



NEWS RELEASE

The Honourable Senator Claudette Tardif, Ph.D.

Access to justice in French in francophone minority communities

Ottawa, May 15, 2012 – The Honourable Claudette Tardif, Senator for Alberta, spoke in the Senate of Canada today on the issue of access to justice in French for members of francophone minority communities.

Senator Tardif said that even though access to justice in Canada's two official languages is a fundamental right recognized by the Constitution, the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, Canadian law and Canadian courts, there are still too many obstacles and gaps standing in the way of access to justice in French.

“I am of the opinion that given that our language rights are recognized in law, individuals charged with a crime have the right to be heard in court in French. They have the right to have a representative of the Crown who speaks French. They have the right to court transcripts that reflect statements made in French. And they have the right to legal and judicial resources in French.”

Senator Tardif named several impediments to respect for and application of the language rights of individuals involved in legal proceedings, including the lack of bilingual judges, a severe shortage of bilingual staff and resources, perceptions which suggest that going to court in French would be a disadvantage, and the absence in most provinces and territories of a real policy of actively offering judicial and legal services in both official languages.

Senator Tardif also called on the federal and provincial governments to demonstrate greater political will to improve access to justice in French.

“Because there are many obstacles to justice in French in the majority of provinces, there is an urgent need for a coordinated approach by all the stakeholders. We still have a long way to go to right this wrong.”

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