



INTRODUCTION TO THE STANDING SENATE COMMITTEE ON OFFICIAL LANGUAGES

MANDATE

The Standing Senate Committee on Official Languages has the mandate to study all matters relating to official languages generally. It studies matters relating to the application of the *Official Languages Act* (OLA) and of the regulations and directives made under it.

The committee investigates the respect of Canadians' language rights and the principle of equality of the two official languages. It examines questions pertaining to the OLA and pays particular attention to the federal government's role and its commitment to advancing English and French in Canadian society and to enhancing the vitality of the English and French linguistic minority communities.

HISTORY

In May 1980, Parliament established the Special Joint Committee on Official Languages to assess what progress had been made since the adoption of the OLA in 1969. Four years later, in May 1984, the Standing Joint Committee on Official Languages Policies and Programs was officially created. In 1986, this joint committee changed its name, becoming thereafter the Standing Joint Committee on Official Languages.

In 2002, concerned with its mandate to protect minorities and the need to examine official language issues in greater depth, the Senate dissociated itself from the joint committee and created its own standing committee.

SELECTED STUDIES

The Standing Senate Committee on Official Languages has tabled more than 15 substantive reports since its creation in autumn 2002. The committee has examined each of the three objectives of the OLA, with a particular focus on the objective to support the development of official language minority communities and, in general, to advance the equality of status and use of English and French in Canadian society. Parts IV and VII of the OLA have received most of its attention.

The committee published a report in June 2015 on best practices in Canada for language policies and second-language learning in a context of linguistic duality or plurality. The committee's 10 recommendations focused on four specific areas: active promotion of bilingualism, increased fluency in both official languages, innovative practices and funding.

In 2014, the committee published its findings from two studies. Its first report, tabled in April, dealt with CBC/Radio-Canada's obligations under the *Official Languages Act* and some aspects of the *Broadcasting Act*. Its second report, tabled in December, looked at the impacts of recent changes to the immigration system on official language minority communities.



Other important issues have drawn the attention of the committee since its inception. These include Air Canada's language policy, reflecting Canada's linguistic duality at the 2010 Olympic and Paralympic Winter Games, francophone arts and culture, education in French-language minority communities, the use of the Internet, new media and social media, the vitality of Quebec's English-language communities, the implementation of Part VII of the *Official Languages Act* as amended in 2005 by *An Act to amend the Official Languages Act (promotion of English and French)*.

The committee traditionally invites the Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages, the President of the Treasury Board and the Commissioner of Official Languages to appear before the committee when their annual reports are released. The Department of Canadian Heritage, the Treasury Board and the Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages are all required to submit an annual report to Parliament on their activities. The committee is interested in learning more on the issues raised by these institutions and on the implementation of the recommendations of their reports.

SELECTED LEGISLATIVE WORK

The Standing Senate Committee on Official Languages mostly conducts special studies and has been called upon several times to consider legislation. Since its inception in the fall of 2002, it has considered 6 bills, most of which sought to amend the *Official Languages Act*. The two most recent bills studied dealt with, one, the language skills required for 10 offices appointed by the Governor in Council and, two, the obligations under Part IV of the *Official Languages Act* covering communications with and services to the public.

CURRENT WORK

For information on the current work of the committee, you may wish to review the orders of reference the committee has received from the Senate, or review the committee proceedings. Detailed information on current work of the committee can be found on the parliamentary website at <http://senate-senat.ca/ollo.asp>.