



# **16<sup>th</sup> Legislative Assembly of the Northwest Territories**

## **Standing Committee on Government Operations**

Report on the Review of the  
2007-2008 Annual Report of the  
Languages Commissioner

Chair: Mr. Kevin Menicoche

## **MEMBERS OF THE STANDING COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS**

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Committee Researcher

October 29, 2009

SPEAKER OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

Mr. Speaker:

Your Standing Committee on Government Operations is pleased to provide its Report on the Review of the 2007-2008 Annual Report of the Languages Commissioner and commends it to the House.

Kevin Menicoche, MLA  
Chairperson

**STANDING COMMITTEE ON  
GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS**

**REPORT ON THE REVIEW OF THE  
2007-2008 ANNUAL REPORT OF THE  
LANGUAGES COMMISSIONER**

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## **STANDING COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS**

### **REPORT ON THE REVIEW OF THE 2007-2008 ANNUAL REPORT OF THE LANGUAGES COMMISSIONER**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

The Standing Committee on Government Operations met on September 28, 2009 to review the '2007-2008 Annual Report of the Languages Commissioner' and the special report 'Speaking of Health: Official Languages as part of Quality Health Care in the Northwest Territories'. The Committee would like to thank the former Languages Commissioner, Ms. Shannon Gullberg, for presenting these reports. The Committee would also like to thank the recently appointed Languages Commissioner, Ms. Sarah Jerome, for attending.

In 2008, the Committee urged the Languages Commissioner to conduct more outreach and visit more communities in order to promote her role and office. In her 2007-2008 annual report, the Commissioner noted that she had completed a number of radio interviews; however, she personally visited only Behchoko. The Committee was disappointed with this limited amount of travel and is pleased to see that the current Languages Commissioner has already begun attending public functions and offering presentations in communities. The Committee looks forward to hearing more about her activities in future annual reports.

The Committee is concerned that members of minority language groups may not be aware of the Commissioner and her role. Her responsibility is to ensure that the rights, status and privileges of the speakers of each of the 11 official languages in the Northwest Territories are protected within government institutions. One of the mandated activities of the Language Commissioner is to investigate complaints from NWT residents on language issues. The Commissioner received only two complaints in the past two years and relatively few inquiries: 11 inquiries in 2006-2007 and 21 in 2007-2008. One Committee Member observed that, in his role as MLA, he had received five or six complaints on language issues in 2007-2008. The Committee would like to see the Commissioner promote her role so that people with languages concerns would bring inquiries and complaints directly to the Languages Commissioner.

#### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

In her 2007-2008 annual report, the Commissioner made 13 recommendations, six of which were raised in previous reports. Nine of her recommendations were

addressed by the Standing Committee on Government Operations in its final report on the review of the *Official Languages Act*. This report, 'Reality Check: Securing a Future for the Official Languages of the Northwest Territories', was presented to the House in May of 2009. A response to this report was tabled in the House on October 15, 2009 by the Minister of Education, Culture, and Employment, and the Minister has committed to providing a follow-up response in the fall of 2010. Given this on-going process, and since some recommendations in the Language Commissioner's 2007-2008 annual report did not fall strictly within her mandate, the Committee has limited its recommendations to the following:

Since 2004-2005, the Committee has advocated for the training and certification of interpreters in all language groups. In recent years, Ms. Gullberg and the Special Committee on the Review of the *Official Languages Act* spoke to the need for capacity building through the development of translation standards as well as training and certification standards for interpreters and translators.

#### **Recommendation 1**

**The Standing Committee on Government Operations recommends that the Government of the Northwest Territories make planning for and implementation of the training and certification of interpreters and translators a priority, and further that the Government report back on the status of this initiative.**

The ability to provide language services and to revitalize official languages requires a cadre of qualified interpreters and translators.

#### **Recommendation 2**

**The Standing Committee on Government Operations recommends that the GNWT establish a registry of interpreters and translators for every official language.**

Websites can be an excellent means of providing general information. The Committee recognizes a need to clarify when two or more official languages should be included on government websites.

### **Recommendation 3**

**The Standing Committee on Government Operations recommends that the Government of the Northwest Territories conduct a review of its website policies and report back on whether they are in compliance with Official Languages policies, guidelines and legislation.**

The Committee was pleased to see the Commissioner's report 'Speaking of Health: Official Languages as part of Quality Health Care in the Northwest Territories'. The Report, tabled in June of 2008, includes 15 recommendations regarding improving language services throughout health care centres and hospitals.

### **Recommendation 4**

**The Standing Committee on Government Operations recommends that the Government of the Northwest Territories provide a formal response to 'Speaking of Health: Official Languages as part of Quality Health Care in the Northwest Territories' within 120 days.**

## **CONCLUSION**

The Standing Committee on Government Operations acknowledges the work that Ms. Shannon Gullberg has done over the last four years. The Committee also appreciates Ms. Gullberg's continued support to Ms. Sarah Jerome as she begins her term.

The Committee looks forward to working with Ms. Jerome and to her active participation in publicizing and promoting the role of Languages Commissioner. During her tenure to date, the Committee is pleased with her approach to fulfilling her mandate. Ms. Jerome has embarked on many community visits, and the Committee supports her initiative in attending assemblies and other community events, and her willingness to make presentations on language rights.

### **Recommendation 5**

**The Standing Committee on Government Operations recommends the Government of the Northwest Territories provide a comprehensive response to this report within 120 days.**