



A Better Economy for Better Lives
Une économie meilleure pour une vie meilleure

WITNESS TESTIMONY

Senate Standing Committee on Official
Languages
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TOPIC

Proposed regulations on the use of French in
federally regulated private businesses

PRESENTER

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MR. CHAIR, HONOURABLE SENATORS

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you. I am John Buck, President and Chief Executive Officer of the Community Economic Development and Employability Corporation (CEDEC), a federally funded organization mandated to strengthen the economic vitality of Quebec's English-speaking Official Language Minority Community.

As I begin, let me be clear: **CEDEC supports protecting and promoting French in Quebec and throughout Canada**, including through the use of French in federally regulated businesses. Our concern is ensuring that the regulations you are studying align with Parliament's broader Official Languages commitments. **Accordingly, this evening, I will make four points.**

FIRST, CANADA'S OFFICIAL LANGUAGES POLICY IS NOT A ZERO-SUM UNDERTAKING.

The Official Languages Act establishes concurrent commitments, including:

- Equal status, rights, and privileges for English and French within federal institutions.
- Support for the vitality of English- and French-speaking minority communities, which includes the protection and promotion of the use of their defining Official Language.
- The advancement of both Official Languages' equal status and use in Canadian society.
- Protecting and promoting French, recognizing its minority situation in Canada and North America, and advancing a majority-French society in Quebec.

These commitments must be pursued simultaneously and coherently and cannot be treated as policy options or alternatives. **Substantive equality does not require identical treatment but differentiated treatment neither diminishes the commitments outlined above nor their legitimacy, nor does it relieve the Parliament of Canada, the Government of Canada or federal institutions of their responsibilities with regard to these commitments. Supporting Quebec's English-speaking minority community, which includes the use of its Official Language, is integral to this framework.**

SECOND, ECONOMIC VITALITY UNDERPINS COMMUNITY AND LINGUISTIC VITALITY.

Employment, incomes, enterprise development and investment help people build livelihoods, communities retain their members, and institutions sustain their contributions to society. Economic vitality underpins an Official Language Community's capacity to sustain, use, and transmit its defining Official Language.

But economic participation does not automatically strengthen community or linguistic vitality. The value of federal measures must be assessed in terms of their design to guide decision-making, their capacity to produce desirable outcomes, and their capacity to foresee and address adverse effects. Accordingly, the contributions of federal measures to community or linguistic vitality must be demonstrated, not presumed.

THIRD, THE REGULATIONS MUST BE ASSESSED AGAINST THEIR ECONOMIC AND LINGUISTIC CONSEQUENCES.

CEDEC advances its work on behalf of the English-speaking Official Language Minority Community in Quebec to achieve three, mutually reinforcing objectives.

- **Sustained economic prosperity:** employment, incomes, enterprise growth, investment, productivity and economic participation.
- **Substantive economic equality:** reduced disparities and fair opportunities to enter, remain in, advance within and benefit from economic life.
- **Linguistic vitality:** meaningful opportunities to use and sustain the minority Official Language in workplaces, enterprises, markets, networks and institutions.

The Government's Regulatory Impact Analysis Statement on the measures this Committee is now studying identifies a critical risk to achieving the above objectives. I quote: *"The new linguistic obligations could complicate the onboarding and adaptation of unilingual-English or non-French-speaking employees within FRPBs, potentially limiting their opportunities for career advancement"*.

Persistent employment and advancement barriers can weaken livelihoods and the economic foundations of Official Language Minority Communities, and the meaningful day-to-day use of their Official Language.

CEDEC is of the view that the Parliament of Canada and the Government of Canada cannot accept diminished economic participation opportunities for Quebec's English-speaking minority as the inevitable price of protecting French. Acknowledging a risk does not establish that it is acceptable or that it cannot be avoided.

In a complex and diverse country like Canada, sound policymaking requires pursuing multiple legitimate objectives together, not assuming that one must be sacrificed for the sake of another.

We seek neither weaker protection for French nor abandonment of legitimate language requirements. We seek explicit measures to prevent foreseeable adverse effects, monitor outcomes and take timely corrective action where evidence warrants.

FOURTH, EFFECTIVE IMPLEMENTATION REQUIRES COHERENCE, EVIDENCE AND ACCOUNTABILITY.

Part VII of the OLA requires federal institutions to take concrete, evidence-informed, positive measures, informed by community dialogue and consideration of potential adverse effects. Although these regulations arise under a distinct statute, implementation should respect Canada's broader Official Languages commitments. **Creating a separate regime for different regulated actors is a defensible legislative choice. Legitimate reasons for legislative separation do not justify treating regulatory implementation as isolated from applicable language rights and Official Language Minority Community responsibilities.**

Accordingly, CEDEC supports TALQ's recommendations to this Committee. CEDEC adds that the Government must be able to take timely corrective action when adverse effects are anticipated by its own analyses.

Once again, let me be clear. Compliance is necessary, but it is not the only measure, and perhaps not even the most important measure of policy success. Monitoring must also examine fairness in minority-Official-Language use in employment, workplaces, career advancement, labour mobility, and business performance, and, as I mentioned above, the Government must be able to take timely corrective action where warranted.

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Parliament has recognized concurrent commitments. Federal policy must give them meaningful effect.

Canadians must be able to trust their institutions to navigate linguistic complexity without treating avoidable disadvantages to one community as the necessary price of advancing another.

We urge this Committee to recommend coherent regulation, explicit safeguards, transparent accountability and the capacity to take timely corrective measures, as required.

Canada's linguistic diversity is not a problem to resolve by choosing among communities. It is a defining national characteristic our institutions must support.

Thank you. I welcome your questions.