D'Entremont on Paramedics

Description

Here is the explanation of why the paramedic situation is being managed the way it is. In September of 2013, our Language Commissioner received a complaint about language service on an ambulance call. The two ambulance attendants were unilingual English and were responding to a call to a French individual. Their lack of capability in French was the focus of the complaint. There are a number of facts that were disclosed in this investigation that clearly expose the attitude of the Language Commissioner and the government's view of the proper application of the official Languages Act.

First of all, the Language Commissioner, Ms d'Entremont, was clearly upset with the lack of an "active offer". Ambulance New Brunswick stated that the patient was not having any trouble expressing herself in English and that at no time did she ask the paramedics to speak to her in French. The Commissioner points out that the "active offer" must be given regardless of what the circumstances. We learn that despite the patient speaking in English, she should have been greeted with "Hello, Bonjour". Apparently this would have given the patient the opportunity to switch to French.

The Commissioner points out that "For non-compliant employees, (those not giving the active offer) disciplinary action must be taken". This shows how ridiculous the situation has become but it is the official policy of the government and their interpretation of the law. It should be noted here that the government at the time was the Alward Conservatives.

During this incident , the patient's sister attempted to talk to the attendants in French and a firefighter on the scene attempted to translate. Ms d'Entremont's comment in this regard was that "other workers on the site such as firefighters, cannot adequately compensate for deficiencies in complying with the Official Languages Act". It would appear from her comment that Ambulance NB is in violation of the Act today by allowing an English paramedic on ambulances because other workers (French speaking attendants) are not permitted under the Act to handle language duties for them. No one has ever taken issue with her on this.

In regard to a mention of a telephone translation system, Ms d'Entremont made reference to a court case , "Doucet verses Canada" which was ruled upon by none other than judge Edmond Blanchard, former cabinet minister in the McKenna government. This case was about a citizen stopped by the RCMP but without service in French. The RCMP stated that in cases like this, arrangements are made to communicate to a bilingual member via radio. Judge Blanchard stated in response that:

"such an arrangement is by no means sufficient for the RCMP to fulfill its obligations under the Charter and the OLA so that any member of the public is entitled to communicate with a Federal institution in the official language of his or her choice."

Ms d'Entremont added to this with great glee:

"Consequently it is not acceptable for Ambulance NB to use a radio or telephone system as a way of fulfilling its linguistic obligations in one official language only." Now you understand why the translation systems are not used in New Brunswick. This certainly should be challenged but we know the barriers to that process, don't we.

D'Entremont goes on to say that " the number of Francophones or Anglophones in a region must not be a factor used to determine the required level of proficiency. Consequently, each crew of paramedics, regardless of where it is in the province, must be able to provide services of equal quality in both official languages. Note the word "quality" this gives licence to the language testing regiment.

So there you have it; the story of how the Language Commissioner, the French jurists, French leadership and successive Liberal and Conservative governments have produced the inequality and discriminatory nonsense that is going on today with not only the paramedics but, firefighters, police and others.

Category

1. Blog

Date Created
2018-11-20

Footer Tagline