

PRESS RELEASE

AN OFFICIALLY BILINGUAL CITY OF OTTAWA: THE PROPOSED LEGISLATIVE APPROACH

For Immediate Release

OTTAWA – Friday, January 8, 2016 – After careful consideration and wide-ranging consultations, a group of several Francophone organizations working at the local, provincial and national levels has publically announced the legislative approach that the community proposes be used to officially recognize the bilingual nature of the City of Ottawa.

The legislative approach being proposed by the Association des communautés francophones d'Ottawa (ACFO), the *Association Richelieu Fondateur*, the *Fédération de la jeunesse franco-ontarienne* (FESFO), the *Fédération des aînés et retraités francophones de l'Ontario* (FARFO), the *Fédération des aînées et aînés francophones du Canada* (FAAFC), the Movement for an officially bilingual Capital of Canada (MOCOB) and the *Regroupement étudiant franco-ontarien* (RÉFO), aims to ensure the continuity of the current level of French-language services offered by the City of Ottawa and preclude any eventual clawback by future administrations. This straightforward and innovative approach seeks to build on the existing foundations and recognize Ottawa's efforts to offer services in French by means of its Policy on Bilingualism adopted in 2001.

"In the context of the 150th anniversary of Confederation, Ottawa, as the capital of Canada, would show outstanding leadership by becoming the first large Canadian city to declare its officially bilingual status," says Jacques de Courville Nicol, businessman and coordinator of the Movement for an officially bilingual Capital of Canada and winner of the *Assemblée de la francophonie de l'Ontario (AFO) Prix du Pilier de la Francophonie* in 2015. "I can think of no better way to recognize the contributions made by all linguistic groups to the vibrancy of Ottawa while also celebrating the cultural diversity of a city that is proud to be inclusive and welcoming."

The above-noted organizations are putting forward a pragmatic approach adapted to the reality of Ottawa which favors an ongoing progression towards the equality of French and English. While ensuring the continuity of the current level of French-language services in Ottawa, this approach provides municipal councillors with some flexibility as to the scope of the City's bilingualism policy and by-law. This flexibility should allay the concerns expressed by some regarding the increase in costs or the loss of jobs for municipal employees.

According to Lucien Bradet, entrepreneur, resident of Ottawa and recipient of the *Prix Bernard Grandmaître* in 2013: "Given that the City of Ottawa is dealing with budgetary constraints, it was important for us to not reinvent the wheel and more importantly, to avoid a solution that would be create an undue burden for taxpayers. We want official bilingualism to be a unifying force for all the citizens of our community."

"I see nothing but advantages to bilingualism in Ottawa," says Alain Dupuis, Director General of the *Regroupement étudiant franco-ontarien*. "Such a concrete yet symbolic policy of openness to the world would generate benefits for Ottawa by increasing the pride of our youth, by encouraging closer ties

amongst various francophone and multicultural communities, by attracting more Francophone immigrants and by stimulating tourism and the economy."

Elizabeth Allard, President of the FARFO, believes that "seniors are skilled ambassadors who can transmit the message to the younger generation that the linguistic duality of Canada is fundamental to their Canadian identity. It is also an extraordinary opportunity for Ottawa to demonstrate its commitment to being an *Age-friendly City* and we would like to be active participants in this initiative."

To achieve this goal, the group of organizations recommends a two-pronged approach:

1. Firstly, that the municipal council adopt a resolution asking the Ontario legislature to modify the constituent Act for the City of Ottawa (City of Ottawa Act) to include specific recognition of its bilingual character and its status as a national capital. The proposed modifications in such a resolution would confirm that everyone can communicate with the City of Ottawa and receive municipal services in French and in English.
2. Simultaneously, the resolution by Ottawa City Council would include an amendment to its Bilingualism Bylaw no. 2001-170 to give effect to the changes in the City of Ottawa Act.

The proposed approach recognizes the City's ongoing efforts at offering bilingual services through its current Policy on Bilingualism and the applicable Bylaw and acknowledges that, as Mayor Watson has stated, they have worked reasonably well since 2001. The proposed approach would see nearly all of the existing provisions remain in place but would reinforce and augment the legal status of the Policy on Bilingualism by incorporating it directly into the Bylaw.

François Larocque, Vice-Dean of the Common Law Section of the Faculty of Law at the University of Ottawa, Gilles Levasseur, Lawyer, Professor of law and business at the University of Ottawa and member of both the Order of Ontario and Ottawa, François Baril, President of the *Association des juristes d'expression française de l'Ontario* and John Mark Keyes, Professor of legislative drafting at the University of Ottawa were amongst the many lawyers and experts consulted in developing this legal framework. They believe that this approach fits well in the context of Ontario's existing linguistic legal framework, solidifying Ottawa's commitment to offer services in both official languages, while recognizing that the implementation of these obligations falls within the jurisdiction of the City of Ottawa.

In the coming weeks, community leaders will continue their efforts to mobilize stakeholders and convince Mayor Watson and city councilors of the merits of this well balanced approach.

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For more details on the proposed legislative approach or for additional information, visit www.bilingualottawa.ca or contact Bernadette Sarazin at (613) 298-4708.