



March 29, 2021

Mr. Emmanuel Dubourg, MP
Chair of the Standing Committee
on Official Languages
House of Commons
Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0A6

Dear Mr. Dubourg:

Thank you for your letter of February 19, 2021, in which you relayed concerns regarding the shortage of interpreters and the increase in the incidence of injuries interpreters are suffering due to distance interpreting.

Working conditions have changed since the beginning of the pandemic and Public Services and Procurement Canada's Translation Bureau has put in place a number of precautionary measures, including reducing the length of assignments from six hours to a maximum of four hours and increasing the number of interpreters per assignment to allow for more frequent breaks.

The Department is also responding to increased demand from Parliament for interpretation as a result of more frequent meetings, especially during break weeks where we have seen an approximate ninefold increase in the number of meetings and in the duration of meetings (3.5 hours on average compared to 1.6 hours in 2018–2019). In addition, in our proposed official languages reforms, we plan on supporting learning in French and establishing a Francophone teacher immigration corridor, both of which would help increase the supply of interpreters.

Protecting employees and freelancers is our government's top priority, and Public Services and Procurement Canada continues to monitor the situation in Canada and around the world to make informed decisions and implement the best safety measures for interpreters providing distance interpretation in collaboration with the Department's partners at the House of Commons administration who are responsible for the technology to support Parliament's virtual meetings.

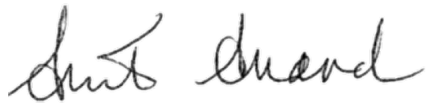
The current contract with freelance interpreters expires in June 2021 and we are committed to a fair and transparent procurement process that will attract the largest number of freelance interpreters to support the Translation Bureau in fulfilling its mandate. Through many months of consultation, including an open and transparent request for information process that closed on February 19, 2021, the views of stakeholders and the most up-to-date research related to distance interpretation have been taken into consideration. We are also keen to consider the recommendations from the upcoming report by the Standing Committee on Official Languages.

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The next step will be to post the request for proposals to ensure that contracts can be put in place following the expiration of the current contract and to allow for the Translation Bureau to continue to support Parliament, Government and all Canadians. The request for proposals will codify the precautions put in place for the current working conditions during the pandemic, based on the information currently available. However, as conditions change, and once Parliament establishes its needs for the future, the Translation Bureau will continue to work with freelancers to adjust its approach.

I hope that this information is helpful in addressing your concerns, and I look forward to the Committee's report.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Anita Anand". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

The Honourable Anita Anand, PC, MP
Minister of Public Services and Procurement

Enclosures