

Commissariat aux  
services en français  
de l'Ontario



Office of the  
French Language Services  
Commissioner of Ontario

# Speaker's Notes

## for Commissioner François Boileau

News Conference

Tabling of the 2018-2019 Annual Report

### **Epilogue of a Franco-Ontarian Institution**

Message to the Media

Tuesday, April 16, 2019

9:30 a.m.

Legislative Assembly, Queen's Park

Media Studio

Toronto, Ontario

Good morning,

It is with great pleasure and immense pride that I submit my twelfth and final annual report today. Entitled *Epilogue of a Franco-Ontarian Institution*, the report covers the activities of the Commissioner's Office from April 1, 2018, to March 31, 2019. While the report does look back at the events of November 2018 that led to the elimination of my position as an independent commissioner and of the Commissioner's Office, it remains focused on the future and highlights the main areas in which action is needed to preserve and sustain Ontario's Francophone communities.

The report is critical of two decisions by the government: the disestablishment of the independent commissioner position and the Commissioner's Office, and the withdrawal of the promised funding for the Université de l'Ontario français.

The transfer of those functions to the Office of the Ombudsman is a step backward for the Franco-Ontarian community, since the activities of promotion, awareness-raising and proactive advice within the machinery of government are compromised. The new "commissioner," who will be an employee of the Ombudsman, will not have the same latitude in setting priorities and taking early action to advance the language rights of Ontario's Francophones.

As we all know, the Office of the French Language Services Commissioner is a vital institution for the Franco-Ontarian community. With the elimination of the Office, the community is losing a pillar, and a defender of your language rights.

Francophones received tireless support from my office in areas such as health, immigration, justice and access to education. We also made time for meetings with the community to listen to what people had to say about their challenges.

In this final report, I look back at the substantial advances made as a result of the studies, the 27 investigations and investigation reports produced by the Commissioner's Office, and the opinions and advice we provided to the Ontario government regarding public policy.

While the decision to eliminate the Commissioner's Office is detrimental, equally so is the withdrawal of funding for the UOF. There is still a desperate need for French-language postsecondary programs in Central-Southwestern Ontario, as indicated in our 2012 report entitled *No Access, No Future*. Without such programs, countless numbers of Francophones will turn to English-language institutions, which will exacerbate the community's assimilation. An entire chapter of the report is dedicated to support for the Université de l'Ontario français to emphasize its importance.

In addition to postsecondary education, there is a wide range of other issues, all of which were discussed at last year's symposium entitled *Looking Ahead, Getting Ready*, which I hope will keep the commissioner very busy in the coming years. Like past annual reports, this report contains a number of recommendations, dealing with designation, active offer, health, immigration, justice, and secondary and postsecondary education.

With regard to health specifically, we are seeing a complete upheaval of the system, once again. Health Ontario, its integrated care delivery systems and its service providers absolutely must tailor their services to the needs of Francophone patients, relying in particular on the expertise and hard work of the French Language Health Planning Entities. In the area of immigration, I sincerely hope that this government will finally take a proactive approach and ensure that there is at least 5% Francophone immigration every year. Lastly, the report emphasizes the need to modernize the *French Language Services Act*, which is still just as outdated today, in 2019, as it was in 2016.

In 2018-2019, we processed 435 complaints and inquiries, more than half of which were admissible. I should point out that because of complaints about Ontario tribunals. I launched an investigation of the systemic problems with access to justice in French.

I would like to take advantage of my last few moments here to thank all of the staff members of the Commissioner's Office, former members of the team and those who are here with me now. We have had some difficult months, but they kept on working with uncommon professionalism. I will not name them all, except perhaps Executive Director Jean-Gilles. He has assumed the difficult responsibilities of overseeing the transition with the Office of the Ombudsman. I would also like to thank the former Minister of Francophone Affairs, Madeleine Meilleur, for trusting an unknown person but above all for giving him the tools to do his job. Thanks also to the former minister, Marie-France Lalonde, with whom we have developed a solid working relationship and finally my thanks to Minister Caroline Mulroney who has nevertheless shown a lot of listening and with whom I would have liked to develop a work relationship.

I would like to address my last few words to the people of Ontario, particularly the province's Francophones. We must never lose sight of the fact that behind our reports, studies, public policies and government decisions, there are real people trying to live their lives and keep their language and culture. If we have been able to help them in that worthy endeavour, we will have fulfilled a large part of our role as language commissioner.

You welcomed me with such great generosity wherever I went in this province. Thank you for listening to me, and thank you for your advice. I am grateful to all of our complainants, who took the time to notify us of poor French-language service or systemic problems and in many cases opened their hearts to us. I can only hope that we served you well. We learned a great deal from you, and we are better people thanks to you.

Thank you.

I will now take any questions you may have.