



Sign Language Institute Canada

**Legislative Brief to House of Commons and Senate Standing Committee(s) on  
Official Languages**

**Bill C-13, An Act to amend the Official Languages Act, to enact the Use of  
Signed languages in Federally Regulated Private Businesses Act and to make  
related amendments to other Acts (short title: Act for the Substantive Equality  
of Canada's Official Languages)**

**Proposed amendments to Bill C-13, An Act to amend the Official Languages  
Act, to include Signed Languages**

**Prepared by Canadian Cultural Society of the Deaf/Sign Language Institute  
Canada**

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## Introduction

The Canadian Cultural Society of the Deaf (CCSD), a registered non-profit organization incorporated in 1973, represents the cultural interests of Canada's Deaf population and is recognized as one of Canada's national arts service organizations. CCSD has received numerous awards for its Sign Language(s) and Deaf arts productions, publications, and digital Sign Language programming. See details at <https://deafculturecentre.ca/ccsd/>

Sign Language Institute Canada (SLIC) was established under the auspices of CCSD to strive for national standards in teaching American Sign Language (ASL), la langue des signes québécoise (LSQ) and signed languages of Canadian Deaf Communities across Canada.

CCSD/SLIC is pleased to support the Government of Canada's commitment and the House of Commons and Senate Standing Committee(s) on Official Languages to do more and better in order to maintain its support for vitality of official language minority communities and the advancement of the official languages to include signed languages, while giving special attention to protection and promotion of French to include LSQ across Canada to include ASL in Quebec. We support the government to renew its efforts in the area of official languages in a way that reflects and showcases the strengths associated with the rich diversity of signing communities across Canada.

The CCSD along with SLIC has served and worked with and for people who are Deaf Canadians, non-Deaf Canadians learning and using sign languages, students, post-secondary, and learners learning first and second sign language(s) for more than 49 years. We operate virtually across Canada.

Among 38 million Canadians, CCSD represents approximately 38,000 Deaf Canadians using sign languages as their primary language as well as an additional 3.8 million Canadians (i.e., second language learners, hard of hearing, children of Deaf Adults (CODAs), children with disabilities, aging individuals with hearing loss) learning and using sign language(s). (CRTC source: <https://crtc.gc.ca/eng/publications/reports/vrsrv21.htm>).

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It is vital for the Government of Canada, including the Office of Official Languages, to improve and enhance their mandates including official signed languages (i.e., ASL and LSQ). We would recommend the following improving guiding principles:

1. To improve the compliance of federal institutions and organizations with Official Languages Act to include signed languages (ASL and LSQ),
2. To protect and promote official languages including signed languages (ASL, LSQ) across Canada
3. To stimulate learning and appreciation of the official languages including signed languages (ASL and LSQ) and
4. To strengthen Official Languages Department in order to foster the development of rich and numerous official language minority communities including signed languages (ASL and LSQ) across Canada

### **ASL and LSQ in the Federal Official Languages Act**

The Official Languages Act needs an amendment that will recognize ASL and LSQ as official signed languages of Deaf and hard of hearing individuals in Canada. Such recognition will enable those individuals to have equal access to federal government information and services, which include the following examples:

- Provision of accessible videos on federal government websites.
- Provision of ASL and LSQ video interpreting at federal government services.
- Provision of picture-in-picture ASL and LSQ interpretation services through broadcast television and digital communications such as the Period of Oral Questions and any proceedings in the House of Commons or emergency alert announcements, and many other accessibility services.
- Provision of ASL-English and LSQ-French Video Remote Interpreting (VRI) at Services Canada offices across Canada.
- Provision of ASL and LSQ translation content for federal websites, online training and other digital communications to make them accessible to Deaf and hard of hearing federal customers and employees who work in the federal public services.

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- Provision of Deaf interpreting services and intervenor services for Deaf-Blind individuals who use ASL or LSQ
- Provision of ASL-English or LSQ-French interpreting services for M.P.s in the House of Commons or Senators in the House of Senate or constituents who are Deaf using ASL or LSQ when meeting with their M.P.s or Senators at Parliament Hill or their constituency offices.

### **Recommendations for New Action Plans for Official Languages Programs including Signed Languages**

1. Funding for a free online tool to learn ASL and LSQ for all Canadians
2. Core Funding for Building Capacity for Sign Language Employment Opportunities for outreaching, recruiting, and training Deaf youth with diverse background and Deaf signing immigrants to become sign language instructors
3. Funding for Statistics Canada Projects/Initiatives for researching on the status of Canadians learning and using sign languages across Canada including sign language minorities (i.e., LSQ in BC, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, & Nova Scotia and ASL in Quebec)
4. Funding for empowering Deaf Signing community organizations to seize new opportunities (i.e., Showcases Programs for Deaf Canadian Artists and Deaf Signing Immigrated Artists from official-language monitories communities)
5. Funding for building the capacity of Deaf signing Settlement Programs and ASL and LSQ Sign Language Literacy Programs (i.e., Deaf LINC Programs, Silent Voice, BRCCED and School Board Settlement Program for Deaf Students)

### **Recommendations for Strengthen Official Languages Centre of Excellence**

1. Develops official languages including signed languages in regulations, policies and directives including ASL and LSQ:
  - sign language proficiency policy on Official Languages.
  - directives on Official Language including signed languages for People Management
  - directive on Official Languages including signed languages for Communications and Services;
  - Official Languages including signed languages regulations 4/6



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- Directive on the implementation of the Official Languages regulations including signed languages; and
  - Qualification Standards including a minimum of sign language proficiency in ASL and LSQ
2. Monitors the delivery of official languages programs including signed languages programs with federal institutions:
    - Annual Review on Official Languages including signed languages (ASL and LSQ)
    - Management Accountability Framework Questionnaire including signed languages
    - Public Service Employees Surveys including signed languages
    - Data collection from HR information systems including signed languages
  3. Supports federal institutions in the implementation of official languages program including signed languages:
    - Engagement activities including signed languages
    - Communication including signed languages
    - Policy interpretation
  4. Tables in Parliament an annual report on the status of programs relating to Official Languages including signed languages in institutions subject to the Official Languages Act (Parts IV, V and IV)
    - Annual Report on Official Languages including signed languages

### **Recommendations for Enhancing C-Bill 13, An Act to amend to Official Languages Act including Signed Languages**

- Need to include definition of Official Languages in Official Languages Act including spoken (i.e., English, and French), signed languages (i.e., ASL and LSQ), written (i.e., text/caption English and French), and other forms of non-spoken languages (i.e., Braille, Protacile ASL, and Protacile LSQ for Deaf-Blind People)



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## Conclusion

It is vital for the Government of Canada, including the Office of Official Languages, to improve and enhance their mandates to include official signed languages (i.e., ASL and LSQ). This recommendation is supported by the Government of Canada's Ratification of UN Nation Convention on Rights of Persons with Disabilities, Supreme Court of Canada Eldridge Decision, Federal Court of Canada's Canadian Association of the Deaf Decision, World Federation of the Deaf Charter on Sign Language Rights for All <https://wfdeaf.org/news/resources/wfd-charter-on-sign-language-rights-for-all/>, and the United Nations International Day of Sign Languages - September 23, annually. <https://wfdeaf.org/iwdeaf2022/>

- The Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms Section 14 and 15 (i.e., Supreme Court of Canada's Eldridge Decision (1997) and Federal Court of Canada's Canadian Association of the Deaf Decision, 2006), Canadian Human Rights Act, and Accessible Canada Act require the Government of Canada website, programs, and services to include ASL and LSQ for Canadian Deaf Anglophones and Francophones who do not speak and need to communicate in sign language
- Deaf culture has its own defining characteristics, which include sign languages, cultural norms, historical traditions, and heritage. Deaf persons have long called on the Government of Canada to recognize their unique languages. This recognition is important to ensure that Deaf persons have equal access to information, communication, employment, government services, and other federally regulated sectors.
- In 2017 the United Nations Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities stated its concern about the lack of official recognition of ASL and LSQ and underscored the need to ensure high quality certification of sign language interpreters. The United Nations Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities recommended that Canada recognize ASL and LSQ as official languages of Deaf persons.
- United Nations Article 2-Definition for "language" includes spoken (i.e., English and French) and signed languages (i.e., ASL and LSQ) and other forms of non-spoken languages (i.e., ProTacile ASL and Protacile LSQ for Deaf-Blind people).

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