



## **Backgrounder: Standing Committee on Rules and Procedures Reviews Use of Official Languages in the Legislative Assembly**

The Standing Committee on Rules and Procedures (“Committee”) is currently reviewing the use of official languages in the Northwest Territories Legislative Assembly.

### **Why is the Committee looking at this:**

The Legislative Assembly makes interpreters available in most official languages when Members are sitting in the Chamber. On March 10, 2020, there was no Tłıchǫ Interpreter. Mr. Lafferty, the MLA for Monfwi said this prevented him from doing his job as a MLA. Mr. Lafferty raised this as a point of privilege with the Speaker, Mr. Frederick Blake. A Member can raise a point of privilege when they feel their rights or role as a Member has been interfered with.

On March 11, 2020, when a Tłıchǫ interpreter was available, Mr. Blake heard debate from Members. He decided that on first look, this issue touched on privilege. The Assembly asked the Committee to review and make recommendations.

The debate and Mr. Blake’s decision is here:

<https://www.ntassembly.ca/sites/assembly/files/hn200311.pdf>

### **Using official languages in the Chamber:**

The *Official Languages Act* says that everyone has the right to use an official language in the debates and other proceedings of the Legislative Assembly.

The rules of the Legislative Assembly are silent on the right of Members to use an official language other than English in the Chamber. They are also silent on whether other Members have a right to understand what is being said when someone speaks in an official language other than English.

### **Committee wants to hear what you think:**

Committee wants to hear from you on what you think about the use of official languages at the Legislative Assembly. You can provide submissions in writing, or you can speak to Committee directly. Committee will be holding a public hearing on November 17, 2020 at 7 p.m.

Some questions you may want to consider include:

- Does the right to use an official language in the Assembly include the right to be understood?
- What should happen if a Member speaks in another language and an interpreter is not available?
- Does it make a difference if an interpreter is unable to work at the last minute?
- What Assembly documents and proceedings should be available in all official languages?
- What could the Assembly do to support Members in using official languages?
- What rights do residents who speak official languages other than English have to understand what is happening at the Assembly?

**Making a submission:**

If you want to make a written submission, please send it to:

Michael Ball  
Committee Clerk, Rules and Procedures  
Northwest Territories Legislative Assembly  
PO Box 1320  
4570-48<sup>th</sup> Street  
Yellowknife, NT X1A 2L9

Or by email at [Michael\\_Ball@ntassembly.ca](mailto:Michael_Ball@ntassembly.ca)

Or by fax at 867-873-0432

Your written submission should arrive by November 17, 2020.

If you want to make a presentation to committee, please contact:

Michael Ball  
Committee Clerk, Rules and Procedures

by phone at 867-767-9130 ext. 12016

or by email at [Michael\\_Ball@ntassembly.ca](mailto:Michael_Ball@ntassembly.ca)

You can appear by phone or video. If you wish to make your presentation in an official language other than English, please contact Mr. Ball no later than November 3, 2020 so that he can arrange interpretation.