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• (1535)

[Translation]

The Chair (Yvan Baker (Etobicoke Centre, Lib.)): Colleagues, welcome to meeting number 25 of the Standing Committee on Official Languages.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(3)(f) and the order of reference of Tuesday, December 9, 2025, we are continuing our study of the official languages (advancement of equality of status and use of English and French) regulations.

I would now like to welcome our witnesses.

From Droits collectifs Québec, we have Étienne-Alexis Boucher, chief executive officer; François Côté, lawyer; and Esther Poirier, articling student. All three are joining us by video conference.

Welcome.

From Canadian Parents for French, we have Derrek Bentley, network chief executive director; and Ahdithya Rajan P. Visweswaran, director, advocacy and public policy.

Welcome.

We also have Stéphanie Chouinard, associate professor, as an individual. She is joining us by video conference.

Each group will have five minutes for their opening remarks. Then we'll go to questions from members.

Mr. Boucher, you have the floor.

Étienne-Alexis Boucher (Chief Executive Officer, Droits collectifs Québec): Good afternoon, everyone. I hope you're doing well.

My name is Étienne-Alexis Boucher. I am chief executive officer and co-founder of Droits collectifs Québec. We are an independent community action organization recognized by the Secrétariat à l'action communautaire autonome et aux initiatives sociales, or SACAIS, as a collective advocacy organization.

The main portion of our remarks will be delivered by Mr. Côté.

I just want to say this. In a few words, much ado about nothing. I remind you that we worked on reforming the Official Languages Act for more than a few years. In the case of the regulations currently under consideration, it took more than two years for the Government of Canada to produce a six-page document that unfortunately doesn't allow the Official Languages Act to comply with in-

ternational law when it comes to determining which language group is considered a minority or a majority.

These regulations also do not respond to the science of protecting minorities, whereas when a state wants to protect a minority language, it invests in a region where that language is useful. I can tell you that when Switzerland is looking to protect the Italian language, it doesn't invest in German-speaking or francophone cantons. It invests in Italian-speaking cantons.

Finally, unfortunately, these regulations do not allow the government to respect the intent of the legislator, who recognized that French is in decline across Canada and that the federal government must therefore support it across Canada, including in Quebec.

Unfortunately, there were no new positive measures in the action plan for official languages 2018-23 to support French in Quebec as well.

I will now yield to Mr. Côté.

• (1540)

The Chair: I will now turn the floor over to Mr. Bentley for five minutes.

Derrek Bentley (Network Chief Executive Officer, Canadian Parents for French): Mr. Chair, members of the committee,

[English]

thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today.

For nearly five decades, Canadian Parents for French has worked to ensure equitable access for all Canadians to have opportunities to learn and use French, and to advance the full recognition and use of both official languages across our country. Today, we are here because the draft regulations under part VII of the Official Languages Act represent a pivotal moment. The modernization of the act was meant to move from aspiration to enforceable obligation and from uneven implementation to substantive equality.

Part VII clearly affirms two interdependent commitments: "(a) enhancing the vitality of [official language] minority communities" and "(b) fostering the full recognition and use of both English and French in Canadian society." Part VII was always built on both minority protection and majority engagement, ensuring that OLMCs thrive and that Canadians in majority language contexts can embrace both official languages.

Our central concern today is this: As currently drafted, the regulations operationalize one pillar more clearly than the other. They translate institutional obligations into important processes: analyze, consult, document, report. However, when the act articulates two equal objectives, the regulations risk creating asymmetry. The draft regulations require detailed sectorial analysis when assessing impacts on OLMCs, yet no comparable analysis is required for the sectors and organizations that sustain societal bilingualism. If minority vitality warrants explicit examination of its institutional ecosystem, then the full recognition and use of English and French across Canadian society must be afforded the same structural attention.

A second concern relates to the repeated use of the term “other stakeholders”. The draft regulations refer to “other stakeholders” alongside OLMCs, but they do not define who those stakeholders are. In the absence of clarity, identification is left to administrative discretion. Experience has shown that when guidance is broad and definitions are absent, implementation varies and certain objectives are deprioritized. This is not a theoretical concern. When duality-focused organizations are not explicitly recognized as core actors under part VII, their participation becomes contingent rather than guaranteed. We are not asking to compete with OLMCs. We are asking that Parliament’s full vision be implemented faithfully and coherently.

As a third concern, we must address capacity. National OLMC organizations receive dedicated public policy service support project funding that allows them to participate fully in policy and regulatory consultations. Duality-focused organizations generally do not, and they are often funded primarily for service delivery. Requiring participation without providing capacity undermines meaningful engagement and risks entrenching a system in which societal bilingualism is treated as secondary.

Finally, we urge the adoption of differentiated consultation mechanisms. There are hundreds of OLMC organizations across Canada. There are comparatively few organizations whose mandate is to foster the full recognition and use of English and French in Canadian society as a whole. When grouped together in undifferentiated consultation processes, the perspectives of duality-focused organizations can be overshadowed simply by volume. An undifferentiated framework does not reflect the dual commitments embedded in subsection 41(1). If the objectives are distinct, the consultation mechanisms must also be distinct.

In short, we urge having regulations that explicitly recognize societal linguistic duality as an equal objective of part VII, clarify that “other stakeholders” includes organizations advancing subsection 41(1), recognize duality-focused organizations as core actors, provide the structural supports necessary for meaningful participation and ensure direct consultation frameworks for duality-focused organizations. Regulations are not a technical afterthought. They are the instrument through which Parliament’s intent is translated into operational reality. The regulations can either entrench ambiguity and uneven application or provide the clarity, symmetry and structural supports required to fully realize the modernization of part VII.

The opportunity before us is not simply to regulate. It is to complete the work of modernization with coherence, intention and fidelity to Parliament’s full vision. The act is not only about protect-

ing OLMCs, although this remains essential; it is also about shaping the linguistic character of Canada as a whole. We respectfully urge you to ensure that both pillars of part VII stand on equal footing so that substantive equality between English and French is not only promised in law but fully realized in practice.

[*Translation*]

Thank you very much.

● (1545)

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Bentley.

[*Translation*]

I will now turn the floor over to Ms. Chouinard for five minutes.

Stéphanie Chouinard (Associate Professor, As an Individual): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would also like to thank the vice-chairs and members of the committee for inviting me to appear before the committee to discuss the draft regulations relating to part VII the Official Languages Act.

My remarks will echo many of the thoughts and briefs you have already heard from stakeholders since you began your work on this issue. The consensus is fairly unanimous: It is imperative to go back to the drawing board to ensure that the regulations not only set out processes. They must also set out objectives and the means for evaluating the achievement of these objectives, in terms of the vitality of communities and progress towards true equality for both official languages.

In their current state, the draft regulations will not prevent us from finding ourselves, in a few years’ time, facing a Gascon 2.0 ruling. I probably don’t need to remind you that the Federal Court ruled in this 2018 decision that the language of part VII did not impose any obligations as to results or concrete measures to advance substantive equality between the official languages.

This ruling was one of the main reasons that brought the need to modernize the Official Languages Act to the forefront of the political agenda. Much of the work done since 2018, particularly within your own committee, has been aimed at ensuring that the new version of the act would address this shortcoming.

Here are a few proposals aimed at revising the draft regulations to ensure that the implementation of the new version of part VII effectively meets the intent of lawmakers by setting out clear obligations for the federal government.

First, the regulations should spell out more precisely how and under what circumstances federal institutions are to determine the objectives of the policies implemented, which must be clear and measurable. In addition, they must take into account the priorities of communities.

They must also require federal institutions to be accountable for the measures they do or do not adopt, particularly following dialogues and consultations with stakeholders in circumstances where federal institutions may reject community priorities.

These first two proposals relate specifically to subsections 41(9) and 41(9.1) of the act and stem from the observation that sections 5 and 6 of the draft regulations lack precision with regard to the obligations of federal institutions in the dialogue and consultation processes.

There have been a lot of suggestions put forward to define what constitutes effective consultation. We can come back to that if you like.

The regulations must ensure that impact indicators are based on evidence-based findings and that the data accessible to the public, particularly the research community, is used to assess progress towards achieving the objectives through the positive measures implemented, and to impose a review of these measures if they do not meet the objectives set.

Subsections 41(8) and 41(9) of the bill read as follows:

(8) The analyses [...] shall be founded, to the extent possible, on the results of dialogue and consultation activities, on research and on evidence-based findings.

(9) [...] permit the priorities of the English and French linguistic minority communities and other stakeholders to be taken into account...

However, nothing in the regulations defines or regulates the production or dissemination of such findings.

Given that the new version of part VII now explicitly names in subparagraph 41(6)(c)(v) sectors of application of positive measures that fall within provincial or shared jurisdiction as “sectors that are essential to enhancing the vitality of [...] minority communities” and refers to the need to “protect and promote the presence of strong institutions serving those communities”, the regulations must be much more explicit with regard to the federal government’s obligations towards minorities in each province and territory. This applies to consultation, consideration of priorities and the role that communities and their institutions play in implementing federal-provincial-territorial agreements on official languages.

Moreover, the Federal Court’s decision last December in the case of *Conseil scolaire francophone provincial de Terre-Neuve-et-Labrador v. Canadian Heritage* lends weight to this argument by finding Canadian Heritage guilty of failing to fulfill its obligations to consult with the community under the previous version of the Official Languages Act. However, both the intention of the legislator and the new text of the act itself clearly demonstrate a desire to strengthen these obligations. The regulations should also dictate to the federal government its course of action in circumstances where a province or territory refuses to co-operate in any of the sectors essential to enhancing the vitality of minorities.

Finally, again with regard to subparagraph 41(6)(c)(v), the regulations should set out the criteria that will be considered to define what the act means by “strong institutions”. Here, before I’m told that regulations cannot provide a definition that was not present in the act, I’d like to point out that the official languages (communications with and services to the public) regulations, or the part IV regulations, provide an example of such a practice. In part I of those regulations—

● (1550)

The Chair: Ms. Chouinard, I’m sorry to interrupt you. Please wrap up your presentation, because your time is up.

Stéphanie Chouinard: Okay.

The regulations include a set of criteria designed to determine whether a given region faces significant demand for services in the official language of the minority. So there’s a way to codify terminology in the regulations. It remains possible to do so without including a definition per se. I would like to see the same approach used on the “strong institutions” issue in the part VII regulations.

Therefore, many regulatory changes are needed, in my opinion, to implement—

The Chair: Ms. Chouinard, I really must interrupt you. The time is up.

We’ll now go to questions from members. I’m going to turn the floor over to Mr. Godin for six minutes.

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

I’d like to thank the representatives of Canadian Parents for French, Mr. Visweswaran and Mr. Bentley, as well as Ms. Chouinard and all the other witnesses who delivered opening remarks.

My first question is for the representatives of Canadian Parents for French.

You talked about defining “other stakeholders”.

In your opinion, what would be the best definition, or the definition that would include you so that you are considered one of the major players in the process?

What definition would you like to see in the regulations?

Ahdithya Rajan P. Visweswaran (Director, Advocacy and Public Policy, Canadian Parents for French): Thank you for the question.

Here’s the exact wording we’d like to see: “...stakeholders who are actively engaged in advancing the commitments under subsections 41(1) and 41(3) of the act.”

Joël Godin: If we made this change to the regulations, you would therefore consider yourself included in the definition. That way, you would be part of the consultation process.

Is that correct?

Ahdithya Rajan P. Visweswaran: Yes, that’s right.

Joël Godin: Let's talk about consultation. According to a representative of Droits collectifs Québec who spoke earlier, it took a long time to draft the regulations. So there were probably a lot of consultations.

Was your organization consulted on the drafting of these regulations?

Ahdithya Rajan P. Visweswaran: Yes. We were consulted a number of times in the pre-consultation phase. However, none of what we expressed, including our concerns about "other stakeholders", was taken into account.

Joël Godin: Don't worry. Don't feel singled out, because you're not alone.

Thank you for that.

I will now turn to the representatives of Droits collectifs Québec.

I understand from your remarks that you're disappointed.

It's all well and good to say that you're not happy. We recognize that it has taken too long, and we share your opinion. Urgent action is needed because French is in decline. However, it took two and a half years to draft the regulations. Everyone, or at least the majority of those who have appeared before us, told us that the regulations didn't meet the objectives set and that we had to go back to the drawing board.

Can you give us some solutions?

François Côté: Yes, we can do that.

Two of them are particularly interesting.

First, the objectives need to be clearly stated. For example, the regulations need to specify demographic measures, such as the percentage of speakers in the provinces, including Quebec. We have to be able to see the progress of official language minority communities, the progress of French in the provinces and in Quebec, and so on.

Clear objectives to achieve must be set, such as monetary targets or budgets. The regulations need to talk about language transfer. In short, we need concrete, measurable objectives. That's sorely lacking in these draft regulations. In their current form, these draft regulations can essentially mean anything and everything.

The analytical methodology also needs to be clarified. For the time being, in extremely vague terms, we're only talking about analyzing the impact or establishing potential positive measures. Those are terms that leave way too much room for creativity to be truly effective. We have to talk about a specific sample to be measured and targets, particularly financial ones, to be achieved. We need to say more clearly who the stakeholders are and specify the areas where action is needed.

The draft regulations need to be clear, and right now they're not.

• (1555)

Joël Godin: Thank you.

I will now turn to the other witnesses.

Ms. Chouinard, I think you will agree with what we just heard from the previous witness. Clarity and measurability were mentioned.

That's all well and good, but how can we do that?

On this side of the table, what we want is to have the regulations make it possible to achieve the objectives.

In concrete terms, what can we put in the regulations to leave no room for interpretation or loopholes so that the objectives can really be achieved?

Stéphanie Chouinard: Thank you, Mr. Godin.

I won't be telling you anything new when I say that the purpose of the Official Languages Act is to have a certain transversality. This means that the act is applied horizontally, which involves all agencies and departments. The objectives will therefore differ from one agency or department to another, but there must be an obligation to establish those objectives and there must be effective consultation.

The regulations should set out what an effective consultation is so that we can then say that the consultation actually took place.

The Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages has set out very specific criteria for what constitutes effective consultation. The Fédération des communautés francophones et acadienne du Canada has also done so.

I won't repeat them here, but these are things we should see in the regulations to be able to say, following such consultation, that the agencies and departments have done their job. Objectives have to be measurable and we have to know where to get the evidence to measure how well they have been met.

Joël Godin: I would like to ask you more questions, Ms. Chouinard, but the chair is telling me that my time is up.

Thank you.

The Chair: I'm sorry, Mr. Godin.

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

• (1600)

Giovanna Mingarelli (Prescott—Russell—Cumberland, Lib.): Thank you to all the witnesses for being with us today.

Ms. Chouinard, you recommend that the regulations include clear and measurable objectives.

What would an objective consistent with part VII look like?

Can you give an example of the kind of inconsistent objective you see all too often?

Stéphanie Chouinard: Thank you for the question.

As I said to Mr. Godin, I don't think those specific objectives need to be in the regulations. However, each federal agency and department must be required to have and clearly state these objectives. They must be known to the public, and they must be measurable using evidence-based data. Small and large-scale objectives may look different. In a small organization like mine, the Royal Military College of Canada, it could be the number of students who have access to their entire program in the official language of their choice. On a larger scale, we could look at whether there is linguistic parity among officers and soldiers in the Canadian Armed Forces.

However, we cannot expect such objectives to be in the regulations for all 192 departments and agencies. That's not what the regulations are for. The regulations should ensure that each agency and department has done its job and consulted stakeholders in developing these objectives. The regulations must also ensure that these organizations tell us how they are going to gather data to determine whether they've met their objectives and, if they haven't met them, what measures will be taken to correct the situation.

Giovanna Mingarelli: Thank you very much.

Now I have some questions for the Canadian Parents for French representatives.

What barriers to access are you still seeing, such as waiting lists, selection criteria, school transportation, hidden fees or lack of information?

Should the regulations require equitable access plans for each region that include targets and timelines?

Derrek Bentley: Thank you for the question. That's a big question.

Education falls within provincial and territorial jurisdiction. That complicates things. In some regions, there are still waiting lists for immersion programs. At midnight, parents go to school and line up to secure a spot for their children.

Canada often presents itself, nationally and internationally, as a bilingual country where people can live fully in French just about everywhere, but there are still challenges related to access and waiting lists. Some kids have access to a school, but others don't. Parents have to make tough decisions. It's sad that we're still at this point.

As far as the regulations are concerned, I would agree with Ms. Chouinard. I don't think the government can put specific targets in the regulations. However, the regulations should require organizations to set linguistic duality and bilingualism objectives.

For example, if a department's objective is for 25% of Canadians outside Quebec to be bilingual, it must implement positive measures to achieve that objective, such as making changes to education. It must also consider a whole-of-government approach to increasing the number of bilingual Canadians.

The Chair: Ms. Mingarelli, you have 50 seconds left.

Giovanna Mingarelli: Should the regulations provide incentives to support creating new spaces in immersion programs in underserved regions?

The Chair: I made a mistake. You had one minute and 50 seconds left.

Giovanna Mingarelli: That's fantastic. Thank you.

Derrek Bentley: As I said, it would be interesting to include positive measures, such as setting targets, but I'm not sure that should be right in the regulations. We think it would be good to require that, but we're not sure the regulations are necessarily the place to put something specific like that.

That said, it's important to have targets and expectations for real-world impacts.

We're not lawyers, and we're not sure if that kind of thing can be included in the regulations.

• (1605)

Ahdithya Rajan P. Visweswaran: I'd like to add something.

[*English*]

The way the regulation is written right now, we can't even talk about linguistic duality, French immersion schools or how the majority is engaged in official languages. The regulation has this asymmetry toward the protection of all OLM communities. Is the regulation a place for that? We can't really answer that. As it's currently written, it is leaning toward OLMC protection, so it probably wouldn't even fit.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: You have 30 seconds.

[*English*]

Giovanna Mingarelli: Thank you so much for your response.

[*Translation*]

My last question is for the witnesses from Droits collectifs Québec.

How do you think we can strike a balance between federal language rights and Quebec's Charter of the French Language?

The Chair: I would ask you to keep your answer brief, as you have 10 seconds left.

François Côté: Those are two separate questions.

It's the federal government's job to ensure compliance with its obligations under the Official Languages Act and to stop treating French in Quebec as undeserving of protection and funding. Let's not forget that French is in a minority situation within the Canadian federation.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Mingarelli.

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

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

My first question is for the witnesses from *Droits collectifs Québec*.

You said that there are sections in the new Official Languages Act that prescribe asymmetrical measures in favour of French in Quebec.

Can you tell us a bit more about those sections?

François Côté: Let's keep in mind that the Official Languages Act, following the amendments that were announced to the preamble and section 2, in particular, recognizes that French is in a minority situation in every Canadian province including Quebec.

The French language is dominant at the local level, which is entirely consistent with the principles established in the Ballantyne decision by the Human Rights Committee of the United Nations. However, at the federation level, Canada as a whole is the unit of measurement, and Quebec is indeed a minority on that scale.

In a way, the amendments to the Official Languages Act are, at least in theory, a consistent application of this finding. It's clear that Quebec, the French language and francophones in Quebec are indeed a linguistic minority in a Canada-wide context and must be treated as such. At the very least, that's the theory underpinning the act, and that's what is unfortunately lacking in the draft regulations. The act and the attendant draft regulations refer to the federal government's obligation to adopt positive measures to protect and promote French in all provinces, including Quebec.

Let me give you my legal opinion. In accordance with the statutory obligations and commitments set out in the Official Languages Act after section 41 was amended, the federal government is obligated to adopt measures that will have a concrete impact and to help increase the demographic weight of French in Quebec. It must also provide funding for culture, health, justice and education. Unfortunately, funding is still sorely lacking, and it is conspicuously absent from the proposed regulations.

If we're talking about asymmetrical federalism, that's one way of looking at it. We could also talk about the federal government's attempt at internal consistency in recognizing that French is in jeopardy across Canada, including in Quebec. It would be logical and legitimate to expect the government to act in a manner consistent with what it says.

Étienne-Alexis Boucher: I would just like to add to what my colleague said, sir.

After extensive research and access to information requests, it appears that there has been only one agreement between Quebec and Ottawa with respect to the Action Plan for Official Languages 2023-2028. The purpose of this plan is to implement legislative provisions of the Official Languages Act.

This agreement concerns the anglophone minority in Quebec. Of course, we know that English speakers in Quebec are in a minority situation. However, I would refer again to the Ballantyne case. Indeed, under international law, an anglophone is considered to be part of the majority language group wherever they are in Canada, be it Moncton, Vancouver, Montreal or Toronto.

Unfortunately, the government did not act on this. Perhaps inter-governmental negotiations are to blame. Nothing would have pre-

vented Canadian Heritage, for example, from setting up a program for civil society organizations that specialize in implementing initiatives to promote the French language, organizations like the *Société nationale des Québécoises et des Québécois d'Abitibi-Témiscamingue et du Nord-du-Québec*.

• (1610)

Mario Beaulieu: It's really strange because there are very specific sections stating that there must be measures for French in Quebec, but we haven't seen anything at all.

Consultations were held in connection with the Action Plan for Official Languages 2023-2028. I believe you participated, but only after considerable effort on your part.

Please tell us about your experience.

Étienne-Alexis Boucher: During those consultations, the only groups the minister reached out to at the time were groups representing English-speaking Quebecers. I'll reiterate that these people have language rights. I'm not disputing that. However, it is clear that, during the consultations, the Canadian government never demonstrated that it understood its obligations, regulatory or otherwise, which are to adopt meaningful policies that support French across Canada, including in Quebec, so it wasn't a very pleasant experience.

The Chair: You have 50 seconds left.

Mario Beaulieu: The act also prescribes consultations for the draft regulations.

Were you or representatives of groups that defend French or promote French in Quebec asked to take part in the consultations?

François Côté: Not as far as I know.

We get the impression that Quebec's francophone civil society simply wasn't invited to take part in the consultations. Both the act and the draft regulations fail to provide for mechanisms to identify stakeholders and their representation, which is problematic when it comes to reaching out to Quebec civil society and francophones in Quebec.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mario Beaulieu: Thank you. I'll come back to that.

The Chair: Colleagues, we're moving into the second round. Given that we have about 17 minutes left for this panel, I have to shorten the second round. The Conservatives and the Liberals will have three minutes per member. Mr. Beaulieu will have a minute and a half for his questions.

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

Jim Bélanger (Sudbury East—Manitoulin—Nickel Belt, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Ms. Chouinard, there have been many discussions about the importance of consulting stakeholders while developing these regulations.

In your opinion, was the consultation process rigorous enough?

Do you feel that the voices of francophone minority communities were heard in a meaningful way?

Stéphanie Chouinard: The consultation process did indeed take place, but the opinions of those communities were not taken into account.

I read several of the Treasury Board submissions that were sent in, and I would say that there were solutions. Treasury Board had them right there. I believe that a number of very interesting solutions were ignored and are not in the draft regulations.

Jim Bélanger: Do we have enough statistics and data for federal institutions to identify concrete, measurable targets?

Stéphanie Chouinard: We have some statistics, primarily from Statistics Canada. They're certainly helpful, but evidence-based data will be lacking. Statistics will depend on the objectives each agency and department sets for itself.

All positive measures should be evidence-based. As things stand, Statistics Canada doesn't have the means to provide all that data.

There would have to be a significant investment in research, both within the federal government and in academia—pardon the self-promotion—to get all the necessary data.

• (1615)

Jim Bélanger: Thank you.

[*English*]

To the organization Canadian Parents for French, you mentioned that we need to complete the work. How do we realize that practically?

Ahdithya Rajan P. Visweswaran: Canada's language policy has always been built on two objectives. Number one is the protection of minority language communities, and number two is promoting linguistic duality across Canada.

This goes back all the way to the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism. It has been about minority language education, for example, as well as second language learning.

[*Translation*]

This vision was then reflected in the Official Languages Act, the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms and a number of existing measures and instruments.

[*English*]

All of these instruments affirm the same principle: English and French have equal status, and they have to be promoted throughout the country, both for minorities and for the majority.

[*Translation*]

Jim Bélanger: I see problems arising with respect to substantive equality. I just read a report on health. The situation must be similar in some industries and various departments. There are a lot more people retiring than there are graduates with French skills.

What are your thoughts on that?

Ahdithya Rajan P. Visweswaran: Indeed—

The Chair: I'm sorry to interrupt, but time is up. Please be brief and give us a one-sentence answer.

Ahdithya Rajan P. Visweswaran: French immersion and everything that has to do with education in French and the Canadian anglophone and allophone majority must be seen as a pathway to the vitality of francophone minority communities, not as a side issue.

The Chair: Thank you.

Thank you, Mr. Bélanger.

I will now turn the floor over to Mr. Villeneuve for three minutes.

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

I want to start by reassuring my colleague, Mr. Godin. Everyone on this side wants the regulations to achieve their objectives. Actually, I'm firmly convinced that everyone around the table is working to make that happen.

Joël Godin: I'm very happy to hear that.

Louis Villeneuve: You don't know how pleased I am about it, Mr. Godin.

Ms. Chouinard, in your opinion, what are the limits of what a regulation can accomplish?

How can other policy tools, such as directives or guidelines, strengthen the application of part VII?

Do you have ideas about what those policy tools should include?

Stéphanie Chouinard: Thank you, Mr. Villeneuve.

A regulation is certainly not the end of the road. There are also directives. However, directives are below regulations in the hierarchy of legal standards, and they're much easier to amend.

The part VII regulations need to include clear obligations that make it possible, at the end of a process, to know whether the departments and agencies have done their job and whether they have really taken the priorities of stakeholders and communities into account.

It should also be possible to say whether the positive measures selected and implemented by the agencies and departments have an impact on the development and vitality of communities. There has to be the necessary data to demonstrate whether there has indeed been progress toward the established goal. That's what we're supposed to see.

There seems to be a desire here to restrict the regulations' content as much as possible so that, at the end of the day, departments and agencies keep the status quo compared to how things were before.

Louis Villeneuve: I'm sorry to cut you off. I don't have much time left, and I'd like to ask another witness a question.

Stéphanie Chouinard: Okay.

Louis Villeneuve: Mr. Bentley, the regulations emphasize the importance of consulting communities.

How could organizations like yours be better integrated into the process?

The Chair: There are 30 seconds left.

Derrek Bentley: Thank you.

We're basically proposing to clarify who the other stakeholders are. If that's left to interpretation, there's a risk of being completely forgotten. The request has to be very clear, namely, to include organizations like Canadian Parents for French.

To avoid quoting us directly, we propose terms in our brief. That way, groups that promote linguistic duality aren't forgotten.

• (1620)

Ahdithya Rajan P. Visweswaran: I would like to add a comment, Mr. Chair, if there's time.

The Chair: There are five seconds left.

Ahdithya Rajan P. Visweswaran: Okay.

I just want to say that we're also calling for a differentiated approach to consultation for linguistic duality organizations. We don't want to be drowned out by all the francophone or anglophone minority organizations.

Louis Villeneuve: Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you.

Thank you, Mr. Villeneuve.

I'm going to pass it over to Mr. Beaulieu for a minute and a half.

Mario Beaulieu: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would like to come back to the discussion we were having earlier.

Neither the action plan for official languages 2023-2028, nor the consultations for the draft regulations, nor the draft regulations themselves contain any measures to promote French in Quebec.

What does that tell us, particularly about all the statements from Liberal ministers saying that they're promoting French in Quebec?

François Côté: I would simply say that it's unfounded. Those statements that French is being promoted in Quebec aren't reflected in reality.

We have looked at the act, the action plan and the budget measures, and we can see that the actions don't match the words, that the measures being taken can't fulfill the promises being made. This is particularly problematic when it comes to promises about commitments and obligations that are now enshrined in legislation.

The Chair: There are 20 seconds left.

Mario Beaulieu: Thank you.

I will now turn to the representatives from Canadian Parents for French.

Do you receive any grants under the Official Languages Act? If so, is that enough?

Derrek Bentley: Yes, we do receive grants.

At the national level, four organizations work in the field of French as a second language, including ours. We have to do all the work. For example, we're here today. Tomorrow, we'll have to oversee a virtual tutoring project directly with youth.

Our challenge is that we not only have to do this part of the work, but also provide direct services. The money we receive isn't enough to help us manage all these files.

The Chair: Thank you.

I will now give the floor to Mr. Gill for three minutes.

[English]

Dalwinder Gill (Calgary McKnight, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I have a question for Madame Chouinard. The regulations require federal institutions to promote the inclusion of language provisions in agreements with the provinces and territories, but they do not set minimum standards for those provisions. Do you think clear requirements would improve accountability and collaboration between the provinces and the federal government?

[Translation]

Stéphanie Chouinard: As it stands right now, no.

The regulations will not improve the accountability of agencies and departments. This is one of the major concerns that many other stakeholders have talked about.

[English]

Dalwinder Gill: Mr. Côté, I have a question for you. Under the proposed regulations, institutions must consult relevant stakeholders but are not required to explain how the consultation's findings were taken into account. How do you think this affects transparency and accountability?

François Côté: It affects them quite negatively. Stakeholders must be clearly identified and allowed to speak out on their linguistic truths and how the financing and measures for the protection of official languages, especially French, affect them. They need to be listened to. They need to be taken into consideration, because ineffective consultation—allowing someone to speak but not listening to what the person has to say, not hearing the concerns they're trying to voice—is simply, in the best case, a waste of time.

Dalwinder Gill: Mr. Côté, based on your experience, do you believe the proposed regulations are likely to produce meaningful change, or are stronger accountability and transparency mechanisms needed?

François Côté: I believe, following your question, that in their current state, the proposed regulations will not effect measurable change because they lack clear objectives and clear directives on the scientific method to be employed and on measurement tools of such progress to be made. They are far too vague. I say this as a lawyer, as a research director and as an academic. They are simply too vague to be effective. There need to be much more precise measurement points, methodologies and objectives to be attained if the regulations are to accomplish anything.

• (1625)

Dalwinder Gill: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Gill.

[*Translation*]

I now give the floor to Mr. Deschênes-Thériault for three minutes.

Guillaume Deschênes-Thériault (Madawaska—Restigouche, Lib.): Thank you.

Ms. Chouinard, you said that the regulations should be much more explicit in defining what the act means by “strong institutions”. You’re the first witness to make this recommendation to us.

I’d like you to talk more about that. How do you see that?

How could we operationalize that in the regulations?

What might a recommendation from this committee look like in that regard?

Stéphanie Chouinard: Thank you for your question.

As I said at the end of my opening remarks, part I of the part IV regulations gives us some guidance on how to provide a definition without it actually being in the definitions section of the regulations.

When it comes to the term “strong institutions”, we would have to go back to the legislator’s intent. What was understood, at least in my opinion, is that this kind of institution is managed by, for and with the communities.

In fact, the Official Languages Act goes on to refer to institutions that are supported by the communities and that promote them. As things stand, that makes it quite difficult to see how this could be made operational. I think that deserves a lot of thought, but the regulations that are currently proposed say absolutely nothing about what these strong institutions are and how the federal government should continue to support and promote them.

There’s also a question that remains unanswered. In communities where such institutions don’t exist in the key areas mentioned in the same part of the act, should the federal government help create such institutions? The Université de l’Ontario français, or UOF, is an example that comes to mind. That’s a fairly recent example.

One question that occurred to me when I was reviewing the draft regulations was whether the regulations should also specify which institutions those are.

Guillaume Deschênes-Thériault: Thank you.

I will yield the last minute of my time to Ms. Chenette.

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

Ms. Chouinard, listening to you, I see that, since there are many departments in our government, you understand the challenge of the need to be very specific in the definitions and criteria. What I understand, then, is that it’s important to further clarify the processes to ensure that everyone can fulfill their commitments, rather than forcing them to meet criteria that wouldn’t be applicable everywhere.

Have I interpreted your analysis correctly?

The Chair: You have 30 seconds to answer the question, Ms. Chouinard.

Stéphanie Chouinard: Okay.

It’s necessary to not only have a clear process, but also fulfill commitments. That means it’s important to specify what the positive measures are, how those measures were decided on, and how to assess whether the objectives of those measures have ultimately been achieved.

Madeleine Chenette: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Chenette and Mr. Deschênes-Thériault.

On behalf of the committee, I would like to thank all the witnesses for their work, for attending this meeting and for their testimony.

Colleagues, I will now suspend the meeting for a few minutes so that we can go in camera and continue our work.

The meeting is suspended.

[*Proceedings continue in camera*]

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