



HOUSE OF COMMONS  
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES  
CANADA

45th PARLIAMENT, 1st SESSION

---

# Standing Committee on Official Languages

EVIDENCE

**NUMBER 034**

**PUBLIC PART ONLY - PARTIE PUBLIQUE SEULEMENT**

Thursday, May 7, 2026

---

Chair: Yvan Baker





## Standing Committee on Official Languages

Thursday, May 7, 2026

• (1535)

[Translation]

**The Chair (Yvan Baker (Etobicoke Centre, Lib.)):** Welcome to meeting number 34 of the Standing Committee on Official Languages. Pursuant to Standing Order 108(3)(f) and the motion adopted on April 21, we are meeting today to study the proposed regulations on the use of French in federally regulated private businesses.

I would now like to welcome our witnesses. As an individual, we welcome Gianluca Campofredano, lawyer. From the Acadian Society of New Brunswick, we have Nicole Arseneau-Sluyter, president, and Ali Chaisson, executive director, who is attending via video conference.

Each group will have five minutes to deliver an opening statement. We will then proceed to a question-and-answer period with the committee members.

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

**Gianluca Campofredano (lawyer, as an individual):** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I will introduce myself first.

I thank all the members of the Standing Committee on Official Languages for welcoming me today to give this testimony. My name is Gianluca Campofredano, I am a lawyer and I have been a member of the Barreau du Québec since late 2017. I co-founded the law firm Boavista Services juridiques in 2020, a multidisciplinary law firm in Montreal.

In 2022, my firm and I collaborated with Professor Guillaume Rousseau, a specialist in language law in Quebec, on a project funded by the Office québécois de la langue française. This mandate led us to produce guides, informational capsules, and educational materials on language law, published by the legal clinic of the Université de Sherbrooke, Clé de vos droits.

As part of this mandate, we also designed presentations and practical guides, and held several workshops on labour law and commercial law related to language law in Quebec. This assortment of content is accessible through the Centre d'accès à l'information juridique, the CAIJ, and the Société québécoise d'information juridique, the SOQUIJ. We have held these workshops for other audiences, including university students.

Lastly, we also helped with the update to the second edition of the book *Le droit linguistique au Québec* by Professor Guillaume Rousseau, particularly the chapter dealing with labour law and language at work.

In my professional practice, I popularize language law for the general public, and I continue to offer workshops on language law when requested by the CAIJ or SOQUIJ.

I have reviewed the proposed regulations on the use of French in federally regulated private businesses as well as the Use of French in Federally Regulated Private Businesses Act. Drawing on my expertise in the field, I would like to contribute to the discussion surrounding these regulations, particularly with respect to the integration of the protections offered by Bill 96, the new version of the Charter of the French Language in Quebec.

I am of the opinion that the protection and promotion of French require clear legislative intervention, particularly with regard to federally regulated businesses that have a significant presence in Quebec and employ a large number of workers. It is essential to regulate the language of work on two levels: first, in internal communications between employers and employees, and second, in external communications with the public, notably customer service and advertising, especially on social media.

In my opinion, any legislative intervention should be strictly inspired by the Charter of the French Language, as reinforced by Bill 96 in 2022, in order to respect its spirit and objectives. This approach would ensure legal consistency and prevent any legal uncertainty that could undermine the right to work and be served in French.

On the ground, we have seen an increasing use of English, particularly among young people and in downtown Montreal. Within our firm, at Boavista Services juridiques, we have chosen to work exclusively in French, both in our communications and in our online presence on social media, the Internet, and elsewhere, in order to actively help to promote the French language. The appeal of English remains very strong and, without concrete and structural measures, French is likely to continue declining, especially in Montreal. The federal government must therefore lead by example and align itself with the efforts made by the Quebec government; otherwise, there is a real risk of seeing two distinct language regimes coexist, which would further weaken the situation of the French language.

We support these regulations insofar as they ensure a level of protection equivalent to that provided by the Charter of the French Language. It would also be desirable to explicitly recognize the right to work in French as a fundamental language right, as provided for in article 4 of the Charter of the French Language.

• (1540)

Furthermore, unlike the general principles currently set out in the act and the proposed regulations, the Charter of the French Language provides concrete mechanisms regarding the language of work, particularly concerning recruitment, protection against linguistic discrimination and the regulation of language requirements related to employment—

**The Chair:** Mr. Campofredano, excuse me for interrupting, but your time is up. I would ask you to finish your statement. I am sure you will have the opportunity to share more information during the question period.

**Gianluca Campofredano:** Okay. I'm sorry, I didn't realize how much time had passed.

I will have time to talk about the rest, but I want to thank Professor Guillaume Rousseau and the members of the committee for their initiative. I especially thank member of Parliament Mario Beaulieu for his invitation. I also thank my colleagues Évan Boocaart and Sophia Toutant for their participation and for organizing this testimony.

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

I will now give the floor to Ms. Arseneau-Sluyter for five minutes.

**Nicole Arseneau-Sluyter (President, Acadian Society of New Brunswick):** Mr. Chair, members of the committee, I am an Acadian who has lived in Saint John, New Brunswick, for almost 40 years. It is a predominantly English-speaking city where living in French is never taken for granted. It is a conscious choice that we make every morning with pride and determination. I know this reality very well, having to defend my language in everyday actions and to seek services in French. It is on behalf of the many Acadians and francophones who make this same choice every day despite the challenges that I speak before you.

During the study of the former bill C-13, parliamentarians and stakeholders focused their efforts on part VII of the Official Languages Act, and rightly so. However, this bill also gave rise to a second act, the Use of French in Federally Regulated Private Businesses Act, or UFPBA, which can also concretely help to slow the decline of French in Canada.

For the Acadian Society of New Brunswick, or SANB, this act raised a fundamental question: How to interpret the expression “strong francophone presence” in the New Brunswick context. With the submission of the proposed regulations, the SANB welcomes the proposal to apply the UFPBA throughout all of New Brunswick. Moreover, this good news is in keeping with the very spirit of the act. The preamble of the UFPBA recognizes that “the Government of Canada is committed to protecting and promoting the French language, recognizing that French is in a minority situation in Canada and North America”.

New Brunswick is not like the other provinces. It is the only officially bilingual province in the country. This reality is explicitly recognized in subsection 16(2) and section 16.1 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. These sections guarantee the equal status of the two linguistic communities. Since 2023, the modernized Official Languages Act also recognizes this unique language

regime. This constitutional specificity is not a detail; it is the foundation on which all concrete action in favour of French in New Brunswick is based.

If this recognition remains symbolic, it will fail. It must trigger concrete actions that protect and strengthen this bilingualism. The demographic context is concerning. Rural exodus is hitting the province hard. Francophone communities in the north are losing residents, while the south, which is predominantly anglophone, is experiencing sustained growth.

In this context, applying the UFPBA across the entire province can produce two concrete results. First, it will promote the creation of well-paying jobs in French in francophone regions, thereby helping to retain populations where their roots run deep. It also guarantees access to French-language services throughout the province, including in predominantly anglophone regions, allowing francophones to live fully in their language on a daily basis. The SANB believes that these two results help contribute to reversing the demographic trend.

For francophones like me, this measure gives a glimmer of hope. The fact that my region could offer more services and jobs in French within federally regulated private businesses is a concrete step towards a better linguistic balance. It is in this context that Saint John becomes a symbol of what francophones experience as a minority. We are on the front lines of this daily battle. The sustainability of our language is declining in cities and workplaces, and acts like the UFPBA strengthen this sustainability, for which we at the SANB have been fighting for over 52 years.

It is with this in mind that I invite you to go further. Let's take concrete action that allows the Canadian francophonie not only to survive but to thrive, because it is not a constraint, it is an asset. It is a strength for all of Canada.

Thank you.

• (1545)

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Arseneau-Sluyter.

We'll now move on to the questions from the committee members.

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

**Joël Godin (Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, CPC):** Mr. Chair, before you start the clock, I would like to say that I proudly wear this item on my lapel to show my solidarity with you as chair, as well as with your people, on the occasion of the Ukrainian national holiday, the day of the—I will try to pronounce it correctly—*vyshyvanka*.

**The Chair:** That's perfect.

**Joël Godin:** To make sure everyone is on the same page, this celebration takes place on May 21, but unfortunately, we will not be at the House of Commons that day. That's why it was highlighted in the House. I wanted to take the time to mention it.

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

**Joël Godin:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Ms. Arseneau-Sluyter, thank you for participating in this exercise. Mr. Campofredano, thank you as well for your opening remarks.

I will first address the witnesses from the Acadian Society of New Brunswick.

Ms. Arseneau-Sluyter, after hearing your opening remarks, I understand that you are satisfied with the proposed regulations of the Use of French in Federally Regulated Private Businesses Act, or UFPBA. Are there any specific elements you would like to see added to strengthen, as you mentioned, the possibility for the French language to flourish throughout Canada?

I am asking you, Ms. Arseneau-Sluyter, but also Mr. Chaisson, who is with us remotely and whom I welcome.

**Nicole Arseneau-Sluyter:** We agree that there is still a lot of work to be done in New Brunswick, just like in my region in Saint John, for the province to become bilingual.

For us, it would be really great if all customer services could be offered to us in French everywhere in the province.

**Joël Godin:** You are talking about communication with consumers. Is that right?

**Nicole Arseneau-Sluyter:** Yes.

**Joël Godin:** Okay. It is an important element.

Mr. Chaisson and Ms. Arseneau-Sluyter, in paragraph 18(1)(b) and subsection 19(1) of the UFPBA, we can see that New Brunswick is subject to an exception: it is not required to disclose, among other things, information about the address of the places where consumers have access to its services.

How does this improve and enhance the influence of the French language in New Brunswick? Is it an advantage or a disadvantage?

**Ali Chaisson (Executive Director, Acadian Society of New Brunswick):** It should be beneficial.

In theory, the fact that a bank, for example, can offer services in French can only enhance the vitality of the community.

We know—I have experienced it—what it's like to be the designated francophone, the person one turns to in an emergency, or the one who has to chase after a francophone to make a will; we know what it is like to be the one desperately trying to be served in their language.

In this context, I think it could encourage new realities to emerge. What I mean is that we could step outside the framework of official languages—French, in our case here—and turn a burden into an opportunity.

For over 50 years, Canada has invested in bilingualism, in teaching French through immersion programs. We do all that. We lament students or graduates who, after 15 years in their profession, no longer speak the language they learned.

• (1550)

**Joël Godin:** Thank you, Mr. Chaisson. I understand that, for you, it's not a disadvantage. For my part, I believe it would be to everyone's advantage to require federally regulated businesses in your province to report this information. We are all filled with goodwill around the table, just like you are at the SANB. However, there are businesses that sometimes try to hide and not draw atten-

tion to themselves. I understand that you interpret it as being positive.

Unfortunately, I have other questions for you, but my speaking time is running out.

Mr. Campofredano, I am now going to ask you a question. In your opening remarks, you said you want both acts to be equivalent. In your opinion, after reading the two documents, are they?

**Gianluca Campofredano:** Obviously, the Charter of the French Language is concerned with promoting a single language, whereas the Use of French in Federally Regulated Private Businesses Act—

**Joël Godin:** Let's just stay within Quebec.

We had proposed that federally regulated businesses operating in the province of Quebec be subject to Quebec's Charter of the French Language. Unfortunately, we were unable to include it in the act due to the agreement that the Quebec government made with the federal Liberal government at the time.

Wouldn't it have been easier and more effective in Quebec to let the Charter of the French Language apply? We have the expertise in Quebec. We have just broadened certain criteria. We have just created more grey areas.

**The Chair:** I'm sorry to interrupt you, Mr. Godin. You have 10 seconds of speaking time left.

Mr. Campofredano, I'll ask you to quickly answer the question.

**Gianluca Campofredano:** Okay.

I fully agree with Mr. Godin's proposal in this respect, that is to say, that the Charter of the French Language is more comprehensive and has more bite. Moreover, there is expertise here in Quebec. So, yes, I agree with Mr. Godin's proposal.

**The Chair:** I now give the floor to Mr. Deschênes-Thériault for six minutes.

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

I will address the representatives of the Acadian Society of New Brunswick.

As you mentioned, the Use of French in Federally Regulated Private Businesses Act will apply throughout New Brunswick. As an Acadian from New Brunswick myself, I also share your enthusiasm about this excellent news.

I would like to hear your comments on this again: Why is it important for the act to apply throughout New Brunswick and not just in specific regions?

**Nicole Arseneau-Sluyter:** As you know, the more we speak English, the more we will speak English, and the more we speak French, the more we will speak French. In Saint John, it is really difficult to get services in French in businesses. It is difficult to see our children go to French school in a minority environment or to immersion school. When we go looking for services, the services are not there. We don't hear about them. This further contributes to the assimilation we are experiencing in New Brunswick.

As you know, the census is coming up. What is happening in New Brunswick is worrying. We will probably be less than 30% francophone.

In my opinion, this is a very positive measure to improve the situation and to slow down assimilation.

• (1555)

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

I would also like to hear your comments on another question: How will this act be a step forward in supporting the vitality of our francophone Acadian and Brayon communities in New Brunswick?

**Nicole Arseneau-Sluyter:** You want to know what this act will change for these communities. Is that right?

**Guillaume Deschênes-Thériault:** Yes.

How will this act support the vitality of our communities?

**Nicole Arseneau-Sluyter:** It is our communities that bring the francophonie to life and make it thrive in New Brunswick. So it must continue.

Several years ago, I worked for a bank, and all the documents were in English, like the mortgages and all that. That wasn't so long ago. I think that these documents are now translated into French. I haven't worked there for a long time. However, it is important that all these businesses in New Brunswick use both official languages, English and French.

**Guillaume Deschênes-Thériault:** We also see it in New Brunswick. With the exception of Quebec, which is a distinct case, for Canada outside Quebec, New Brunswick is the only province where the whole province is covered.

Can you tell us how New Brunswick stands out in terms of its language policy compared to other provinces? What sets New Brunswick apart?

**Nicole Arseneau-Sluyter:** We are equally divided when it comes to English and French, particularly when it comes to health at the provincial level.

If I go to the hospital or schools, we also have a linguistic duality that protects us, except in early childhood. So, we still have work to do.

**Guillaume Deschênes-Thériault:** The act will grant new rights to workers and consumers.

In your opinion, what additional tools or support measures would be necessary for Acadian workers and consumers to fully understand and exercise their rights under the Use of French in Federally Regulated Private Businesses Act?

I'd like to hear your comments first, Ms. Arseneau-Sluyter. I would ask Mr. Chaisson to add his comments afterwards.

**Nicole Arseneau-Sluyter:** We will need to do some promotion. We are so used to speaking English too easily. We are so close to being assimilated. I am certainly not talking about regions like Caraquet, but throughout the southern part of the province, it doesn't even occur to us to speak French. Really, I find that in New Brunswick, we are a society....

We are a bit discouraged. It's difficult to always make the effort and have everyone going the opposite way. It's almost embarrassing to ask to be served in French. I think the federal government will really have to do its homework and promote the fact that we have these rights and that we can use them.

**Guillaume Deschênes-Thériault:** Mr. Chaisson, do you want to add anything?

**Ali Chaisson:** I believe there is a course of action to take and that the federal government must put pressure on business activities across Canada to encourage banks, for example, to adopt processes that will not only ensure respect for languages in branches, but also implement a policy on signage. Having someone working at the counter who can serve is all well and good, but if no one knows that we have these rights, we haven't really accomplished anything.

I feel that the federal government must show leadership to implement these regulations. They must impose financial penalties when businesses do not fulfill their obligations.

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

In conclusion, Ms. Arseneau-Sluyter, we will need to make recommendations regarding these proposed regulations, but we can also recommend that they be adopted as is.

From what I understand, there would be a need to recommend measures to promote vitality, but as for the content of the proposed regulations themselves, do you recommend that they be adopted as is?

**Nicole Arseneau-Sluyter:** Yes.

**Guillaume Deschênes-Thériault:** You therefore recommend adopting these proposed regulations in their current version. Is that correct?

**Nicole Arseneau-Sluyter:** Yes, in New Brunswick's case.

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

In closing, Ms. Arseneau-Sluyter, I would like to point out that this is your last appearance as president of the SANB before the Standing Committee on Official Languages. Your term is coming to an end. I would like to take a moment to congratulate you and thank you for all the work you have done over the years to defend the rights and promote the interests of the Acadians of New Brunswick. Thank you very much.

• (1600)

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Deschênes-Thériault. I believe that, as you can see, all the committee members share your sentiment.

Thank you very much, Ms. Arseneau-Sluyter.

Before moving on to the next member, I have a small request to make of you, Mr. Chaisson. I don't think the sound from your microphone is loud enough. Could you lower it just a little? Yes, that's right. Perfect. The next time you speak, we will see if it works.

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

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

To complete the history that my colleague has provided, the Bloc Québécois has been working to ensure that Bill 101 applies to federally regulated businesses for at least two decades. Over the years, we have managed to gain the support of all opposition parties.

As Mr. Godin said, there were in fact negotiations with the government of Quebec, which probably feared that it would not pass. It then reached an agreement to bring the Official Languages Act and the Use of French in Federally Regulated Private Businesses Act closer to the Charter of the French Language. In the end, it was the NDP that joined the Liberals in voting against this.

We therefore have two language regimes in Quebec. The act is quite ambiguous, because the Commissioner of Official Languages has the authority to take action to ensure that the rights provided for in the act are acknowledged, but the minister is the one responsible for enforcing it. Furthermore, the regulations mention the minister, but they do not specify the role of the Commissioner of Official Languages at all.

Mr. Campofredano, do you have anything to add to that? In the end, aren't these regulatory measures ambiguous?

**Gianluca Campofredano:** Yes. What I can tell you about that is that the federal government promotes two languages, whereas in Quebec, the Charter of the French Language focuses on French. The essence of our message is to give a general reminder that Bill 101, the Charter of the French Language, has more bite. It provides more details, more specific articles on situations, for example, that involve the recruitment of staff, the knowledge of French when hiring a worker. There are also safeguards.

**Mario Beaulieu:** It wasn't loud enough, but the technicians are going to turn up the volume. It's not just for you. It is also for the other witness who is with us remotely.

**Gianluca Campofredano:** There are several safeguards. There are several penalties as well. This is something I have not seen in the Use of French in Federally Regulated Private Businesses Act or in the proposed regulations. There are several types of administrative and civil penalties that add bite to the Quebec act, but are not present in the federal act. It's part of our recommendations.

Also, in my introductory remarks, I wanted to mention that the federal government has a great deal of power for demonstration and protection. If the federal government took care of protecting the French language in Quebec, it would send a strong signal to speakers, workers, and people in Quebec that protecting the French language is not just an internal mission and that it is truly promoted by the Canadian federal state.

I think there is a lot of work to be done. Furthermore, in certain fields, including the telecommunications sector and the banking sector—

**Mario Beaulieu:** Excuse me for interrupting, but our time is limited.

The commissioner's work requires a lot of resources. I think that the Office québécois de la langue française has over a hundred employees. However, the commissioner will not necessarily have additional resources to take on this role. So we will see. Moreover, she cannot use her new power to impose financial penalties. She has the power to make orders, but not assess penalties. We don't really know how it will turn out. A case could possibly go to the Canada Industrial Relations Board, and there could be penalties. However, it seems much less effective than the Charter of the French Language. We will see.

Currently, it is said that about 40% of federally regulated businesses are not registered under the Charter of the French Language. These businesses will eventually be automatically registered under the Use of French in Federally Regulated Private Businesses Act. It is certain that many federally regulated businesses would rather subject themselves to federal law. Those subject to Bill 101 and who have difficulties complying with it can simply transfer their obligation to the federal side. As I understand it, it is the Minister of Canadian Heritage who can authorize a business to be subject to Bill 101. In fact, federal law states that he can enter into an agreement. So we'll see the result.

For you, should the proposed regulations be much more comprehensive to define the role of the Commissioner of Official Languages?

• (1605)

**The Chair:** Mr. Beaulieu, I'm sorry, but there are only 10 seconds left.

Mr. Campofredano, I am asking you once again for a very quick response.

**Gianluca Campofredano:** Absolutely.

In Quebec, there is the Office québécois de la langue française, but there are also other agencies, such as the Commission des normes, de l'équité, de la santé et de la sécurité du travail, which are responsible for applying or enforcing Bill 101. I think there should be a few more resources at the federal level, especially for the commissioner.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Thank you, Mr. Beaulieu.

Some colleagues asked for the volume to be turned up. Our technicians have already turned the volume up to the maximum. There are two potential solutions. First, you can use headphones to amplify the sound. That helps a bit. That's one suggestion. Second, we can ask witnesses participating by video conference to speak a little louder. Those are the two possible solutions.

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

**Joël Godin:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Campofredano, first of all, I would like you to give me your analysis of the criteria that have been established concerning regions with a strong francophone presence. Those are very quantitative criteria. I am not sure that was the intention when we, the legislators, wrote the act. Part IV of the Official Languages Act deals with more qualitative criteria. I believe that francophones should be counted not only in terms of quantity, but also in quality.

Could broadening the criteria be a direction worth exploring? High-density regions are few in number. I am disappointed with the covered area, so I am looking for a way to broaden the criteria. I see my colleague from Nova Scotia on the screen. He gave a very good speech on Tuesday about the fact that Halifax is not even a region with a strong francophone presence.

**Gianluca Campofredano:** Mr. Godin, I don't have many specific comments for you on that point. As you requested, how are we going to assess the francophone presence? Are we going to base it on the language spoken at work, the language spoken at home, or the heritage language? I must admit that this is a criterion that is not really used in Quebec or in Quebec language law, because the Charter of the French Language applies to the entire province.

**Joël Godin:** I understand that this is less within your area of expertise because it is outside Quebec, but I am going to ask you a question.

You are a lawyer. If we add complications to define zones, we make the task more difficult. Sometimes, the intention behind all this is to muddy the waters.

Wouldn't it be better to draw inspiration from the criteria in part IV to broaden the definition? I would add that it might be more effective, instead of defining two groups, to use only one, that of the bilingual regions in Canada. With that, we would add a larger number of areas. I think it would really demonstrate the government's intention to stop the decline of French and to promote the development of both official languages.

• (1610)

**Gianluca Campofredano:** Yes, absolutely. I agree with that. I would say that we could move towards bilingual regions. Eventually, should this act even protect francophones who are in very anglophone cities across the country or who are in regions where the francophone presence is weaker? It's clear that if we go by logic, there should be equal treatment. That would be something to look into.

**Joël Godin:** Another point is that there are French schools located in areas that are not covered, which is absurd. Something isn't working here.

You told my colleague earlier that you had a recommendation for us regarding administrative penalties. Can you tell us a little more about that?

**Gianluca Campofredano:** Yes. The new version of the Charter of the French Language, amended by Bill 96 in 2022, provides for potential penalties, which could be included in the proposed federal regulations. For example, when a business loses its francization certificate in Quebec, one of the possible penalties is that it will no longer receive government grants, no longer be eligible for government programs and will no longer have access to certain public

contracts. In my opinion, these penalties are interesting and add some bite. I believe the proposed regulations could draw some strong inspiration from them.

**Joël Godin:** I think that's a good suggestion. Rest assured that I will try to include it in the report that the committee will provide, because I believe we need tools at our disposal. There needs to be more bite—I'm borrowing your expression. I think we would be well advised to do it, but we need to clearly demonstrate that we want to improve things.

What I feel about these regulations is that they are half-hearted. We try to please everyone, then we forget the primary cause, which is to protect francophone consumers by allowing them to access services in their language and to enable employees to work in a francophone environment.

Mr. Chair, I see that my time is up. Thank you very much.

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

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

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

Thank you to our witnesses.

Ms. Arseneau-Sluyter, I congratulate you on your contribution.

I understand the struggle in recent years. However, I will start by asking this: Don't we have incredible opportunities ahead of us now? French is the fourth most spoken language in the world. Now, it is in fact the fourth language on the internet. In the world, a large generation of young people will speak French, whereas we had to fight in the past. This fact has real global legitimacy.

At the same time, all across our beautiful Canada, there is a paradigm shift, and we must work from east to west and in the north thanks to the Official Languages Act. It is said to be an important asset, but now it must be applied so we can take advantage of it in our economic development. While we may have scars from the past, I believe there are opportunities arising.

My first question about that is for you, Mr. Campofredano.

We talk about Quebec, but wouldn't the fact that the Use of French in Federally Regulated Private Businesses Act applies throughout Canada, and that many businesses offer services only in the rest of Canada, be an advantage? Would the pressure exerted on the banking system, telecommunications sector and other sectors exerted across Canada—therefore not only operating in Quebec because there are business opportunities—not be a strength of the act for Quebec?

• (1615)

**Gianluca Campofredano:** Yes, obviously. As I have already mentioned to your colleagues, I believe the will is there, and it is a good sign that the federal government is taking action in this direction, even if it is to some degree following the same path as the Quebec government and legislators.

As I mentioned in my introduction, my office is located in downtown Montreal, in Old Montreal, so it is obvious that when I deal with chartered banks, the presence of English is very strong in terms of documentation and service. I think it would send a very strong signal.

If you have any questions about business communication and advertising on social media, I will come back to it. It is obvious that English has a very strong appeal and that this appeal goes beyond the Montreal area, because the internet obviously has no borders. I would say that if this new legislation could have an impact on private businesses in Quebec, especially in Montreal and Laval, where there is work to be done, and especially on the young people of generation Z and the upcoming generation alpha, it would be very beneficial.

**Madeleine Chenette:** I will continue on the topic of youth. Once again, we are in the midst of a paradigm shift regarding the pride of expressing ourselves in French without fear or reproach, and no longer feeling embarrassed to speak it, especially in a bilingual environment.

I turn to you, Ms. Arseneau-Sluyter.

You agree with these regulations, so I will talk about their implementation. If, in your province, but also in the rest of Canada, we want to promote the idea that they are a catalyst and that we do not kneel down for the regulations to be enforced, this attitude needs to change. The Liberal government of Canada is very sensitive to the idea of having this strength at the table. I am sure that our colleagues across the way agree on that as well.

What is important to do when implementing these regulations to harness this strength and ensure it reaches the young people, who will benefit from these jobs?

**Nicole Arseneau-Sluyter:** I'll give you an example of this. My daughter, who graduated in 2012 from the only French-language school in Saint John, tells me that today, there are maybe five students out of the 30 in her class who still speak French. They are said to be bilingual, but after finishing school, children and youth in immersion programs do not have the opportunity to work in French and use the language.

In this case, we know what happens: The less we speak the language, the less capable we are of doing so, and the less confident we become. Here in Ottawa, one of my nephews always speaks English when I see him, even though, like me, his mother is a francophone Acadian from Balmoral.

**Madeleine Chenette:** If I may, we do in fact know that we need to change that. The Use of French in Federally Regulated Private Businesses Act aims to create jobs and foster that pride.

So if we want to speed up the implementation of these regulations to rekindle the desire to speak French, do you have any ideas so that—

**The Chair:** I'm sorry to interrupt you, Ms. Chenette.

Time is up, so I will ask you for a quick answer, Ms. Arseneau-Sluyter.

**Nicole Arseneau-Sluyter:** The means to educate young people in French at the post-secondary level is necessary, so that they can

express themselves properly, especially in majority environments. You need to have the means everywhere in Canada. We know that it is a problem in terms of resources for French, so we will need to invest in that in order to improve.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Thank you very much, Ms. Chenette.

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

**Mario Beaulieu:** Ms. Arseneau-Sluyter, what is strange is that in Quebec, the Use of French in Federally Regulated Private Businesses Act, the UFPBA, applies to businesses with 25 employees or more, and the obligation to have a francization committee only applies to businesses with 100 employees or more; whereas outside Quebec, notably in New Brunswick, the act applies only to businesses with 100 employees or more.

Don't you think it would have been good for the act to apply at least to companies with 50 employees or more? I don't know how many there are.

• (1620)

**Nicole Arseneau-Sluyter:** I think we have to start somewhere. We would certainly like all employees to be able to serve in both English and French in New Brunswick. There are laws that protect us, but sometimes we need to keep pushing to make sure they truly protect us.

I think we have to start somewhere, and that's already a plus for us. We see this as a positive means.

**Mario Beaulieu:** I have a question for you, Mr. Chaisson: Do you have an idea of the number of businesses with fewer than 100 employees that will not be subject to the UFPBA?

**Ali Chaisson:** That's a fairly substantial number.

However, I am more concerned about the possible inconsistency between part IV of the Official Languages Act and the UFPBA, particularly in a situation that your colleague Mr. Godin mentioned. There may be a situation where young people from a school located in a region can apply for their passports in French down the road, because there is a federal institution nearby, but cannot open a bank account.

We will clearly see the inconsistency, and I wish the Commissioner of Official Languages good luck in managing this.

**Mario Beaulieu:** However, in New Brunswick, the UFPBA applies to the entire province. Elsewhere in Quebec, the application of the act is determined by the potential demand indicator, which designates bilingual regions. This would need to be checked, but if it doesn't include bilingual regions, that would be a bit surprising.

**Ali Chaisson:** It is still a question of section 23 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, which deals with justification by numbers. For us francophones, the defenders of the French language, if one francophone is involved, that justifies the request.

At some point, I feel that we need to seriously consider addressing the issue of the possible inconsistency in the province between part IV of the Official Languages Act and the interpretation of these new regulations. That could cause problems.

**The Chair:** 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'm going to continue in the same vein as my colleague Ms. Chénette.

I find that New Brunswick is very similar to my region in northern Ontario, especially in the eastern part. I wonder whether this new act, which is supposed to protect and promote the French language, will create an environment that will help the language grow or just an environment to serve the francophones in these regions. In my riding, it is clear that French is in decline in the regions that are currently affected. If French is in decline in regions designated as having a strong francophone presence, what will happen when they are no longer designated as having a strong francophone presence?

I have a second question. Promoting French is also a responsibility that falls to francophones. I myself am guilty. To learn French well, you need to live, speak and work in French. However, assimilation is far too easy. I'll give the example of a bank, which is supposed to serve us in both official languages. If I go to the counter and ask for help in French, they tell me they will find someone else. It's easier for me to just speak in English. Even a businessman who uses his phone will speak in English rather than in French.

Is that enough? Is there anything else the government should do? It's about the environment. I'm not very optimistic, so I ask the question.

**Nicole Arseneau-Sluyter:** We need to start with the basics. We need to start with our grandchildren. That's where it starts. We need to have schools. In New Brunswick, French-language schools are not yet everywhere in the province.

What you're saying is true. I am probably guilty myself. We are tired of always asking for service. However, when we start to see results from promoting French, I think it will create a domino effect. It's been so long that we've thought it doesn't exist, so we're going to have to do a lot of work on the foundation.

It is true that internationally, French is really an asset compared to what we are experiencing now, in Canada and elsewhere. We really need to invest, starting with our grandchildren, by ensuring they can attend school in French. I could talk to you about assimilation all night. It takes just one generation. I live it and see it every day.

• (1625)

**Jim Bélanger:** Assimilation will continue as long as there is no post-secondary education in French to ensure that more people can enter the job market in French. Next, the presence of people who speak French in management to continue the efforts will depend on private businesses.

I have another question. Since 2021 and Bill C-32, we're talking about pretty much the same subject. In 2023, there was

Bill C-13, and today, we are still talking about it, so there hasn't been much progress all this time.

We ask ourselves all these questions. I am trying to address the issue of the environment. The UFPBA will be imposed in the rest of Canada in just two years, after it is implemented in Quebec. Now I wonder if in two years, private businesses will be able to use artificial intelligence instead of people to comply with the acts. I'm wondering about your comments on that.

**Nicole Arseneau-Sluyter:** I agree with you: There are certainly some concerns.

There's a lot of work to be done. We've been doing it for a long time, and we need to keep doing it and not give up. However, the federal government has investments to make in order to improve the situation, put things in place and impose consequences on those businesses.

**Jim Bélanger:** Do you think that we francophones can do things to improve the situation and use the tools given to us?

**Nicole Arseneau-Sluyter:** I'll give you an example of this. In Saint John, municipal elections will be held on May 11. I asked a candidate for mayor why she didn't have any posters in French. She told me that it didn't even occur to her to make any. Then, she went to make her posters in French and put them all over the city. This is a first in the history of Saint John.

Yes, as francophones, it is our responsibility to ask for things and to know our rights. This is what we at the SANB have been doing for 52 years, and we will continue to do so.

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

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

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

I thank all the witnesses for being here today.

Mr. Campofredano, in your opinion, does the federal government have full jurisdiction to impose language obligations on federally regulated private businesses without encroaching on provincial jurisdiction?

**Gianluca Campofredano:** I believe this is an area that was not specifically covered in the division of powers under the Constitution of 1867. It is debated, but it does not seem to me that the courts have ruled on this constitutional issue.

However, I can tell you that the Canada Labour Code applies to labour relations in federally regulated private businesses. Along the same lines, we could say that the federal government has jurisdiction over official languages. I think it's a jurisdiction that can be shared. I am highlighting the work you are doing through these proposed regulations.

To answer your question, I believe the federal government can also legislate in this area.

• (1630)

**Giovanna Mingarelli:** My second question is as follows: Can the UFPBA strengthen Canadian federalism on the linguistic front or does it open the door to future legal tensions between Ottawa and Quebec?

**Gianluca Campofredano:** There are certainly different notions or visions of federalism. There can be a more centralizing notion, but also a notion that, historically, there is independence from the federal system, and there may be less encroachment. This refers to a more traditional notion of federalism.

Could the UFPBA be beneficial or not to Canadian federalism? If we start from the premise that there are two official languages in Canada, and that these two languages can be protected in the same way—although the UFPBA concerns French more—I do not think that the UFPBA and the promotion of the use of French in federally regulated private businesses would be negative or have a negative influence on Canadian federalism. I even think it will create a balance, because, as I mentioned earlier, the appeal of English is naturally quite strong, given the number of speakers. In my opinion, it will not cause problems for federalism.

**Giovanna Mingarelli:** Thank you.

I have one minute left and a question for you, Ms. Arseneau-Sluyter: How can the government ensure that the benefits of the act are fairly distributed among the various Acadian regions, including the most rural ones?

**Nicole Arseneau-Sluyter:** Can you repeat the question? I'm not sure I understood.

**Giovanna Mingarelli:** How can the federal government ensure that the benefits of the act are fairly distributed among the various Acadian regions, including the most rural ones?

**Nicole Arseneau-Sluyter:** The act will apply to businesses everywhere, but, as I said in my speech, the rural areas of New Brunswick are emptying out. The rural regions of the north are Acadian regions. This means that if we have this act to encourage people to work in their language and stay close to home, it's a plus for everyone.

For English-speaking regions, it would also be a plus to have bilingual businesses to do business internationally, particularly in Africa, Europe or Asia.

In my opinion, it would be a win-win for everyone.

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

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

On behalf of the committee, I would like to thank all the witnesses for being here with us.

Ms. Arseneau-Sluyter, once again, on behalf of the committee, I thank you for your work over all these years. We hope to see you again from time to time. Thank you very much.

I also thank all the witnesses.

Now, colleagues, the next hour of the meeting is dedicated to in camera work, so I will suspend the session. We will resume in camera.

I am suspending the session.

*[Proceedings continue in camera]*

---





Published under the authority of the Speaker of  
the House of Commons

---

### SPEAKER'S PERMISSION

---

The proceedings of the House of Commons and its committees are hereby made available to provide greater public access. The parliamentary privilege of the House of Commons to control the publication and broadcast of the proceedings of the House of Commons and its committees is nonetheless reserved. All copyrights therein are also reserved.

Reproduction of the proceedings of the House of Commons and its committees, in whole or in part and in any medium, is hereby permitted provided that the reproduction is accurate and is not presented as official. This permission does not extend to reproduction, distribution or use for commercial purpose of financial gain. Reproduction or use outside this permission or without authorization may be treated as copyright infringement in accordance with the Copyright Act. Authorization may be obtained on written application to the Office of the Speaker of the House of Commons.

Reproduction in accordance with this permission does not constitute publication under the authority of the House of Commons. The absolute privilege that applies to the proceedings of the House of Commons does not extend to these permitted reproductions. Where a reproduction includes briefs to a committee of the House of Commons, authorization for reproduction may be required from the authors in accordance with the Copyright Act.

Nothing in this permission abrogates or derogates from the privileges, powers, immunities and rights of the House of Commons and its committees. For greater certainty, this permission does not affect the prohibition against impeaching or questioning the proceedings of the House of Commons in courts or otherwise. The House of Commons retains the right and privilege to find users in contempt of Parliament if a reproduction or use is not in accordance with this permission.

---

Also available on the House of Commons website at the following address: <https://www.ourcommons.ca>

Publié en conformité de l'autorité  
du Président de la Chambre des communes

---

### PERMISSION DU PRÉSIDENT

---

Les délibérations de la Chambre des communes et de ses comités sont mises à la disposition du public pour mieux le renseigner. La Chambre conserve néanmoins son privilège parlementaire de contrôler la publication et la diffusion des délibérations et elle possède tous les droits d'auteur sur celles-ci.

Il est permis de reproduire les délibérations de la Chambre et de ses comités, en tout ou en partie, sur n'importe quel support, pourvu que la reproduction soit exacte et qu'elle ne soit pas présentée comme version officielle. Il n'est toutefois pas permis de reproduire, de distribuer ou d'utiliser les délibérations à des fins commerciales visant la réalisation d'un profit financier. Toute reproduction ou utilisation non permise ou non formellement autorisée peut être considérée comme une violation du droit d'auteur aux termes de la Loi sur le droit d'auteur. Une autorisation formelle peut être obtenue sur présentation d'une demande écrite au Bureau du Président de la Chambre des communes.

La reproduction conforme à la présente permission ne constitue pas une publication sous l'autorité de la Chambre. Le privilège absolu qui s'applique aux délibérations de la Chambre ne s'étend pas aux reproductions permises. Lorsqu'une reproduction comprend des mémoires présentés à un comité de la Chambre, il peut être nécessaire d'obtenir de leurs auteurs l'autorisation de les reproduire, conformément à la Loi sur le droit d'auteur.

La présente permission ne porte pas atteinte aux privilèges, pouvoirs, immunités et droits de la Chambre et de ses comités. Il est entendu que cette permission ne touche pas l'interdiction de contester ou de mettre en cause les délibérations de la Chambre devant les tribunaux ou autrement. La Chambre conserve le droit et le privilège de déclarer l'utilisateur coupable d'outrage au Parlement lorsque la reproduction ou l'utilisation n'est pas conforme à la présente permission.

---

Aussi disponible sur le site Web de la Chambre des communes à l'adresse suivante :  
<https://www.noscommunes.ca>