

## **Bilingualism in Manitoba**

Pursuant to section 23 of the *Manitoba Act, 1870*, English and French have an official status in the legislative and judicial spheres of government in the province. In *Reference Re Manitoba Language Rights*, the Supreme Court of Canada, in discussing the intent of section 23, stated that “[t]he purpose of . . . section 23 of the *Manitoba Act, 1870* . . . was to ensure equal access to the legislatures, the laws and the courts for francophones and anglophones alike”. As a result, all provincial statutes and regulations must be passed in English and French and the courts must be able to operate in both these languages.

In addition to these constitutional obligations, the Government of Manitoba adopted a French Language Services Policy in 1989. The fundamental purpose of the Policy is to ensure that government departments and agencies provide their services in both English and French in geographic areas of the province where the French-speaking population is concentrated. Although the policy as a whole is not entrenched in legislation, the bilingual service centres which represent an essential tool for its proper implementation are recognized and protected under a provincial statute enacted in June 2012.

Several other provinces and territories also have laws and policies that guide the provision of services to their official language minority. New Brunswick ensures services in both English and French in all governmental aspects as required constitutionally. Quebec and Manitoba have similar constitutional obligations with respect to legislative and judicial bilingualism. Quebec’s laws and regulations provide for English language services in health and social services, in education and other sectors. Ontario, Prince Edward Island and Nova Scotia have enacted laws to ensure services in French in designated geographic areas and in various fields of public service activity. The northern territories all have legislation pertaining to the provision of services in a number of official languages. Virtually all governments across Canada have established special offices in charge of French-language services in order to better meet the needs of their Francophone population.

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