bilateral agreement with Quebec.

Do you think that's necessary?

**Mark Power:** I think the situation in Quebec is different. Unless I'm mistaken, the National Assembly, rightly or wrongly, passed a piece of legislation that limits the ability of Quebec institutions to accept federal funding directly. That also applies to universities.

That's probably the exception to the general principle. That's what Mr. Bossé and I are trying to highlight today.

**Mario Beaulieu:** My question was more theoretical.

You say that education is a provincial jurisdiction when it comes to the education of the majority based on the federal approach, but—

**Mark Power:** I think Mr. Bossé emphasized the fact that school boards, whether they are English-speaking in Quebec or French-speaking for francophones and Acadians outside Quebec, have the right to exist. So that level of government is protected. The CAQ government recently found that out.

The bottom line is that the Government of Canada, in exercising its spending power, can do a lot more than it is doing right now.

**Mario Beaulieu:** We see that, for example, when grants are given directly to anglophone lobby groups, without going through a whole series of considerations. In my opinion, federal research funds are used more to fund research in Quebec than provincial research funds. So they fund the universities.

Infrastructure grants are mainly provided to anglophone institutions. There don't seem to be any restrictions, but there could be.

A long time ago, Maurice Duplessis—I believe—said that such grants could be given, but that, in this case, he would remove those provided by the province.

**The Chair:** Excuse me, Mr. Beaulieu. You have 10 seconds left.

I would ask the witness to provide a brief answer.

**Darius Bossé:** I think what you're saying is that the Quebec government accepts this fund.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Beaulieu. Your time is up. I'm sorry.

I give the floor to Mr. Godin for five minutes.

**Joël Godin:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Power, you said that the action plan for official languages 2023–2028 was a good start.

However, although an additional \$1.4 billion has been invested, how do you explain the reduction in federal funding for the French-speaking Collège Nordique?

That is one case among many, but I'm having a hard time understanding the decision. We see that some specific institutions are paying the price.

**Mark Power:** I misspoke or I made a mistake, or both.

What I wanted to point out, and I invite Mr. Bossé to correct me if necessary, is that the action plan must first reflect the current act and the new obligations. Depending on the applicable dates, that may not be the case.

In any event, Mr. Godin, I recommend that we set aside the action plan for a moment because what matters is the act.

In the binder you have in front of you, you will find, at the top of the page marked with a little yellow sticker, the new part VII. It starts on page 31, and it goes on for a number of pages. The new part VII requires the public service to meet all kinds of new requirements, which have been enshrined in the act since 2023. It appears that these requirements have not been met to the letter. The most recent example is the Collège Nordique. We heard about that last week.

Page 31 talks about a commitment to learning in minority language. Page 32 talks about duty and positive measures. It is stated that federal institutions have the duty to do something. It is also stated that these measures shall be concrete and taken with the intention of having a beneficial effect.

Reducing funding in the middle of a fiscal year cannot have been done with the intention of having a beneficial effect. On page 33, in subsection (7), it is stated that negative impacts needed to be considered. It's possible that the Government of Canada, in wanting to help, could actually cause harm. I invite you to look at page 34.

It's—

• (1250)

**Joël Godin:** It's an aberration. Anyway, that's what I'm saying.

**Mark Power:** At first glance, that seems to be the case.

**Joël Godin:** Okay.

I share your opinion. I think the government is setting itself up for failure. That said, we'll see where this will lead.

You said that 200 federal institutions had to put positive measures in place.

Who in the federal government can compel those 200 institutions and departments to comply with this requirement and promote both official languages?

**Darius Bossé:** It's Treasury Board.

**Joël Godin:** Does it have full authority to act in this regard? Is it doing its job?

**Darius Bossé:** I don't know if it's doing its job. However, time is running out. Based on the testimony you've heard from various organizations, it should be assumed that it's not doing its job.

That said, on page 5, you will find subsection 2.1(1). It says, “The President of the Treasury Board is responsible for exercising leadership within the Government of Canada in relation to the implementation of this Act.”

Page 6 states that the President of the Treasury Board “shall, in consultation with the other ministers of the Crown coordinate the implementation of this Act, including the implementation of the commitments set out in subsections 41(1) to (3)”.

These provisions are exactly the commitments that are relevant to your study. Subsection 41(3) talks about the obligations imposed on the federal government with respect to the education continuum.

**Joël Godin:** I apologize for interrupting, Mr. Bossé. I have only one minute of speaking time left.

Our study focuses on the education continuum. A number of witnesses have told us that there was a problem with rights holders in terms of their right to an education in the minority language. In Canada, that's a right. However, I can cite one factor that means that even rights holders can't benefit from that right. It's the fact that they often have to travel great distances to get to a school.

What measures would enable us to limit the travel time of rights holders who live in northern Alberta, for example, and who don't have access to a primary or secondary school?

How can we support access to a school? Are there any models that would meet that requirement? This is a fundamental right, and it is guaranteed by section 23 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

Is this a back door way for the government to not meet its obligations?

**The Chair:** I would ask you to limit your answer to just a few sentences, because the time is up.

**Mark Power:** Exercising the right to education depends on the time it takes to get to school. Research shows that outside Quebec, travel time to school is the most important variable in determining which francophones and Acadians will exercise their right. That's absurd, and it's happening just about everywhere.

I'm speaking from my own experience. I'm glad to see that my daughter's experience isn't as bad as mine was, even though it's far from perfect.

In exercising its spending power, the Government of Canada can impose conditions and performance targets. For example, it can tell the Government of British Columbia or the Government of Nova Scotia that it will be entitled to more funding if travel times are reduced over two, three, five or 10 years. That could be done.

As an individual, I encourage the committee to be creative about what needs to be demanded of our public service going forward to ensure the interests of French are protected.

**The Chair:** I'm sorry, but the time is up.

**Joël Godin:** Mr. Chair, I just want to tell the witness that the majority of the members here would have liked to have an extra hour with him.

Thank you, Mr. Power.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Godin.

Ms. Mingarelli, you have the floor for five minutes.

**Giovanna Mingarelli:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Good morning, Mr. Bossé and Mr. Power. Thank you for being with us today.

For several years, our country has sought to strengthen the role of French and English while recognizing the importance of revitalizing and protecting indigenous languages. These objectives are essential to our collective identity, but they can sometimes seem hard to reconcile in the current constitutional framework.

How could Canada better reconcile the advancement of French and English with the revitalization of indigenous languages, within the current constitutional framework?

• (1255)

**Darius Bossé:** The official languages issue and the indigenous languages issue are two completely separate things. They even have constitutionally distinct sources. Indigenous language rights stem from section 35 of the Constitution Act, 1982, whereas there are provisions elsewhere for official languages. Sometimes these issues are wrongly pitted against each other, when the two language battles must be fought on common and distinct fronts.

Those issues were dealt with under separate legislation, the Indigenous Languages Act and the Official Languages Act. The issues addressed are specific to each of these streams under these separate statutes.

If I understand correctly, apparently the Indigenous Languages Act doesn't have a lot of teeth, and it won't lead to much meaningful action. Funding is also woefully inadequate for the revitalization objectives set out in the act.

**Giovanna Mingarelli:** Thank you very much.

Mr. Power, you've also worked on the issue of access to justice.

What concrete barriers do francophones in minority communities still face today when seeking to exercise their language rights?

**Mark Power:** If funding for colleges and universities were more stable, more predictable and multi-year, we would have better training for the staff needed so that courthouses could operate in French at the drop of a hat, not just after a week or two of notice, as is sometimes the case in certain regions, even where I live in eastern Ontario.

All roads lead to Rome. Federal funding spent through the action plan for official languages 2023–2028 in an attempt to implement the Official Languages Act must respect that. This needs to be better regulated.

We need to focus on results and transparency. We have to listen to our communities. In Ontario, the Association des juristes d'expression française de l'Ontario, or AJEFO, is, of course, in a better position than I am to identify those needs. They have, however, been expressed.

We need to take action, with an action plan that gets results. We must avoid giving false hope since the modernized act was passed in 2023.

**Giovanna Mingarelli:** Thank you. I think my time is up.

Mr. Chair, do I have time for one more question?

**The Chair:** You have one minute left.

**Giovanna Mingarelli:** That's perfect.

Mr. Power, do you think constitutional recognition of indigenous languages would be necessary to ensure their long-term survival?

**Mark Power:** That question should be put to other people, not me.

Francophones across Canada have often suffered when the majority made decisions for them, even if intentions were good. I think it would be very awkward for me to answer that question.

I would note, however, that it is possible, as Europe teaches us, to protect and advance more than one language at the same time. Language protection is not a zero-sum game. There are many polyglots in Canada, thanks to our post-secondary institutions, for example.

I'm still trying to get back on topic. It's no longer acceptable, and I would go so far as to say that it's illegal, to appoint people who can't speak the languages required for their position, especially when it comes to key positions.

**Giovanna Mingarelli:** Thank you very much.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

Mr. Power and Mr. Bossé, on behalf of the committee, I'd like to thank you for your testimony. We appreciate what you've offered to the committee, the time you've taken to prepare and the materials you've provided. Thank you for the work you're doing. Thank you for being with us today.

Before I conclude, I want to quickly remind my colleagues of a few points. Our next meeting will be on Thursday, November 6. We will continue our study on the minority language education continuum.

I also want to briefly remind you that last week, we adopted the deadline of Friday, November 7 at noon, to submit potential witnesses for the study on the use of French in government communications and federal institutions. The committee agreed to hear from seven witnesses: three submitted by the Liberal Party, three submitted by the Conservative Party and one proposed by the Bloc Québécois. Feel free to send more names to the clerk in case some witnesses aren't available.

I also want to take this opportunity to say that we will soon be conducting a study on the quota of French-language music imposed on French-language media. We'll need to submit the names of witnesses for that study. I'd like to propose November 13 at noon as a deadline for submitting names.

Is that okay? It's next Thursday. Are we in agreement?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**The Chair:** Okay, thank you.

The meeting is adjourned.

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