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Standing Senate Committee on Official Languages – Study on Canadians’
views about modernizing the Official Languages Act

Appearance by the
Fédération de la jeunesse canadienne-française (FJCF)

The Views of Young Canadians

The sociolinguistic background and the vitality of francophone minority communities

The challenges of second-language learning

Promoting both official languages

Bilingualism and prospects for employment

Ottawa, May 1, 2017

About the Fédération de la jeunesse canadienne-française (FJCF)

The Fédération de la jeunesse canadienne-française is a national organization by and for young Canadians. Our organization was founded in 1974 and is made up of 11 youth member associations from nine provinces and two territories. We work to foster the socio-cultural development and identity of French-speaking Canadians between the ages of 14 and 25. We do so through activities, Canada-wide events and youth employment programs.

Last year, the FJCF conducted two surveys to find out how young Canadians see certain issues. The first survey was conducted by Doyon+Dupuis as part of the work to review the strategic plan. The second survey was conducted internally by the FJCF, specifically in preparation for this appearance. This document was inspired by the statistics and the comments of young Canadians. Some data are provided in appendices to this document. Please consult the attached document entitled *Analysis of the Survey Responses of young French-speaking Canadians*.

The FJCF position

As the study on Canadians' views about modernizing the Official Languages Act gets under way, the FJCF would like to provide the Standing Senate Committee on Official Languages with the priorities expressed by our members. First and foremost, they expressed the desire for all federal institutions to recognize that it is important to champion and value both official languages across the entire country. They also express the desire for the Official Languages Act to adequately address the current issues that are important to them, such as francophone minority communities, employability, education and second-language learning, linguistic security, and promoting linguistic duality.

The FJCF has a presence across the entire country through its provincial and territorial members that work with young French-speaking Canadians. It espouses the principle of BY and FOR youth, involving them as much as possible in its decisions and its positions. In 2015, therefore, after major consultations, FJCF members focused on modernizing the Official Languages Act as a major plank in their BY and FOR youth platform, which was then shared with the leadership of the main political parties before the most recent federal election.

Given that the Official Languages Act (OLA) has served as the blueprint for the protection of official language minority communities (OLMCs) in Canada since 1969, it is a source of pride

for many Canadians. The OLA is particularly significant for Canada's francophones, who are often faced with obstacles in having their rights respected. In the opinion of the FJCF,

modernizing it and fully enforcing it are priorities because, for the francophonie to reach its full potential, including the potential of its youth, its rights must be fully respected.

Young Canadians are looking for a francophonie in Canada in which their identity is defined, not by opposition and exclusion, but by openness and diversity. That is why the FJCF wholeheartedly supports any attempts to modernize the OLA that involves the idea of communications and services of equal quality, to improve the tests that determine whether there is significant demand, and to clarify the provisions for prior consultation in the application of Part IV of the OLA. We believe that it is vital for the Government of Canada to review the definition of a francophone in order to achieve a more inclusive definition of the francophonie, as the Government of Ontario has already done.¹

THE SOCIOLINGUISTIC BACKGROUND AND THE VITALITY OF FRANCOPHONE MINORITY COMMUNITIES

According to Statistics Canada's 2011 census, about 7 million Canadians stated that they speak French most often at home in 2011, compared to 6.7 million in 2006.² Many young people, however, identify themselves as francophones, given their attachment to French language and culture, but, for various reasons, do not use French most often at home. Likewise, the statistics do not account for the number of young, and not-so-young, francophiles who would like to expand their knowledge and use of French in their communities and who are active participants in the vitality of francophone minority communities. That is why we believe that, in order to achieve better sociolinguistic representation for francophones in minority situations, it would be preferable not to limit ourselves to the "first official language spoken" formula in order to determine the size of the official language minority community.

The vitality of francophone minority communities should not simply be defined by their size. The vitality of francophone minority communities undeniably has much to do with the commitment of its members. Although young people all across the country are increasingly mobilized and playing an increasing role in the civic life of their communities, youth organizations are undergoing undue pressure and experiencing numerous difficulties that are

¹ Government of Ontario: Inclusive Definition of Francophone, <http://csfontario.ca/en/rapports/ra1516/30-ans-de-la-loi/dif>

² Statistics Canada: 2011 Census, http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2011/as-sa/98-314-x/98-314-x2011003_1-eng.cfm

threatening their stability and the continuity of their operations and growth. Like all their counterpart associations in all sectors of the Canadian francophonie, organizations that bring

together and mobilize young francophones have seen their funding stagnate for more than a decade. They tell us about major deficiencies in employment possibilities, both in French and in their communities, and greater challenges in gaining access to post-secondary studies in French all over the country. Maintaining these sources of French-language socialization meetings and activities is even more important when we consider that, when surveyed, more than 30%ⁱ of French-speaking youth indicated some degree of difficulty in living in French in their own regions.

“The best opportunity to live in French where I live is to participate in school events and events like the Jeux de l’Acadie or the provincial youth council.”ⁱⁱ

According to a short survey of young people in the francophone network in April 2017, and according to the experience of our member organizations, we see that participating in provincial or national gatherings of francophone and francophile youth organizations, is, after their schools, the best way for young people to live in French, to develop links with other young French-speakers, and to develop their affiliation with the other official language and with francophone culture. These occasions to socialize in French are also, in their view, one of the main keys to developing a sense of belonging to francophone culture. *“Although my family helped me to develop my affinity for francophone culture to some degree, the time spent with youth organizations was really when I was able to find my place.”ⁱⁱⁱ*

As a result, the FJCF believes that it is imperative to establish the vitality of francophone minority communities as a priority. This is especially so in order to strengthen the capacity of organizations working to develop the potential of youth and to organize events and activities that bring young French-speakers together in the same place and at the same time, thereby making their own communities more dynamic. In our view, this is one of the ways in which to successfully ensure the survival of the French language everywhere in Canada.

THE CHALLENGES OF SECOND-LANGUAGE LEARNING

In education, the most widely-held opinion among the young survey respondents is the importance of greater access to studies in French and to French-language courses across the entire country. This is as true for francophones as for francophiles whose first language is not French. For them, the notion of bilingualism should be an automatic, integral part of the school curriculum from the very outset, in order to develop a feeling of affiliation and commitment to the values of bilingualism and linguistic duality at a very early age. Since an

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attachment to the French language comes principally from an attachment to French culture, young respondents believe that the culture should also be taught as part of French courses in order to develop that attachment among those speaking the language.

For young francophones in minority situations, learning the second official language, English in their case, comes almost naturally. They often say that they learn French, but they catch English.

One comment that our members frequently make about the challenges in their communities that prevent them from living completely in French is the lack of a range of French-language post-secondary institutions and programs. Specifically, 32.5%ⁱⁱ of the young French-speaking Canadians responding tell us that they have difficulty accessing quality post-secondary education in French in the areas and programs that interest them. Education is one of the pillars of self-actualization, through which young people acquire their history and identity as Canadians. Schools are therefore the ideal places for them to discover and understand the nature of the francophonie. It is troubling to find that almost one in threeⁱⁱ has either to pursue post-secondary education in a language not of their choosing or to leave their own areas to find their preferred course of study in French.

PROMOTING BOTH OFFICIAL LANGUAGES

Valuing accents and official languages

As the face of the francophonie changes in Canada, the FJCF notes that many Canadians, including young francophones, do not feel comfortable speaking French for various reasons. Some believe that they are not good enough, that they will be judged or that their accent is worse than in other regions or in the media. As a result, many young people prefer to use English, although they are able to communicate in French. This feeling of intimidation or insecurity about language proficiency can be observed across the country, affecting all age groups. The FJCF believes that differences in expression should not be an obstacle to the affirmation of the French language and that the francophonie should be celebrated in all its forms.

Canada is a vast country where distance isolates francophone communities from each other. It is not surprising that a francophone from Nova Scotia has never heard the accent of a francophone from British Columbia, as several thousand kilometers separate them. Young francophones want to break down the barriers of distance to discover the other linguistic realities of their country and build bridges with them. Each region may have its linguistic features, but each feature can become a source of richness and pride. They just need to be discovered and showcased.

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Canada is a bilingual country. However, the promotion of the two official languages is sometimes less than ideal. In our opinion, our country's linguistic duality is one of its greatest

assets. Young people believe that the Government of Canada should actively promote this duality as a cultural and economic benefit.

Promoting the official languages and linguistic duality

At 91.3%ⁱ, almost all of the young francophones and francophiles surveyed over the last year recognize bilingualism as a very important component of Canadian identity and as the very foundation of Canadian culture. However, they note a failure to promote and value bilingualism in Canada, but more importantly, they note a nation-wide failure to recognize and take pride in our linguistic duality.

In addition to the direct promotion of official languages, one aspect raised by young people is the lack of linguistic diversity and the lack of original French-Canadian content in the media, be it on the radio, on television or on the web. Attachment to francophone culture first requires access to that culture and the distribution of content produced by and for the francophonie across the country. The diversity of dialects and the multitude of accents from the various Canadian regions are often missing from the media. Canada's French is much more than the French spoken and heard in Quebec. It is important that francophones from across Canada see, hear and recognize themselves in the media across the country.

To educate Canadians about the importance of respecting linguistic diversity, of celebrating linguistic duality in Canada, of promoting regional accents, and of bringing together the country's linguistic communities, it was recommended that the Government of Canada launch a nation-wide awareness campaign to promote Canada's official languages and linguistic duality in order to ensure that Canada's various francophone accents are known and valued, and to build bridges between the country's linguistic communities.

In addition, significant investments in the creation of digital content in French are in order. In today's information age, content must be created and distributed quickly to reach a wide audience. We want to equip young francophones across the country to help create this content in French.

BILINGUALISM AND PROSPECTS FOR EMPLOYMENT

When surveyed by the FJCF, young francophones surveyed by the FJCF unanimously recognizeⁱ the importance of a command of both official languages for their future job prospects. However, they also point out how few and far between the French-language, or even bilingual, work environments are. The participants in our survey also raise the failure to promote

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bilingualism or linguistic duality in workplaces, with English often being preferred when working in-house and in interactions between employees.

Young people aspire to find jobs in their language, in their field of study, with competitive wages and decent terms of employment, in their communities.

Fortunately, there are a few programs that help integrate young francophones into the labour market and develop the economy of francophone minority communities, such as Young Canada Works (YCW). Young Canada Works is a Government of Canada initiative, whose Young Canada Works in Both Official Languages (YCW-BOL) component is administered by the Department of Canadian Heritage. Since 1996, this program has been helping young Canadians develop their skills and acquire summer employment experience in their second official language. As an organization that has delivered this program for the past 20 years, the FJCF is well aware that the program plays an important role in helping young people integrate into the labour market and in developing the economy, particularly of francophone minority communities.

Offering internships to young graduates, in their field of study, here in Canada, would also be an excellent way to support the development of the youth labour force and to contribute economically to communities, including the development of a bilingual workforce across the country. The Young Canada Works at Building Careers in English and French (YCW-BCEF) component currently exists to create internships abroad. Although the objective of creating domestic internships is part of the program, no budget is currently earmarked for this goal, which we feel is very unfortunate.

We therefore believe that the Government of Canada should invest more in creating jobs for young francophones and make funding a priority for Young Canada Works in Both Official Languages. In addition, it should invest in high-quality paid internships for French-speaking students in the country's francophone minority communities through the Young Canada Works at Building Careers in English and French.

In conclusion

In parallel with this legislative updating of the Official Languages Act, the FJCF is of the opinion that the federal government would do well to consolidate its ability to deliver grass-roots services through increased core funding for the organizations, associations and networks in

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OLMCs. In addition, the considerable influence of provincial and territorial governments in supporting the dynamism of the official languages in Canada should not be overlooked.

As a separate issue, the FJCF recommends that the Government of Canada designate a central agency to be responsible for coordinating, implementing and enforcing the OLA. Too often, violations of the OLA go unreported, with no consequences for those who commit them. That is also why we invite the federal government to develop and implement an oversight system with the power to impose sanctions in cases where the OLA is violated.

Finally, for us, linguistic duality is when two linguistic communities live side by side in every province and territory, each with its own realities and uniqueness. If young people today can develop a greater association with a bilingual identity, they will automatically remain proud francophones.

Accordingly, the FJCF also commits itself to continue working for the implementation of the OLA by informing young people of their linguistic rights, by assuming responsibility for specific mandates, by conducting more extensive research into the subject, and by contributing to the federal government's thinking at every appropriate time.

We remain ready to support you in your research and in your desire to meet young francophones from all corners of the country, so that you have a better understanding of their needs, of the issues they must grapple with, and of what motivates them to become committed citizens.

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ⁱ Survey on youth concerns, conducted by the FJCF from June 24 to July 11, 2016, as part of its strategic plan review. 614 participants.

ⁱⁱ Survey on the views of young Canadians about modernizing the Official Languages Act, conducted by the FJCF from April 21 to 26, 2017. 23 anonymous participants.

ⁱⁱⁱ Youth consultation on official languages in Canada conducted by the FJCF at its annual general meeting on September 16, 2016. 30 participants.