



COMITÉ SÉNATORIAL PERMANENT
DES LANGUES OFFICIELLES

STANDING SENATE COMMITTEE
ON OFFICIAL LANGUAGES

Terms of Reference:

Canadians' Views about Modernizing the *Official Languages Act*

First Theme:

Canada's Youth

APRIL 2017

DESCRIPTION OF STUDY

The Standing Senate Committee on Official Languages (“Senate committee”) is mandated to study all matters related to official languages generally, including the application of the *Official Languages Act* (OLA).

The *Official Languages Act* was first passed in 1969, following recommendations by the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism. In 2019, Canada will mark the 50th anniversary of its enactment.

The legislative framework for official languages has undergone major amendments twice in its history. The first time was in 1988 to reflect the constitutional language rights enshrined in the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*, and the second was in 2005 to include federal institutions’ obligation to take positive measures to implement its commitment regarding the advancement of English and French in Canadian society. However, the OLA has not been modernized to reflect sociolinguistic, demographic or technological changes, or evolving legal precedents.

In the fall of 2016, the federal government announced a review of the *Official Languages (Communications with and Services to the Public) Regulations*, under the direction of the Treasury Board President and the Minister of Canadian Heritage, as well as upcoming consultations with parliamentarians, stakeholders and the public. The new regulations are scheduled to be passed in the spring of 2019. However, the government will focus only on the delivery of services in both official languages. As a result, a number of sections of the OLA are excluded from this process of review, consultation and modernization.

The Senate committee recognizes that the OLA affects various segments of the population and it wants to fully understand what Canadians think about modernizing this legislation. How can the federal government enhance its support for linguistic duality? What steps can be taken to improve enforcement of the OLA? How can we ensure that English and French are respected as Canada’s official languages in a changing sociolinguistic and demographic environment? Does the OLA reflect recent developments in case law and technology? In short, is the OLA in its current form still an effective tool for ensuring the substantive equality of both official languages in Canadian society?

Over the coming months, the Senate committee will gather comments and recommendations from various segments of Canadian society, particularly the following:

- young people;
- official language minority communities;
- stakeholders who have witnessed the evolution of the OLA;
- the justice sector;
- federal institutions.

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

In the spring of 2017, the Senate committee will launch a special five-part study on Canadians’ views about modernizing the *Official Languages Act*. The purpose of the study will be to gather comments and recommendations from various segments of the population, starting with young people.

The Senate committee will begin by gathering young people's views on the advancement of both official languages, how they identify with the languages and related cultures, the motivations for learning the other official language, the employment opportunities and future of bilingual youth, and what can be done to enhance federal support for linguistic duality.

The Senate committee will reach out to young Canadians between the ages of 14 and 25 from a variety of environments and linguistic backgrounds, particularly:

- high school students;
- post-secondary students; and
- youth who are entering the workforce.

During the first stage of its study, the Senate committee will seek out the views of young Canadians by asking the following questions:

- How do young Canadians picture the advancement of both official languages in Canadian society?
- How much do they identify with these two languages and their respective cultures?
- How do they express their feeling of identification with the two official languages from a personal, family, educational, social and cultural perspective?
- Do they consider bilingualism to be part of the Canadian identity?
- What triggered their commitment to bilingualism as a value?
- Are young people interested in preserving this value and, if so, why?
- What day-to-day opportunities do they have to live in English and French? Conversely, what opportunities are lacking?
- What challenges are involved in learning and living in both official languages?
- Is it getting harder to live and learn in both languages in a multicultural society with increasingly diverse demographic and sociolinguistic factors?
- How important do young people think it is to be proficient in both languages at this stage of their life, and in terms of their employment opportunities and their future?
- What motivates them to learn the other official language?
- How could the federal government help young people fully express their feeling of identification with the two official languages and preserve this value for future generations?