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Aluki Kotierk, President, NTI
Opening Remarks to the Standing Committee on Legislation
Bill 25 – proposed *Education Act* amendments
Monday, November 25, 2019 at 10:30 a.m.



Introductory Remarks

Thank you, chairperson and members, for the opportunity to present before the Standing Committee today in regards to Bill 25.

My name is Aluki Kotierk. I am the President of Nunavut Tunngavik Incorporated.

My presentation is a joint response from NTI, the Qikiqtani Inuit Association, the Kivalliq Inuit Association and the Kitikmeot Inuit Association (the Inuit Organizations) and is informed by the active input of Nunavummiut.

I am speaking to you today on behalf of Nunavut Inuit.
We are calling for government to withdraw Bill 25.

Despite our rights, including under Article 32 of the Nunavut Agreement, and despite consistent efforts on our part, NTI was not engaged in the development of this proposed legislation.

This is concerning, particularly given the elevated priority of Inuit towards creating an education system that reflects and promotes Inuit priorities and Inuit culture.

Inuit are not asking for anything new, and what we are asking of our government is indeed reasonable, as reflected in current legislation.

During public consultations regarding proposed amendments to the Education Act and the Inuit Language Protection Act last fall and winter, members of the public and local leadership of District Education Authorities (DEAs) took the time and effort to provide input in the hopes that they may contribute positively to education reform in our territory.

Inuit have consistently communicated a desired path forward in the broad area of education. These concerns have been communicated to you (as well as your

predecessors) – through written correspondence and formal submissions, through direct contact with MLAs and by other means.

Our main concerns are three-fold:

1. **Inuktitut** must be the language of instruction in all grades and in all subject areas, not just language arts. Inuit culture must form an equal part in the education system.

2019 marks the International Year of Indigenous Languages – an opportunity to draw attention to Indigenous languages and the urgent need to strengthen, revitalize and promote them.

Here, in Nunavut, we are concerned about the future of Inuktitut. The goals for protecting, preserving and promoting Inuktitut, as envisioned in the dream of Nunavut are currently not being achieved.

The current education system in Nunavut is not living up to the requirements in the *Education Act* and the *Inuit Language Protection Act*.

Rather than proactively addressing the underlying issues and investing the resources where they are needed, our government is apparently seeking to diminish existing language rights with Bill 25.

There is an urgency to strengthen and revitalize Inuktitut, especially given the high proportion of young people in Nunavut. According to Statistics Canada 2016 Census data, young Nunavummiut under 25 years old make up 49.7% of the population. While 89% of Inuit are able to converse in Inuktitut, the Census data can hide levels of proficiency.

If English continues to be the predominant language of instruction across Nunavut's public school system, then how is this system supporting parents and families in pursuit of our cultural and linguistic rights and aspirations?

There is a dire need to make Inuktitut as the language of instruction (LOI) from Kindergarten to Grade 12 because Inuktitut matters.

Since its creation in 1999, the GN has projected linguistic dispossession of Inuktitut by privileging English and southern Canadian (and often 'white') norms as beneficial to Nunavut's northern and Inuit education system. Such linguistic and cultural harms imposed on Inuit children and their families, historically and currently, contribute to an education system that is fundamentally colonial.

Today in Nunavut, during the UN Year of Indigenous Languages, we continue to see negative results of education based on forced assimilation and serious harm, not with residential schools, but rather with other political and pedagogical means.

The education system continues to minimize and stigmatize the cultural, economic and environmental needs of Inuktitut for Inuit students and their families.

Nunavut government-mandated curriculum is fraught with problems as Eurocentricity unjustly privileges English and Western value systems, while consequently degrading others—in Nunavut's case—Inuktitut and Inuit ways of knowing, being and understanding.

This promotes linguisticism. Despite any positive intentions, the resulting education system is biased against and discriminates against Inuit children and youth (and their families) on the basis of their language and diminishes their linguistic human rights:

1. by replacing Inuktitut with English;
2. by maintaining and extending English as the language of instruction; and
3. by setting back a diluted implementation of Inuktitut language of instruction to 2039:
 - I. Bill 25 shockingly also intends to reduce the right to Inuit Language of Instruction to an Inuit Language Arts program. It would not be until 2039 that Inuktitut Language Arts courses from Grades 4-12 would be available. Inuktitut Language of Instruction timelines for all other courses are left to be set in the future or perhaps never. This is not a reasonable plan that we can accept and the Standing Committee should not accept it either.
 - II. Inuktitut must be the language of instruction in all grades and in all subject areas, not just language arts. Inuit culture must form an equal part in the education system.

The government maintains and promotes linguisticism in its policies and practices through structural and ideological processes, and this discrimination against Inuit must stop. Not 20 years or 40 years from today. This structural discrimination against Inuit must stop NOW.

Let us not abandon our children's right to quality Inuit education because it is challenging for the administration.

It is our collective responsibility to take action now.

2. DEA Authority

The government must provide support to the Coalition of Nunavut Education Authorities and DEAs to expand and take on substantive authorities and effectively deliver on Inuit language, curriculum and incorporation of *Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit* throughout the education system, similar to the authority given to CSFN

Governance Matters

There is a pressing need to balance and clarify roles and responsibilities as well as funding and accountability, because education governance matters.

Bill 25 perpetuates the fundamental flaws created by the 2008 *Education Act* by not requiring the Minister to deliver on fundamental obligations and by further eroding the role and budgets of the DEAs.

The Government of Nunavut's approach to the governance of education over-emphasizes DEA capacity challenges (and ignores failures on part of the Department of Education, who is currently responsible for provision of required supports).

Reducing DEA authorities while allowing the Minister of Education to centralize a standardized education system is not the solution.

The *Nunavut Education Reform Act* proposes to improve education significantly by allowing the Coalition of Nunavut Education Authorities and DEAs to expand and take on substantive authorities and effectively deliver on Inuit language, curriculum and incorporation of *Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit* throughout the education system.

As is currently provided to one, but not all education authorities.

NERA establishes clear lines of authority between the Department of Education and District Education Authorities, and will reinstate the powers, duties and functions of superintendents as well as increase the number of Inuit educators.

NERA will be supplemental to the existing *Education Act*. It will provide for a collaborative process for the Department of Education, the Coalition of Nunavut DEAs and NTI to make any further required amendments in legislation and regulations.

NERA will allow Inuit to play a fundamental role in education decision-making through the Coalition of Nunavut Education Authorities and the DEAs, and put in place a process to ensure that this transition happens smoothly.

3. Inclusive Education

The GN must ensure that all Nunavut students with diverse needs are fully included with their peers in regular classrooms—with timely diagnoses by qualified professionals, adequate supports and accommodations, ongoing assessments and record-keeping, open communication between schools and families, and appropriately trained educators.

Inclusive Education Matters

There is an urgent need to recognize the importance of *all* children, regardless of their needs, because all children matter in inclusive schools and classrooms in Nunavut.

It can be observed that Inuit youth are *pushed out* rather than drop out of school. Not only is Nunavut's formal education programs mainly conducted through the medium of English rather than Inuktut, it has been insensitive to local needs, that is, Inuit needs. Nunavut's current education system is irrelevant to Inuit children and youth.

It is imperative that the Department of Education recognize that students with diverse needs make up a significant number of students in Nunavut classrooms. Schools, which are to be safe spaces for all students, must also be rich places of learning and teaching for all.

Currently, many Inuit children and youth are excluded in schools.

Change in the organization of inclusive education is an important way of putting an end to the inequitable treatment of Inuit children and youth with diverse needs. We urge the Government to make Nunavut schools inclusive *now*.

The GN must ensure that all Nunavut students with diverse needs are fully included with their peers in regular classrooms—with timely diagnoses by qualified professionals, adequate supports and accommodations, ongoing assessments and record-keeping, open communication between schools and families, and appropriately trained educators.

Without these effective inclusive practices and the funding necessary to implement and support these, Nunavut's education system will continue to fail a majority of Inuit students, who remain undiagnosed through no fault of their own.

Because all Inuit children matter in inclusive schools and classrooms in our communities, Nunavut Inuit object to Bill 25.

My recommendation to you is to have a student based approach rather than an administrative centred approach.

I am not here to complain. We see NTI and Inuit as active and positive contributors.

Nunavut Education Reform Act

NTI has explored and considered improvements to our education system. We have paid close attention to the expressed needs and wishes of Nunavummiut and developed a sound proposal to reform the Education system in Nunavut.

The *Nunavut Education Reform Act* (NERA), which we have shared with you for your review and input, recognizes that Inuit have the fundamental right to control our children's education based on a foundation that encompasses Inuit culture.

Specifically, NERA will make Inuktitut the main language of instruction in early childhood education programs and Kindergarten through Grade 12, in all classes and subjects, in a practical and ambitious timeframe, to ensure the graduation of students proficient in both Inuktitut and English or French.

Because all children matter, in culturally-responsive school programs rooted in additive bilingualism and *Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit*, Nunavut Inuit object to Bill 25. NTI is inviting the Nunavut legislature to consider, refine and adopt NERA instead of Bill 25.

The *Nunavut Education Reform Act* proposes to improve education significantly by allowing the Coalition of Nunavut Education Authorities and DEAs to expand and take on substantive authorities and effectively deliver on Inuit language, curriculum and incorporation of *Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit* throughout the education system.

As is currently provided to one, but not all education authorities.

Nunavut Education Reform Act establishes clear lines of authority between the Department of Education and District Education Authorities, and will reinstate the powers, duties and functions of superintendents as well as increase the number of Inuit educators.

Nunavut Education Reform Act will be supplemental to the existing *Education Act*. It will provide for a collaborative process for the Department of Education, the Coalition of Nunavut DEAs and NTI to make any further required amendments in legislation and regulations.

Nunavut Education Reform Act will allow Inuit to play a fundamental role in education decision-making through the Coalition of Nunavut Education Authorities and the DEAs, and put in place a process to ensure that this transition happens smoothly.

Closing Remarks

I believe that, together, we can constructively address the challenges with the common goal of improving the education system for the benefit of our youth.

In closing, I want to draw your attention to the reference made in Thomas Berger's cover letter in the 2006 Conciliator's report about the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Bi-culturalism held in the late 1960's. Following the commission's report, the federal government acknowledged their responsibility for French language expenditures. In fact, the Prime Minister of the day, Prime Minister Pearson, said francophonie should feel at home in their own country.

Now, is that the sentiment we should be advocating for in a territory where the public majority are Inuit?

Inuit should feel at home in Nunavut.

Inuit listening to us this morning are looking to you and expecting you to pass legislation that will ensure that they feel welcomed in Nunavut.