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Mr. René Arseneault, M.P.
Chair, Standing Committee on Official Languages
House of Commons
Ottawa, Ontario
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Dear Mr. Arseneault,

Thank you for tabling the second report of the Standing Committee on Official Languages, *Government Measures to Protect and Promote French in Quebec and in Canada* (the Report), on June 8, 2023. I would like to acknowledge the considerable work of the members of the Standing Committee on Official Languages, who oversees the protection and promotion of Canada's official languages, and without which the Government of Canada would not have been able to make such historic progress over the past year.

As you know, the Government is committed to official languages, as demonstrated by applied efforts over the past few years. In fact, in 2019, the year that marked the 50th anniversary of the passing of the first *Official Languages Act* (the Act), the Government of Canada undertook the significant task of reforming Canada's language regime. A series of dialogues with Canadians helped to define the Government's vision, as outlined in the reform document entitled *English and French: Towards a Substantive Equality of Official Languages in Canada*, which was published in February 2021. The document presents a series of measures to increase support for the French language across Canada, including in Quebec.

I am pleased to state that, overall, the Government of Canada supports the Committee's recommendations. Moreover, the concrete actions and historic progress achieved in recent months, after decades of sustained effort, provide a comprehensive response.

I would like to point out that the Report was written on the basis of testimonies and briefs obtained from February 2021 to February 2022. Yet, that period precedes the work that led to Royal Assent of Bill C-13 *An Act to amend the Official Languages Act, to enact the Use of French in Federally regulated Private Businesses Act and to make to*

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make related amendments to other Acts, as well as the *2022 Cross-Canada Official Languages Consultations*, which guided the Government of Canada in the development of the *2023-2028 Action Plan for Official Languages: Protection-Promotion-Collaboration* (Action Plan). These major advances include a series of new legislative provisions, new or improved administrative measures, and the planning of regulations to protect and promote French in Canada.

As part of the efforts to modernize the language regime and development of the Action Plan to meet the needs of Canadians, the federal Government has conducted its own studies, held numerous meetings with stakeholders, Canadians and provincial and territorial government representatives. This has led to an echoing of issues similar to those raised by the Committee in its study. The modernized Act and the Action Plan reflect and respond to the priorities and challenges identified in these complementary exercises. The positive reactions following the announcement of the Action Plan, as well as the quasi- unanimous passing of Bill C-13 in the House of Commons and at the Senate, are proof of this.

In order to expound further on how the latest major advances respond in a general sense to the Report's recommendations, the latter have been grouped under five themes which reflect the essence of the Government's priorities and areas of intervention to protect and promote French in Canada, including in Quebec:

1. Protection and promotion of French in Quebec, which groups together recommendations 1, 12 and 15;
2. Education, which relates to recommendations 2, 3 and 5;
3. Francophone immigration, which is linked to recommendations 7, 8, 9, 10 and 11;
4. Provision of statistical data, which relates to recommendations 13 and 14; and lastly,
5. Measures to ensure the vitality of official language minority communities (OLMCs), related to recommendations 4 and 6.

Protecting and Promoting French in Quebec

The protection and promotion of French are critical elements of the modernized Act and are central to several initiatives in the Action Plan. Indeed, in the same spirit that led to recommendations 1, 12 and 15 of the Report, the modernized Act includes a new federal government commitment to protect and promote French in Canada, including in Quebec. In the new version of the Act, the Government recognizes and takes into account the fact that French is in a minority situation in Canada and North America due to the predominant use of English, and thus commits to the protection and promotion of French.

Furthermore, with regard to Quebec's Charter of the French Language (CLF), the modernized Act recognizes the diversity of provincial and territorial linguistic regimes in that they contribute to advancing the equality of status and use of English and French in Canadian society. In addition, and even more specifically, it recognizes that the CLF stipulates that French is the official language of Quebec.

As for the relative decline of the French language, it is a known trend that no longer needs to be demonstrated. The issue is at the heart of a number of investigations, studies and reports. To address this, the Action Plan appropriately contains strong measures to restore and increase the demographic weight of French-speaking Canadians. These include measures to support Francophone immigration and measures aimed at official language minority communities (OLMCs). These measures can be found in Pillars 1 and 3 of the Action Plan, respectively entitled *Francophone Immigration: Towards the Re-establishment of the Demographic Weight of Francophones*, and *Strong Measures in Support of Community Vitality*.

The federal Government has made a number of commitments with respect to the operation and use of French in federal institutions, including those in Quebec, and regarding the language skills of senior management. Among other things, the Government is committed to promoting and increasing bilingualism throughout the public service, which must be exemplary in its implementation of the modernized Act. Among the administrative measures to strengthen bilingualism within the public service are those relating to language training, the linguistic requirements of positions, recruitment as well as translation and interpretation functions.

In addition, the modernized Act includes new provisions that grant a range of new powers to the Commissioner of Official Languages to increase his ability to intervene to promote compliance of federal institutions with their official languages' obligations.

Education

Education is essential to the vitality of Francophone communities, and the modernized Act recognizes this. The Government has made a number of commitments in this area, which are in line with recommendations 2, 3 and 5 of the Report. It has committed to working with provincial and territorial governments, and to ensuring a multi-year investment to support the sound management of anticipated needs. For 50 years, the Department of Canadian Heritage's Official Languages Support Programs have supported these partners through bilateral agreements under the Protocol for Agreements for Minority-Language Education and Second-Language Instruction. The annual base funding is \$149.1 million for minority-language education and \$86.4 million for second-language instruction, plus an annual recurring amount of \$6.65 million for the recruitment and retention of Francophone teachers, and \$14.8 million for educational and community infrastructure.

In addition, the Government of Canada has significantly increased its contribution to the education sector through Pillar 2 of the Action Plan, entitled *Promoting Lifelong Learning Opportunities*. Among other items, it includes up to \$147.8 million over 5 years to strengthen the education continuum by supporting provincial and territorial governments in minority-language education; up to \$128 million over 4 years to address the underfunding of minority-language post-secondary institutions; up to \$31.29 million over 4 years to address the shortage of skilled labour in minority-language schools; \$14.2 million over 5 years to support the development of early learning and child care, and the list goes on.

Francophone Immigration

Francophone immigration is a key element of the reform of Canada's language regime. In the same vein as recommendations 7 to 11 of the Report, the government's commitments are reflected in new and robust provisions included in the modernized Act and underlying one of the four pillars of the 2023-2028 Action Plan.

The modernized Act includes a new requirement for the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship to adopt a Francophone immigration policy to enhance the vitality of Canada's Francophone minority communities. In addition, this new obligation specifies that the policy must include objectives, targets and indicators. Finally, the Act states that the federal government recognizes immigration as one of the factors that contribute to the restoring and increasing the demographic weight of Canada's French-speaking minorities.

Pillar 1 of the Action Plan, entitled *Francophone Immigration: Towards Restoring the Demographic Weight of Francophones*, includes various promising measures, including a series of investments over five years, notably: \$13.4 million to develop a Francophone Immigration Policy; \$18.5 million to increase efforts to promote and support recruitment in Canada and abroad; \$16.3 million to increase the number and retention of French teachers and French-speaking teachers, and; \$50 million for the *Francophone integration pathway*, which aims to facilitate the settlement and integration of newcomers on Canadian soil.

Providing Statistical Data

The Government is a strong advocate of evidence-based policy, and statistical data is crucial to this. In line with recommendations 13 and 14 of the Report, the Action Plan provides for an increase of \$2 million in Statistics Canada's recurrent funding in order to pursue and expand its mandate to develop analyses and data products that shed light of the status of languages, including French, in Canada.

Among the many topics covered by these studies are the transmission of language from parents to children, the links between the language of education and the language of work, the use of official languages in business and the retention of French as a second language among youth.

In addition, Statistics Canada undertakes consultative and collaborative activities aimed at aligning its products with current community issues and needs, particularly with respect to the French language. Furthermore, Statistics Canada conducts analytical activities to develop new and relevant indicators on the knowledge and use of languages in the country.

Statistics Canada also emphasizes disaggregation of data, so that its products reflect the concerns and realities of communities, as well as the different uses of languages. In particular, based on the results of the 2021 Census of Population, Statistics Canada has very recently published the profiles of official language minority communities in each province and territory.

Many of the Committee's recommendations deal specifically with the status of French in Quebec. Statistics Canada works closely with the Office Québécois de la langue française, which publishes an annual report on sociolinguistic data examining the evolution of the linguistic situation in Quebec. These collaborative efforts enable the sharing of information and boost the relevance of analytical undertakings. The Government of Canada is committed to pursuing a healthy collaboration with the governments of the provinces and territories, including Quebec. In addition, Statistics Canada has initiated discussions with Quebec's Commissaire à la langue française concerning the development of an analysis program to monitor Quebec's current and future linguistic situation.

Statistics Canada's 2022 Census of Population and Survey on the Official Language Minority Population (SOLMP) provides and will continue to provide a better picture of the status of French in Canada. The new survey includes information on intentions to receive instruction in the minority official language. These two data sources, coupled with administrative data, will create a more complete ecosystem than ever before for minority-language education.

Measures to Ensure the Vitality of OLMCs

Community vitality is at the heart of many actions undertaken by the Government of Canada over the years. Recommendations 4 and 6 are echoed in the new provisions of the modernized Act, which considerably strengthen Part VII, and more specifically, the taking of positive measures by federal institutions for the benefit of OLMCs. By strengthening this part of the Act, and specifying the nature and scope of the positive measures to be taken by federal institutions, the Government acknowledges claims

expressed by stakeholders over several years. The new provisions clarify the process by which positive measures are to be taken.

As shown under Pillar 3 of the Action Plan, *Strong Measures to Support Community Vitality*, several administrative measures will also support the vitality of OLMCs. Overall, the 2023-2028 Action Plan proposes some \$304 million over 5 years for community organizations that work tirelessly in the field to promote the development of OLMCs.

Most notably, this includes increases of \$62.5 million through the Department of Canadian Heritage and its network of official languages organizations, \$20.5 million through Employment and Social Development Canada's Enabling Fund for Employment and Economic Development, \$8 million over 5 years through the Department of Health Canada and its health sector organizations and \$5 million through the Department of Justice for organizations working to improve access to justice in both official languages. The 2023-2028 Action Plan also puts forward a brand-new initiative of \$208 million over 5 years and \$54 million annually thereafter to support employment in OLMCs.

The Government also has regulations in its sights. It intends to quickly launch a regulatory process to establish the terms and conditions for positive measures to be taken by federal institutions.

Rest assured that the Government will continue to take concrete, far-reaching steps forward ensuring the protection and promotion of the French language, to respond to the challenges of ensuring the survival of the French language, promoting its vitality and preserving its contribution to Canadian identity and history, for generations to come.

Finally, I would like to emphasize once again the importance of the Committee's role in protecting and promoting the French language. I encourage the Committee to closely monitor the implementation of the provisions of the modernized Act, as well as the measures of the 2023-2028 Action Plan. Should it see fit, I would be delighted to appear before the Committee to discuss in greater detail the state of progress of the various measures taken by the Government of Canada to protect and promote French in Canada.

Please accept my best wishes.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Randy Boissonnault', with a stylized flourish at the end.

The Honourable Randy Boissonnault, P.C., M.P.