

Government of  
Northwest Territories

June 26, 2023

CAITLIN CLEVELAND  
MLA, KAM LAKE**Oral Question 1488-19(2) Government of the Northwest Territories (GNWT)**  
**Indigenous Language System**

This letter is in follow-up to the Oral Question you raised on March 29, 2023, regarding revising and modernizing the Bilingual Designation policy so that it better supports language revitalization. During our exchange, I committed to reviewing the impact of the Bilingual Designation policy as I was not aware of its implications on employees who speak or are learning an official Indigenous language. I also acknowledged if a public servant speaks one of our official languages, they should be recognized for that.

In December 2016, the Department of Finance (“FIN” or “the Department”, at the time, the Department of Human Resources) came to Financial Management Board (FMB) to seek approval of a Bilingual Designation Policy; however, the FMB recommended that the policy be expanded to include Indigenous languages in addition to French. Indigenous languages refer to official Indigenous languages as defined in the *Official Languages Act*: Chipewyan, Cree, Gwich’in, Inuinnaqtun, Inuvialuktun, Inuktitut, North Slavey, South Slavey and Tłı̨chǫ.

In March 2018, the Government of the Northwest Territories (GNWT) Strategic Plan for French Languages ended, and a new Operating Plan on French Services was developed following the implementation of the *Canada-Northwest Territories Cooperation Agreement to Support French and Aboriginal Languages*. The funding from that plan went toward providing administrative and policy support to implement and deliver programs and services to the public in French and to support the revitalization, maintenance, and enhancement of the Indigenous Languages.

The Bilingual Designation policy allows an employee to receive a bilingual bonus for using an Indigenous language if they are considered by a fluent speaker of that language to have sufficient knowledge and skill to engage in conversation or communication in that language. The Human Resources Branch at FIN is responsible for evaluation of all language abilities. Prior to a job offer being made, a potential candidate is required to successfully undergo an evaluation as part of the recruitment process for bilingual required positions.

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The GNWT recognizes employees that are required to use two or more of the official languages of the Northwest Territories (NWT) by remunerating those employees in the form of a bilingual bonus payable in the amount of \$1,200 per annum.

It is imperative to note that the Bilingual Designation policy applies to all GNWT public servants except:

- Members of the NWT Teachers' Association;
- Employees of the NWT Power Corporation;
- Physicians as per NWT Medical Association; and
- Translators and interpreters tasked with providing translation services for the public.

To ensure continued integrity of the service being offered in an Indigenous language, language abilities must be re-evaluated if there is a reasonable basis to believe an employee receiving the bonus may not be providing adequate bilingual services.

To support language revitalization, Government Service Officers (GSOs) provide services in their Indigenous language or understand the language enough to dialogue with Elders. This is part of access to programs and services offered in small communities. The GSOs can translate or explain (using plain language) forms and applications in terms or analogies that the Elders would understand.

The implementation of the Bilingual Designation policy highlights the importance of offering services and communications in the official languages of the NWT, in addition to showing the GNWT recognizes the importance of language revitalization and maintaining these languages which is a principle supported by many northerners.

Thank you.



Caroline Wawzonek  
Minister of Finance

- c. Clerk of the Legislative Assembly  
Legislative Coordinator, Executive and Indigenous Affairs