



Annual Report of the French Language Services Commissioner of Ontario, 2024-2025

Opening Remarks – Commissioner Carl Bouchard, December 4, 2025

Hello,

My name is Carl Bouchard, French Language Services Commissioner of Ontario.

I'd like to start by acknowledging the Ontario Legislative Assembly Media Studio from which I am speaking is located on the traditional Indigenous territories of many Nations, including the Mississaugas of the Credit, the Anishnabeg, the Chippewa, the Haudenosaunee, and the Wendat, which are now home to many First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples.

Thank you.

Imagine this: You're a Francophone mother, and the worst thing that can happen to a parent happens to you – your child dies tragically in a car accident.

You have to deal with the Ontario Coroner's Office, but no one speaks to you in French. No one informs you of your language rights.

You're afraid to request services in French because you don't know if it's even possible, and you don't want to offend anyone.

The rare times you are spoken to in French, it's through interpreters, which causes delays.

You can manage in English, so you agree to continue in English to move your case forward.

You have to deal with the emotional impact of the situation, connect with your family, and figure out what to do with information you only partially understand.

What I'm telling you is the true story of a Francophone mother from Northern Ontario who contacted us.

It was our intervention that resulted in the mother being able to obtain services in French and understand what she had to do.

She told us (in French): "It's not easy to translate all the words. I speak a little English, but in situations like that, I have a lot of trouble being able to really express myself, because it's very emotional. [...] It also affects the other members of the family who are put aside because we can't have letters in French."

Following our intervention, the Coroner's Office communicated with the mother, both orally and in writing, in French.

The Ontario Coroner's Office, which is subject to the *French Language Services Act*, also conducted an analysis of the bilingual capacity of its staff across the province and reviewed its offer of French-language services for families and the general public.

This case is just one example of the results we are achieving for Francophones who come to us through our complaint resolution system.

In my 2024-2025 Annual Report, I present many other examples of cases that we have resolved and that have a concrete impact on the daily lives of Francophones.

I am thinking of the case of a new mother who contacted us after receiving her 3-month-old daughter's health card, which was missing two dots over a letter in the child's first name (a French character called a "tréma" or a diaeresis). This special character was restored following our intervention.

I am thinking of road signs, in English only, that were translated into French after we stepped in, such as the sign for the Town of Mattawa on Ontario Highway 17 at the western edge of the municipality, or the one at the entrance to a cemetery on Ontario Highway 64 in Alban, in the District of Sudbury.

I am also thinking of the signage around Metrolinx construction sites, several of which were redone to include French versions, thanks to our intervention – like signs for the large-scale project to extend the subway line to Scarborough.

I am also thinking of the Ministry of the Attorney General's jury selection process, which used an English-only email address, until our intervention resulted in the creation of a bilingual address.

And our interventions also resolve long-standing issues.

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I am thinking of Ontario's Fire Code, which was available in English only since its adoption in 1981 and which, following our intervention in the handling of a complaint, was finally translated and is now available in French.

We also contribute to the efforts of Ontario's Francophones to access French language services that are important to them.

For example, in 2023, we received 115 complaints about the province's refusal to fund the University of Sudbury, a university designated under the *French Language Services Act*, which jeopardized its ability to comply with its language obligations.

Our many follow-ups have helped put the University of Sudbury back on the path to compliance. The University established partnerships with other post-secondary institutions and has received funding from the Ministry of Colleges, Universities, Research Excellence and Security.

These resolutions make a real difference in the daily lives of Ontario's Francophones.

I am therefore very proud of this report: It once again focuses on the concrete results we are achieving to improve services in French in Ontario and to ensure compliance with the *French Language Services Act*.

Not only does our work have a direct impact on people's lives, but it also has a positive impact on the whole of government by raising the profile of French language services and ensuring that the issue of respecting the rights of Francophones is regularly considered and discussed in all Ontario government agencies.

I would like to thank all those who have contacted us, who have placed their trust in us and who have allowed us to resolve issues that directly affect them, their communities, and often, Francophones across the province.

These results come from our rigorous fact-finding processes, and from the relationships of trust that we establish with the public and with the institutions that are subject to our jurisdiction that want to find solutions to improve services in French.

And the work continues.

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In this report, I refer to the investigation report into unilingual government out-of-home advertising that I released last year, in which I concluded that the government was systematically failing to meet its obligations under the Act when it communicates only in English on billboards in public places.

To remedy the situation in a timely and effective manner, I recommended that Cabinet Office produce bilingual materials to allow information to be shared simultaneously in English and French. My recommendation is still under review by Cabinet Office and in the meantime, the issues remain. I continue to urge the government to respect its language obligations.

In this Annual Report, I also come back to Francophone daycares that are required to offer services in French. Last year, we reported on the case of a Francophone daycare that had announced the closure of one of its branches. Our analysis identified gaps in the daycare's knowledge of its language obligations, and in the role of the daycare, the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Francophone Affairs in ensuring that those language obligations were respected.

I have asked the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Francophone Affairs to rectify the situation to ensure that designated daycares are aware of and comply with their obligations. This is a critical issue that we will continue to monitor carefully to ensure compliance with the Act.

I will conclude my remarks by speaking about the recommendation I am making this year, which concerns the ability to exempt certain services from the Act's requirements.

There is a regulation under the Act that allows certain services to be exempted from language obligations in very limited cases.

We have dealt with several cases since 2019 where services were wrongly exempted from meeting these obligations, which deprived the public of information that should have been provided in French. I am thinking, for example, of public consultations on the establishment of a public transit route, or the construction of high-rise apartments.

Among the explanations we received to justify these exemptions, we were told a few times about the costs and delays of translation.

Respect for language rights should not depend on cost, value for money or administrative flexibility. This is one of the lessons learned from the Montfort Hospital decision by the Ontario Court of Appeal in 2001.

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Currently, there are no guidelines or validation or approval processes to guide the application of an exemption, which leads to these inconsistencies and ultimately deprives Francophones of the information and services to which they are entitled.

That is why, this year, I recommend that the Ministry of Francophone Affairs establish a framework with clear parameters to support all organizations subject to the *French Language Services Act* when an exemption is being considered.

That said, in my opinion, we should always aim to protect and increase French-language services, rather than the other way around.

Thank you for your attention, and I am now ready to take your questions.

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