



***Annual Report of the  
French Language Services Commissioner of Ontario, 2023-2024***

**Opening Remarks – Commissioner Carl Bouchard, December 5, 2024**

Hello everyone,

I'd like to start by acknowledging that we're on the traditional territory of many First Nations, including the Mississaugas of the Credit, the Anishnabeg, the Chippewa, the Haudenosaunee, and the Wendat peoples, and a territory that is now home to many First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples.

Thank you.

“If I can't pass this test, I can't earn a living.”

We heard that from a Francophone who had just moved to Ontario, in a message describing how a lack of services in French was jeopardizing his ability to earn a living in this province.

His was one of the almost 400 cases we handled this past year, which can be found in our Annual Report. It's the case of a truck driver who couldn't get a bilingual examiner at a DriveTest Centre in Ottawa for his heavy vehicle driver's licence.

Truck drivers play a key role in Ontario's economy. Our work in this instance helped a newcomer enter the workforce and gave the province one more truck driver it could count on.

He even called us back to say thank you. “I got my licence today. I wanted to thank you very much for your help and for everything you did for me. Thank you!”

That's why we're here: To promote the right to French language services, because we know they benefit people individually, and the entire province.

Our contributions are crucial for the vitality of the Francophone community in Ontario and for Ontario's prosperity as a whole. Francophones and public agencies alike have thanked us for taking action to protect language rights, and for our professionalism and expertise in empowering the public sector to find ways to remove barriers to accessing services in French.

And here is the proof: Since May 1, 2019, we've published five Annual Reports and two reports on investigations, and issued 41 recommendations, the majority of which were accepted and implemented by the government, or are in the process of being implemented. We have made huge strides in improving Ontario's provision of services in French. I thank the government for its collaboration, as well as the public for bringing more cases to our attention each year, a testament to their growing trust in our organization.

I attribute this increase largely to the work we've put in to connect with all those who speak French in Ontario. We are constantly working to give Francophones and anyone in the province who has an interest in French a Commissioner who is accessible and responsive, to help them understand and resolve the issues they are facing.

This year, I attended 23 community events and several dozen meetings with interested parties of all kinds, including Francophone organizations, elected officials, public servants, fellow ombudsmen and other independent officers.

I gave 21 interviews and posted 12 videos and statements.

I visited almost every part of Ontario. I went to Ottawa, Vanier, Sarnia, London, Chatham-Kent, Windsor, Timmins, Moonbeam, Kapuskasing and Hearst, to name just a few places.

I met with Francophones who impressed me with their ingenuity and resourcefulness. Francophones who are interested and motivated.

One of the recurring themes I noticed in the conversations I had with Franco-Ontarians, as well as in our casework and in my many direct public interactions, was a lack of awareness of which services of the Ontario government must be provided in French and where they could be found.

To improve the delivery of French language services in Ontario, I think it's important to be able to easily identify them.

This is in fact the purpose of the *French Language Services Act* and its regulation on active offer.

Therefore, in my Annual Report, I've recommended that the Ministry of Francophone Affairs develop a digital tool to help people quickly locate the services that are covered by the Act and that must be offered in French.

*Aussi disponible en français*

This aligns with the goal that the government set in April 2023 when the regulation on active offer entered into force. At that time, the government said it wanted to ensure that French language services are readily available according to the principle of active offer, so that the burden of finding these services no longer falls entirely on users.

We are already seeing plenty of initiatives to help identify where services are available in French.

The Ontario Provincial Police is now permanently flying the Franco-Ontarian flag at its general headquarters and its detachments that offer service in French. The OPP is also allowing officers who are able to work in French to wear a Franco-Ontarian flag pin.

On the websites of the LCBO and ServiceOntario, you can now filter your search results to find branches that offer services in French.

In October, the Ministry of Francophone Affairs unveiled a visual identifier in the form of a logo that agencies designated under the *FLSA* can print out and use to more clearly identify themselves as providing service in French.

But all this requires an effort on the part of Francophones to follow, research and learn about different individual practices.

With a digital tool that pulls together all the information on which services are available in French, and where we can find them around us, Ontarians who wish to be served in French will be able to access these services efficiently, without having to wonder whether or not they have the right to them.

When this information is clearly communicated, French speakers will have a better understanding of where they have the right to be served in French, and the government will be better positioned to achieve its goal of shifting the onus of identifying and locating services from users to service providers, as stated in the Act.

Thank you for another fulfilling year. I encourage you to add [www.ombudsman.on.ca](http://www.ombudsman.on.ca) to your bookmarks, send us an email, or call us to share your personal experiences.

I'm ready to take your questions now.

*Check against delivery*

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