



## PRESS RELEASE

### **#BilingualOttawa confirms: a majority of citizens support Ottawa's official bilingualism**

**OTTAWA – Embargo until September 27, 2016 at 11 am** - According to the results of a poll conducted by Nanos Research and commissioned by the members of #BilingualOttawa, the majority of Ottawa residents support making the City officially bilingual.

The results of the survey, conducted between July 19 and 23, 2016 with 750 Ottawa residents aged 18 and over, indicate that:

- **72%** of respondents support official bilingualism in the City of Ottawa if it does not mean an increase in costs or job losses;
- **85%** of young adults aged between 18 and 29 support official bilingualism in the City of Ottawa if it does not mean an increase in costs or job losses;
- **68%** of respondents and **78%** of young adults aged between 18 and 29 believe that official bilingualism in the city would have a positive or rather positive impact on the environment for people to learn English and French.

Of note, **83%** of survey respondents were Anglophones and **17%** were Francophones. The results of this survey, sponsored by the Montfort Hospital, the *Conseil des écoles publiques de l'Est de l'Ontario*, the *Conseil des écoles catholiques de Centre-Est* and La Cité College, are consistent with the results of a Nielsen survey released in late August by the Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages, confirming that 87% of Canadians believe Ottawa, the nation's capital, should be officially bilingual.

Public calls to declare Ottawa officially bilingual have come up regularly over the last several years and the time has come to take the next step. Drawing from the approach to bilingualism already adopted by the City, a group of community organizations have rallied around the #BilingualOttawa proposal, which sets out a straight forward and innovative way to achieve official recognition of Ottawa's bilingualism and cement the City's commitment to French language services.

This is an Ottawa-centric approach to official bilingualism. Far from being a mirror of the federal model, the #BilingualOttawa initiative proposes to confirm the equality of French and English, protect the current Bilingualism Policy and ensure the current level of French services is not subject to arbitrary roll backs. Such protection is necessary because the *City of Ottawa Act, 1999* (the "Act"), which created the City as we know it today, does not officially recognize Ottawa's bilingual character or the equality of French and English. While it does mandate the adoption of a bilingualism policy, it does not specify its terms, contents or even the objectives. #BilingualOttawa believes that the most efficient way to remedy this situation is as follows:



1. Explicitly recognize the bilingual character of our capital in the *City of Ottawa Act, 1999* (the "Act"). This amendment would confirm that everyone has the right to receive municipal services and communicate with the City in the official language of their choice. To give effect to the proposed amendment, the City would need to adopt a by-law on bilingualism rather than just a policy. The provincial government of Premier Kathleen Wynne has publicly stated it would take steps to officialize Ottawa's bilingualism if the City were to make such a request.

2. To give effect to the amendments above, City Council would then incorporate its current Bilingualism Policy directly into its By-Law on Bilingualism. This step would enhance the legal status of the Policy. It would ensure that any future changes to the Policy would be subject to Council's approval and consistent with the principle of language equality as stated in the Act. This approach transforms the current Policy into a by-law. It does not create new obligations and would not generate any additional costs or cause any job losses.

On behalf of the majority of citizens of the City of Ottawa, #BilingualOttawa is asking Mayor Jim Watson, and the 23 city councilors to show leadership and formally recognize the equality of English and French. This would not only honour Ottawa's two founding cultures, but it would also enhance the city's image both nationally and internationally as the nation's capital takes center stage in Canada's 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrations, of a modern, inclusive and united country.

*The #BilingualOttawa is led by the following organizations: l'Association des communautés francophones d'Ottawa, l'Association des juristes d'expression française de l'Ontario, le Mouvement pour une capitale du Canada officiellement bilingue, l'Assemblée de la francophonie de l'Ontario, le Regroupement étudiant franco-ontarien, la Fédération des aînés et retraités franco-ontariens, la Fédération des aînées et aînés francophones du Canada, la Fédération de la jeunesse franco-ontarienne, l'Union provinciale des minorités raciales et ethnoculturelles francophones, l'Association des enseignantes et enseignants franco-ontariens et l'Association Richelieu Fondateur.*

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