

Bilingualism of the Moncton Fire Department: Complainer wins (Translated by Google Translate)

Description

An investigation by the Commissioner of Official Languages in New Brunswick may have consequences for all municipalities in the province

The Moncton Fire Department must serve the public in both official languages at all times, concludes New Brunswick's Commissioner of Official Languages, following a complaint by a citizen who could not be served French during a medical emergency.

The facts at the origin of the complaint go back to February 20, 2014. The complainant, Louis Audet, had dialed 911 to obtain help for his spouse in difficulty. A fire department team was the first to arrive at the scene, but none of its four members spoke French, according to Mr. Audet.

Commissioner Katherine d'Entremont considers that the City of Moncton has derogated from its obligations under the Official Languages Act.

Ambulance NB must provide its services in both official languages under the law, says the Commissioner. This obligation therefore applies to the role of first responder. Any organization that acts as a first respondent with paid employees has the same obligation, adds Ms. d'Entremont. The fire department had to serve the citizen in the official language of his choice, she concluded.

First responders must understand the importance of serving the public in both languages, according to Louis Audet's lawyer, Michel Doucet, linguistic expert and legal advisor.

"So, in the end, all the services were offered to Mr. Audet in English despite the fact that he himself had repeatedly stated that English was not his first language, that he was not unable to understand the questions put to him. These are very important situations, crisis situations where people need to be offered services in their language," says Doucet.

All New Brunswick municipalities should now review their fire department's ability to serve the public in both official languages, he added.

That means that municipalities like the City of Moncton or other remunerated first responder services in this case will have to revisit their protocol for the first client approach, and ensure that these protocols respect the Official Languages Act of New Brunswick.

Michel Doucet, linguistic expert and Louis Audet's legal advisor

The Commissioner of Official Languages makes recommendations to the City of Moncton, including ensuring that the fire department, as the first responder, complies with the Official Languages Act at all times, and formulate a plan with a timetable to improve the bilingual capacity of this service.

It was not possible to obtain feedback from the City of Moncton.

<http://ici.radio-canada.ca/nouvelle/1075708/plainte-bilinguisme-service-incendie-moncton-acadie-nouveau-brunswick>

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