



# **Reports of Standing and Special Committees**

**Standing Committee on  
Oversight of Government Operations and Public Accounts**

***Report on the Review of the  
2011-2012 Annual Report of the Languages Commissioner of Nunavut***

**Third Session of the Third Legislative Assembly of Nunavut  
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Mr. Speaker, I have the honour today of presenting the report of the Standing Committee on Oversight of Government Operations and Public Accounts on its review of the 2011-2012 Annual Report of the Languages Commissioner of Nunavut.

Mr. Speaker, Ms. Sandra Inutiq is the new Languages Commissioner for Nunavut. She assumed her duties as Languages Commissioner on January 14, 2013, and is at the very beginning of her term.

The Languages Commissioner of Nunavut's duties and responsibilities are established by two pieces of Nunavut legislation: the *Official Languages Act* and the *Inuit Language Protection Act*. Nunavut's new *Official Languages Act* which was passed in this House in 2008 and, with the exception of section 12(7)(c), came into force on April 1 of this year, 2013. The *Inuit Language Protection Act* was also passed in this House in 2008, and has come into force in stages since that time.

Mr. Speaker, the Languages Commissioner has three main areas of responsibility: the investigation and resolution of concerns relating to language rights, providing guidance and support to various bodies and institutions, and the administration of her office.

As you will recall, Mr. Speaker, the Languages Commissioner's Annual Report for 2011-2012 was tabled in this House on October 26, 2012. While the Standing Committee recognized that the Languages Commissioner's Annual Report described activities conducted in 2011 and 2012 under the tenure of her predecessor, Committee Members appreciated Ms. Inutiq's willingness to update the Committee on the status of many of the Office's activities over this period as well to discuss her own plans for the future.

The Standing Committee held its hearings on the Languages Commissioner's 2011-2012 Annual Report from April 16 to 17, 2013. The hearings were open to the public and news media to observe and were broadcast on local cable television.

Mr. Speaker, last year, the Standing Committee's report on its review of the Languages Commissioner's 2010-2011 Annual Report included a number of recommendations with respect to the presentation of information within the report. The Standing Committee maintained the view that in order to gain a greater appreciation of the workload and focus of resources within the Office of the Languages Commissioner as well as the effectiveness of her role, a significantly greater level of detail regarding the activities undertaken by the Languages Commissioner's Office should be included in her annual report.

Members were pleased to note that those recommendations have been followed. The level of detail and analysis in the 2011-2012 Annual Report, specifically regarding concerns received and addressed by the Office of the Languages Commissioner, provides a very comprehensive overview of the Office's activities in this area.

With respect to the 2011-2012 Annual Report's description and analysis of investigations conducted by the Office of the Languages Commissioner, the Standing Committee also appreciated the level of information provided and looks forward to future updates in this area.

Mr. Speaker, in its report on the review of the Languages Commissioner's 2010-2011 Annual Report, the Standing Committee had recommended that the Languages Commissioner and her staff work to create benchmarks for specific objectives and to establish criteria with which to evaluate progress towards meeting those objectives as they support language rights. The Standing Committee had recommended that the Languages Commissioner report on her Office's progress towards those benchmarks in her annual reports.

While the Standing Committee notes that the Office of the Languages Commissioner's Office has made efforts to improve this aspect of the 2011-2012 Annual Report, Members were of the view that further work could be done in this area.

**Standing Committee Recommendation #1:**

The Standing Committee recommends that the Languages Commissioner work to improve the benchmark criteria for the specific objectives listed in her Annual Report's work plan section by establishing a baseline status for each proposed activity and indicating what measures will be used to evaluate the Office's progress towards meeting each objective in support of the Office's mandate.

Mr. Speaker, as I indicated earlier, the Languages Commissioner's duties are established under Nunavut's language legislation. For some sections of the legislation, Members raised the concern that developing the relevant guidelines, policies and parameters for implementing the law falls to the Office of the Languages Commissioner. For example, under section 3(5) of the *Inuit Language Protection Act*, and in certain circumstances, it would fall to the Languages Commissioner to determine whether or not to relieve a private sector body of the obligation to provide Inuit Language services.

While the Languages Commissioner made it clear during our hearings that her Office had informed private sector bodies which are established for purposes relating primarily to the heritage, expression, strengthening or promotion of a non-Inuit linguistic community, such as the Francophone Association of Nunavut and the French school in Iqaluit, that they could be exempt from providing Inuit Language services under this section of the Act, it appeared that her Office had

yet to establish the necessary guidelines by which to exempt other types of private sector bodies.

Committee Members were of the view that the Government of Nunavut should bear some responsibility for establishing the necessary criteria by which to implement this and other aspects of Nunavut's language legislation.

Mr. Speaker, as I also mentioned earlier, the one section of Nunavut's new *Official Languages Act* that did not to come into force on April 1, 2013, was section 12 (7) (c). This section would have placed official language service obligations on third party contractors which deliver communications and services to the public on behalf of the government. At this time, official language service obligations do not apply to third party contractors. As noted by the Languages Commissioner during our hearings, a concern about whether the language rights of Nunavummiut are being respected when they are receiving services, for example, health services delivered by a third party contractor outside of Nunavut, could become quite complex to address.

**Standing Committee Recommendation #2:**

The Standing Committee recommends that the Languages Commissioner work with representatives from the Government of Nunavut, and specifically with the Minister of Languages, to develop and establish the necessary guidelines and policies by which her Office can most effectively monitor the implementation of Nunavut's language legislation.

Mr. Speaker, throughout the course of our hearings, Members provided a number of examples of federal agencies, federally-regulated agencies or federally-affiliated entities and raised a number of questions regarding the obligations of these entities with respect to Nunavut's language legislation. The Standing Committee remains somewhat unsure of the Languages Commissioner's position on this issue.

**Standing Committee Recommendation #3:**

The Standing Committee recommends that the Office of the Languages Commissioner be more fully prepared to substantively address issues relating to the delivery of services in the territory's official languages by federal and federally-regulated entities and federally-affiliated organizations.

Mr. Speaker, language plays a very important role in the history, culture, and identity of Nunavut and its residents. The Standing Committee membership itself includes speakers of no less than nine different dialects of the Inuit language, spanning all three regions of the territory. Committee Members had strong but diverse views on the role that Nunavut's language legislation should play with respect to the use of different dialects. The issue of standardization, especially with respect to terminology and orthography, was also addressed in this context.

Mr. Speaker, the Standing Committee firmly supports the protection and promotion of the Inuit language and its use as the working language of the Government of Nunavut. The Committee discussed the importance of training and certifying interpreter-translators, teachers and education specialists as well as ensuring adequate levels of language competency to reach this goal.

While the Standing Committee fully recognizes that the responsibility for many aspects of language promotion and use across Nunavut does not fall under the mandate of the Languages Commissioner, Members are of the view that the success of her Office will be very much affected by developments in these areas. The Standing Committee therefore encourages the Languages Commissioner to continue her review of language legislation in other jurisdictions, such as our neighbouring Greenland which has a much longer history of protecting and reinforcing Inuit language rights. The Committee further encourages the Languages Commissioner to review factors relating to language loss which is a growing concern in some areas of Nunavut.

**Standing Committee Recommendation #4:**

The Standing Committee recommends that the Languages Commissioner work closely with entities such as the Inuit Uqausinginnik Taiguusiliuqtiit, the Inuit Language Authority, the Minister of Languages, Nunavut Arctic College, and affected government departments to address those areas which will most directly affect how legislated language service obligations are met.

Mr. Speaker, the Standing Committee applauds the Languages Commissioner's enthusiasm and determination to address the issue of language learning in early childhood. While Members agree that the need for action in this area is critical, it was suggested that the Languages Commissioner ensure that her activities fall within her mandate and complement and support those undertaken by entities such as District Education Authorities and the Department of Education.

The Standing Committee further appreciated the Languages Commissioner's recognition of the specific needs and concerns of Elders with respect to language rights and issues across Nunavut.

**Standing Committee Recommendation #5:**

The Standing Committee recommends that the Languages Commissioner collaborate with territorial, municipal and regional entities to address language issues which directly affect target groups such as young children, youth and Elders.

Mr. Speaker, that concludes the Standing Committee's report. I move that the report of the Standing Committee be received by the House.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.