

Letter to La Liberté

OLA: Modernizing the regulations while awaiting legislation

Many of us applauded last November's announcement by the President of the Treasury Board, the Honourable Scott Brison, of the imminent and comprehensive review of the official languages regulations. By inviting retired senator Maria Chaput to be present when he made this announcement and imposing a moratorium on the loss of the bilingual designation of any federal office, Minister Brison made it clear where he stood: the new official languages regulations will respect the principles of Bill S-209, which was introduced by former senator Chaput. I am now the sponsor of the bill.

Bill S-209 will amend the *Official Languages Act* with respect to the regulations, the offer of services, the rights of the travelling public, and consultation, but will not be passed anytime soon. The bill is not dead but on hold.

The good news is that, by all accounts, the new official languages regulations will be ready in time for the next census.

At this time, we do not know whether they will fulfil the expectations expressed by official language minority communities and if these regulations will finally make institutional vitality the priority rather than systematically curtailing the size of our communities.

For the time being, the signs are encouraging. The Treasury Board Secretariat is holding consultations with many organizations and stakeholders. Minister Brison has appointed an experts' advisory group to provide feedback and recommendations to the minister. Senator Claudette Tardif, Graham Fraser, Mireill Cyr, and I are members of this group and will work independently in the coming months to ensure that the objectives of this review remain top of mind.

The government has made a decision and must honour its commitments. The first version of the new regulations will not be tabled in Parliament until fall 2018. We will be ready to respond.

In the meantime, the Standing Senate Committee on Official Languages has launched a comprehensive study on the need to modernize the *Official Languages Act*. As 2019 will mark the 50th anniversary of the Act, now is the time to take action.

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