

# Senate Standing Committee on Social Affairs, Science and Technology

May 1, 2019

## Witnesses (Panel One):

- Frank Folino, President, Canadian Association of the Deaf
- Rosalie Wang, Assistant Professor, Department of Occupational Science and Occupational Therapy, University of Toronto (AGE-WELL)

## Summary:

Frank Folino started by saying he wanted to see legal recognition of ASL/LSQ as the language of Deaf Canadians. He said 45 countries recognized national sign languages, but Canada has not. He clarified that they were not looking for official language status, but rather recognition of ASL/LSQ in Bill C-81 that would require production of sign language videos on government websites, interpreting services at federal service bureaus, leader's debates, and emergency alerts, and other areas within federal jurisdiction.

Rosalie Wang from AGE-WELL said she wanted to see acknowledgement of multiple or compounding forms of discrimination, for example ageism and disability. She also said federal leadership would be required in helping people access personal assistive technologies. She acknowledged that funding for assistive devices is currently a provincial or territorial jurisdiction but argued that C-81 gives the Minister the power to coordinate with provinces and territories.

Senator Seidman asked Folino where he wanted to see ASL/LSQ amendments made in the bill. He said under Section 6, within the Principles of the Act.

Senator Munson asked the witnesses to weigh in on the permissive language in the bill, and whether the word "may" should be changed to "must". Folino said it had to be changed to must.

Senator Oh asked how adding ASL/LSQ to the legislation would help public transit, including air travel. Folino said it was a question of safety. He said only one airline provides captioned videos, and he wanted to see ASL/LSQ included in videos. Additionally, he said announcements about flight delays, gate changes, or emergencies, should be texted and displayed in addition to being announced.

Senator Deacon asked about the advantages of including timelines. Wong said they would be useful for accountability. Folino said timelines were very important, and noted that without them, a regulated entity could wait 25-30 years before implementing accessibility regulations.

Senator Poirer asked about interpretation services, and if services are provided equally in urban and rural Canada. Folino said there are about 800 ASL interpreters and 200 LSQ interpreters in Canada. Canadians can access interpreting services through video calling; Folino noted that having the support in Bill C-81 would put momentum behind ASL/LSQ to train more interpreters and have services more available.

### **Witnesses (Panel Two):**

- Donna Jodhan, President, Barrier Free Canada
- Seema Lamba, Acting Coordinator, Programs Section, Public Service Alliance of Canada
- The Honorable David Onley, Former Lieutenant Governor of Ontario, As an Individual
- Christopher T. Sutton, National Executive Director (Canadian Hard of Hearing Association)

### **Summary:**

The Honourable David Onley started by saying that 53 percent of Canadians either have a disability or have an immediate family member with a disability, making it the majority of Canadians who will be affected by this bill. He said during the implementation of the AODA, he was convinced moral suasion and good economic arguments for accessibility would be enough in convincing regulated businesses to act. He said after the third review period of the AODA, he knows that isn't the case, and stressed that timelines were needed in the bill to achieve definable dates for standards and objectives.

Donna Jodhan from Barrier Free Canada also said the bill needs timelines so progress on accessibility can be measured. She suggested the words "may" be changed to "shall" and said she wanted to see the minimum penalty for non-compliance set at \$50,000.

Christopher Sutton of the Canadian Hard of Hearing Association said laws and standards are only one part of breaking down barriers and urged the committee to pass the bill quickly. He said once the foundation is put in place, the real work will begin. He urged for timelines, communication supports, and payment to persons with disabilities who are contributing their lived experience.

Seema Lamba from the Public Service Alliance of Canada said she was concerned there was overlap between two pieces of legislation – Bill C-81, and the Employment Equity Act. She suggested the Employment Equity Act be updated to include the employment pieces of Bill C-81. She said the Act had not been updated since 2002, and that federal public services were not getting appropriate accommodations in a timely manner.

Senator Seidman asked each of the panelists what their number one priority would be when the committee presented amendments. Onley, Jodhan, and Sutton all agreed they wanted to see timelines. Lamba said she wanted consistency in workplace accommodations and workplace grievances.

Senator Munson asked if there was enthusiasm in the public service for this bill. Lamba said yes, there is enthusiasm in the public service, and that there are a disproportional number of people with disabilities leaving the public service. She said there has been a task force that is working on the merits of a diversity and inclusion lens, like the GBA+ currently used by the government.

Senator Deacon asked if education and training would be a purposeful piece to this legislation. Onley said advocates are tired and can only keep pursuing things for so long. He said if there is quality content in the bill, there will be considerable enthusiasm, support, and encouragement when it comes to education and training.