

Long-time director given one year to learn French (by subscription)

## Description

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A petition circulating through the Moncton Lions Community Centre calls for the not-for-profit to ask the executive director learn French at her own expense.

The petition states that the executive director is being "asked to become bilingual at her own expense. If she does not do so by the end of the year, it is understood that her employment will be terminated," reads a copy of the petition obtained by the Times & Transcript.

"This request is a fundamental change in the contract of employment, so if and when the employment is terminated, the centre should be responsible for all costs."

The petition began circulating at the seniors' centre on St. George Street early last week.

Pat Layden, 41, executive director of the centre, said on Friday that she is aware of the petition.

Layden confirmed that Blair Lawrence, the chairman of the Lions Centre's board and a Moncton councillor, presented her with a one-year contract on Wednesday requiring she reach a certain level of French competency, by the end of the year.

Lawrence is one of two city councillors who sits on the board as the city owns the building and the organization receives a grant from the city. The city also gives the organization an operating grant of \$68,330, which falls into the \$237,000 budget for 2016.

Layden, originally from Newfoundland, has been an employee of the not-for profit since 2009 and has been at the centre. In 2011, she was asked by the board to fill the position of administrator after her predecessor left.

In an interview with the Times & Transcript on Friday, Layden said she was unilingual at the time she was hired. She said she was required by her employer - the board - to learn to speak French, even when her position was not bilingual.

Layden said that she loves working at the centre, loves the members, and wants to continue to work there.

She said she plans to attend French classes at her own expense in the fall as a result of the petition. She added that some members of the centre have offered to help her learn the language.

In an interview with the Times & Transcript last week, Lawrence confirmed he presented Layden with a contract that required her to reach an advanced French competency requirement, but Lawrence said it was revised when Layden said she could not meet the level of proficiency outlined.

In the days after Layden signed the contract, Lawrence asked that she post a message from members that she was remaining in her position.

"The board of directors of the Moncton Lions Community Centre is pleased to announce the MLCC executive director.

"The board looks forward to continue working collaboratively with Pat and staff and the members.

Mary Cain, a dance teacher and long-time tenant of the building, said while she doesn't know to sign it. Cain said she would hate to see Layden's job in jeopardy, as she is well-respected in the building.

"I've been in that building let's say 25 years, and I teach upstairs," she said. "There's a room that was this awful gross green colour [and] I was almost embarrassed to be teaching in there."

When Layden became the executive director, she listened to Cain's concerns and painted the new flooring.

"She puts in a lot of her own time in there, probably more than she is getting paid for," said Layden. "Things done, she fights for the seniors, she fights for anyone who's renting there... that's the role."

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