

Received by the Clerk of the Senate  
Reçu par le Greffier du Sénat  
July 29, 2020 9:26 am  
Le 29 juillet 2020 9h26

Minister of Economic Development  
and Official Languages



Ministre du Développement économique  
et des Langues officielles

JUL 29 2020

Mr. Richard Denis  
Interim Clerk of the Senate and Clerk of the Parliaments  
A408 – 2 Rideau Street  
Senate of Canada  
Ottawa, Ontario  
K1A 0A4

Dear Mr. Denis:

Pursuant to Rule 12-24(3) of the *Rules of the Senate*, I am pleased to enclose in both official languages, the Government of Canada's response to the Standing Senate Committee on Official Languages' report entitled *Modernizing the Official Languages Act: Views of the Federal Institutions and Recommendations*

This response should be referred to the Standing Senate Committee on Official Languages.

Please accept my best wishes.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'M. Joly'.

The Honourable Mélanie Joly, P.C., M.P.

Enclosures



JUL 29 2020

**Mr. Richard Denis**  
**Interim Clerk of the Senate and Clerk of the Parliaments**  
**A408 – 2 Rideau Street**  
**Senate of Canada**  
**Ottawa, Ontario**  
**K1A 0A4**

**Dear Mr. Denis:**

**In accordance with Rule 12-24(3) of the *Rules of the Senate of Canada*, and on behalf of the Government of Canada, I am pleased to respond to the 13th report of the Standing Senate Committee on Official Languages entitled *Modernizing the Official Languages Act: The Views of Federal Institutions and Recommendations*.**

**I would like to thank the Committee for the efforts made to produce this report, as well as the four other interim reports related to modernizing the *Official Languages Act* that preceded it. I would also like to express my gratitude to all the witnesses and experts who shared their vision, needs and priorities with regard to a modernized Act within the context of your work.**

**As Minister of Economic Development and Official Languages, my mandate includes a commitment to modernizing and strengthening the Act. Please be assured that your report has been given every consideration. During the months that preceded your report, I also considered other key documents, such as the report of the Standing Committee on Official Languages, the Commissioner of Official Languages' recommendations, as well as proposals from advocacy organizations representing official language minority communities and from Canadians in general. During a national dialogue in 2019, I had the opportunity to meet with Canadians from all walks of life and with diverse expertise in each province and territory, which allowed me to broaden the discussion on our two official languages.**

.../2

The Government shares the Committee's view on the importance of giving real meaning to the respect of our official languages, in the interest of all Canadians. In fact, the modernization of the Act is an opportunity to be seized. Your recommendations are diverse, and they deal with governance of official languages, second-language and minority-language education, as well as access to justice, including the roles of the Treasury Board of Canada, the Translation Bureau and the Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages, among others. In the context of its review, the federal government is approaching modernization in the same spirit.

The modernization proposals we received from all across the country speak to Canadians' profound attachment to both of their official languages and demonstrate a clear desire for a modernized Act. While the proposals as a whole represent a wealth of ideas and a range of perspectives, some of them present some incompatibilities with regards to implementation or present differing views.

This has led the Government to undertake an in-depth impact analysis before ruling on including these proposals in a new modernized Act. We must take the time needed to do this part of the work well. While we will not be able to respond positively to all of the proposals received, our objective is to put forward a modernized Act that will enable us to adapt our official languages regime to a demographic, institutional and technological context that is different from the one that existed the last time the Act was modernized in 1988.

As you may know, the Government believes that the modernization must reflect three major priorities. First, as mentioned in the Report, compliance with regard to the implementation of the Act by all federal institutions is essential to provide Canadians with a language regime that meets their expectations. Second, Part VII of the Act must be strengthened to make the Government's commitment to our official languages even more effective with respect to official language minority communities, and to advance the equality of status and use of English and French in Canadian society. Finally, engaging citizens from Anglophone and Francophone linguistic majorities, from all across the country, is essential to making the Act an updated tool that can meet tomorrow's challenges and the needs of a society that is increasingly diverse, inclusive and multicultural.

The Government remains committed to presenting Canadians with a modernization plan by the dissolution of the 43rd Parliament. Moreover, the exceptional situation we find ourselves in as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic is an opportunity to be seized within the context of modernization. Our analyses must take this context and our new reality into consideration to determine how we can support our official languages more effectively in areas that are important to Canadians, including education, services, the media, public health and safety. The goal of modernization is to strengthen the Act, and the pandemic situation does not alter this objective in any way. In fact, it encourages us to think creatively and is a potential for innovation.

The implementation of our language regime is based on decades-long, solid investments, and invaluable collaboration with provinces and the territories. Modernization cannot happen any other way. Therefore, we must take the time needed to talk about it with our partners within the Confederation, who are key to the success of this major undertaking, primarily for the purposes of Part VII of the Act.

The recommendations in the Report raise some questions that fuel the Government's thinking and work regarding modernization. In July 2019, an interdepartmental working group that brings together the Department of Canadian Heritage, the Department of Justice Canada, the Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat and the Privy Council Office, was established to analyze the impacts of the modernization proposals put forward by various stakeholders; examine, among other things, other issues that were not raised in the public arena; and review modernization options of regulatory and administrative nature. This work is carried out in consultation with official languages experts across the federal government. The working group meets on a regular basis and takes the time needed to conduct the required analyses. The Government looks forward to presenting the results of its work to Canadians.

The Government would like to assure the Committee that its recommendations are being taken into consideration in the ongoing analyses. These recommendations are also being raised during our intergovernmental discussions with the provinces and territories as they contribute to the reflection intended to ensure that official languages will continue to be an asset adapted to the 21st century for all Canadians.

I am aware that this response could generate more questions from you, as well as the desire to have an in-depth discussion on modernization. Please be assured that, once the analysis phase is complete, the Government will present its approach and vision to accomplish this modernization. At that time, I would be very pleased to meet with you to discuss this matter and answer your questions.

Please accept my best wishes.

Sincerely,



The Honourable Melanie Joly, P.C., M.P.