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SECTION 14
Right to an Interpreter

Compilation of primary documents to assist in interpreting the public
meaning of Section 14 of the *Constitution Act, 1982*

Second Edition

August, 2025



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The Constitution Act, 1982
Part I. Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms
Legal Rights

Interpreter

Section 14 *A party or witness in any proceedings who does not understand or speak the language in which the proceedings are conducted or who is deaf has the right to the assistance of an interpreter.*

PART 1:

Drafting History of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms Pertaining to Section 14's Public Meaning

Drafts of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms:

January 8, 1979: Canadian Charter of Rights & Freedoms, Federal Draft, tabled at Meeting of Officials on the Constitution, (January 11-12, 1979)

October 17, 1979: Rights and Freedoms within the Canadian Federation, Federal Draft, tabled at the Continuing Committee of Ministers on the Constitution (October 22-23, 1979)

November 5, 1979: Rights and Freedoms within the Canadian Federation, Federal Draft, tabled at the Meeting of Officials on the Constitution (November 15-16, 1979)

July 4, 1980: Continuing Committee of Ministers on the Constitution, Rights and Freedoms within the Canadian Federation, Discussion Draft (July 8-11, 1980)

July 4, 1980: Comité Permanent des Ministres sur la Constitution, Droits et Libertés à l'Interieur de la Fédération Canadienne, Document de Travail (July 8-11, 1980)

July 16, 1980: Revised Discussion Draft with Memo re Section 1 (July 18, 1980)

August 5, 1980: Revised Discussion Draft with Memo (August 5, 1980)

August 8, 1980: Formalities to Bill: Joint Resolution (August 8, 1980)

August 22, 1980: Discussion Draft (Federal) (August 26-29, 1980)

August 28, 1980: Provincial Proposal (In the event that there is going to be entrenchment) (August 26-29, 1980)

September 3, 1980: Revised Discussion Draft (September 8-12, 1980)

September 3, 1980 : Conference Fédérale-Provinciale des Premiers Ministres, Document de Travail, Charte Canadienne des Droits et Libertés (September 3, 1980)

September 24, 1980: Resolution for joint address to Her Majesty the Queen respecting the constitution of Canada (September 24, 1980)

October 2, 1980: Proposed Resolution for a Joint Address to Her Majesty the Queen respecting the Constitution of Canada with Handwritten Notes [Draft, Version1] (October 2, 1980)

October 2, 1980: Proposed Resolution for a Joint Address to Her Majesty the Queen respecting the Constitution of Canada with Handwritten Notes [Draft, Version 2] (October 2, 1980)

October 2, 1980: Proposed Resolution for a Joint Address to Her Majesty the Queen respecting the Constitution of Canada

December 12, 1980: Draft [No Title]

December 19, 1980: Consolidation of Proposed Amendments to the Proposed Resolution Respecting the Constitution of Canada (December 19, 1980)

January 9-12, 1981: Briefing Book for Clause by Clause Consideration of the Resolution (January 1981)

January 12, 1981: Version formally presented to Special Joint Committee by Jean Chretien (January 12, 1981)

February 13, 1981: Special Joint Committee, Final Report Submitted to Parliament (February 13, 1981)

Statutes and International Agreements:

1978: Bill C-60: An Act to amend the Constitution of Canada

[This section is incomplete]

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Drafts of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms

January 8, 1979: Canadian Charter of Rights & Freedoms, Federal Draft, tabled at Meeting of Officials on the Constitution, (January 11-12, 1979)

(j) the right to the assistance of an interpreter in any proceedings before a court, tribunal, commission, board or other authority, if the party or witness does not understand or speak the language in which the proceedings are conducted; and

(Source: Meeting of Officials on the Constitution, *Canadian Charter of Rights & Freedoms, Federal Draft*, [January 8, 1979] (Ottawa: 11-12 January, 1979). Click [HERE](#))

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October 17, 1979: Rights and Freedoms within the Canadian Federation, Federal Draft, tabled at the Continuing Committee of Ministers on the Constitution (October 22-23, 1979)

(j) the right to the assistance of an interpreter in proceedings before a court or tribunal, if the accused or witness does not understand or speak the language in which the proceedings are conducted.

(Source: Continuing Committee of Ministers on the Constitution, *Rights and Freedoms within the Canadian Federation Federal Draft*, [October 17, 1979] (Halifax: 22-23 October, 1979). Click [HERE](#))

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November 5, 1979: Rights and Freedoms within the Canadian Federation, Federal Draft, tabled at the Meeting of Officials on the Constitution (November 15-16, 1979)

(j) the right to the assistance of an interpreter in proceedings before a court or tribunal, if the accused or witness does not understand or speak the language in which the proceedings are conducted.

(Source: Meeting of Officials on the Constitution, *Rights & Freedoms within Canadian Federation, Federal Draft*, [November 5, 1979], Doc 840-177/005 (Toronto: 15-16 November, 1979). Click [HERE](#))

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July 4, 1980: Continuing Committee of Ministers on the Constitution, Rights and Freedoms within the Canadian Federation, Discussion Draft

6. (1) Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of his or her person and the right not to be deprived thereof except by due process of law, which process encompasses the following:

[...]

j) the right to the assistance of an interpreter in any proceedings before a court, tribunal, commission, board or other authority, if the party or witness does not understand or speak the language in which the proceedings are conducted.

[...]

13(4) In proceedings in any court in Canada relating to an offence

a) created by or pursuant to an Act of Parliament, or

b) created by or pursuant to an Act of the legislature of a province if the punishment for the offence may be imprisonment, any person giving evidence before the court has the right to be heard in English or French, through the services of an interpreter where necessary, and the right not to be placed at a disadvantage is so being heard.

(Source: Meeting of the Continuing Committee of Ministers on the Constitution, *Rights and Freedoms within the Canadian Federation, Discussion Draft. Tabled by the Delegation of the Government of Canada, 4 July 1980, Doc 830-81/027 (Montreal: 8-11 July 1980). Click [HERE](#).)*

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July 16, 1980: Revised Discussion Draft with Memo re Section 1

6. (1) Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of his or her person and the right not to be deprived thereof except by due process of law, which process encompasses:

[...]

j) the right to the assistance of an interpreter in any proceedings before a court, tribunal, commission, board or other authority, if the party or witness does not understand or speak the language in which the proceedings are conducted.

[...]

13(4) In proceedings in any court in Canada relating to an offence

a) created by or pursuant to an Act of Parliament, or

b) created by or pursuant to an Act of the legislature of a province if the punishment for the offence may be imprisonment, any person giving evidence before the court has the right to be heard in English or French, through the services of an interpreter where necessary, and the right not to be placed at a disadvantage is so being heard.

(Source: Memo from Fred Jordan to Roger Tassé re Charter of Rights – Possible Modifications [with Possible Alternatives to Section 1 of July 4, 1980 Draft & Revised Discussion Draft (16 July 1980)] (18 July 1980). This text is found on p. 2. Click [HERE](#).)

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August 5, 1980: Revised Discussion Draft with Memo

15. A party or witness has the right to assistance of an interpreter if that person does not understand or speak the language in which the proceedings are conducted.

(Source: Memo from Deputy Minister of Justice to Prime Minister, Charter of Rights incl. Discussion Draft, *The Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* (5 August 1980). Click [HERE](#).)

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August 8, 1980: Formalities to Bill: Joint Resolution

15. A party or witness has the right to assistance of an interpreter if that person does not understand or speak the language in which the proceedings are conducted.

(Source: Canada, Formalities to Bill, Draft Joint Resolution, An Act to Amend the Constitution of Canada (8 August 1980). Click [HERE](#).)

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August 22, 1980: Discussion Draft (Federal)

15. A party or witness has the right to assistance of an interpreter if that person does not understand or speak the language in which the proceedings are conducted.

(Source: Continuing Committee of Ministers on the Constitution, *The Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, Discussion Draft [Federal]*, (August 22, 1980), Doc 830-84/004 (Ottawa: 26-29 August 1980). Click [HERE](#).)

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August 28, 1980: Provincial Proposal (In the event that there is going to be entrenchment)

12. A party or witness has the right to **the** assistance of an interpreter if that person does not understand or speak the language in which the proceedings are conducted.

(Source: Continuing Committee of Ministers on the Constitution, *Provincial Proposal: The Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* (August 28, 1980), Doc 830-84/031 (Ottawa: 26-29 August, 1980). Click [HERE](#).)

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September 3, 1980: Revised Discussion Draft

13. A party of witness has the right to the assistance of an interpreter if that person does not understand or speak the language in which the proceedings are conducted.

(Source: Federal-Provincial First Ministers' Conference, *The Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, Revised Discussion Draft, Federal*, [September 3, 1980] Doc 800-14/064 (Ottawa: 8-12 September 1980). Click [HERE](#).)

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September 24, 1980: Resolution for joint address to Her Majesty the Queen respecting the constitution of Canada

14. A party or witness in any proceedings has the right to the assistance of an interpreter if that person does not understand or speak the language in which the proceedings are conducted.

(Source: Canada, Parliament, DRAFT, "Resolution for joint address to Her Majesty the Queen respecting the constitution of Canada" (24 September 1980). Click [HERE](#).)

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October 2, 1980: Proposed Resolution for a Joint Address to Her Majesty the Queen respecting the Constitution of Canada with Handwritten Notes [Draft, Version1]

14. A party or witness in any proceedings who does not understand or speak the language in which the proceedings are conducted has the right to the assistance of an interpreter.

(Source: Canada, Parliament, DRAFT, Proposed Resolution for Joint Address to Her Majesty the Queen Respecting the Constitution of Canada, Version 1 (2 October 1980). Click [HERE](#).)

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October 2, 1980: Proposed Resolution for a Joint Address to Her Majesty the Queen respecting the Constitution of Canada with Handwritten Notes [Draft, Version 2]

14. A party or witness in any proceedings who does not understand or speak the language in which the proceedings are conducted has the right to the assistance of an interpreter.

(Source: Canada, Parliament, DRAFT, Proposed Resolution for Joint Address to Her Majesty the Queen Respecting the Constitution of Canada, Version 2 with Handwritten Notes (2 October 1980). Click [HERE](#).)

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October 2, 1980: Proposed Resolution for a Joint Address to Her Majesty the Queen respecting the Constitution of Canada

14. A party or witness in any proceedings who does not understand or speak the language in which the proceedings are conducted has the right to the assistance of an interpreter.

(Source: Canada, Parliament, "Proposed Resolution for a Joint Address to Her Majesty the Queen respecting the Constitution of Canada" in *Sessional Papers* (1980). Click [HERE](#).)

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December 12, 1980: Draft [No Title]

14. A party or witness in any proceedings who does not understand or speak the language in which the proceedings are conducted has the right to the assistance of an interpreter.

(Source: [Department of Justice?], [DRAFT], Constitution Act, 1980. Click [HERE](#).)

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December 19, 1980: Consolidation of Proposed Amendments to the Proposed Resolution Respecting the Constitution of Canada

14. A party or witness in any proceedings who does not understand or speak the language in which the proceedings are conducted has the right to the assistance of an interpreter.

(Source: Consolidation of Proposed Amendments to the Proposed Resolution Respecting the Constitution of Canada (19 December 1980). Click [HERE](#).)

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January 9-12, 1981: Briefing Book for Clause by Clause Consideration of the Resolution:

14. A party or witness in any proceedings who does not understand or speak the language in which the proceedings are conducted has the right to the assistance of an interpreter.

(Source: Canada, *Briefing Book for Clause by Clause Consideration of the Resolution* (January 1981). Click [HERE](#).)

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January 12, 1981: Version formally presented to Special Joint Committee by Jean Chretien¹

14. A party or witness in any proceedings who does not understand or speak the language in which the proceedings are conducted has the right to the assistance of an interpreter.

(Source: Canada, Parliament, *Minutes of Proceedings and Evidence of the Special Joint Committee of the Senate and of the House of Commons on the Constitution of Canada*, 32nd Parl, 1st Sess, No 36 (12 January 1981). Click [HERE](#).)

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February 13, 1981: Special Joint Committee, Final Report Submitted to Parliament:

14 A party or witness in any proceedings who does not understand or speak the language in which the proceedings are conducted or who is deaf has the right to the assistance of an interpreter.

(Source: Canada, Parliament, *Minutes of Proceedings and Evidence of the Special Joint Committee of the Senate and of the House of Commons on the Constitution of Canada*, 32nd Parl, 1st Sess, No 57 (13 February 1981). Click [HERE](#).)

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¹ See also [January 9-12, 1981: Briefing Book for Clause by Clause Consideration of the Resolution](#).

French:

July 4, 1980: Comité Permanent des Ministres sur la Constitution, Droits et Libertés à l'Interieur de la Fédération Canadienne, Document de Travail

6. (1) Toute personne ad liberté et a la sécurité de sa personne et a le droit de n'en être privée que par l'application régulière de la loi qui comprend nécessairement :

[...]

(j) le droit de bénéficier des services d'un interprété devant un tribunal, une commission, un conseil ou un autre organisme si une partie ou un témoin ne comprend pas ou ne parle pas la langue des procédures.

[...]

13(4) Toute appelé à témoigner devant personne d'utiliser le français ou une cour au Canada a le droit si nécessaire, et le droit l'anglais avec un interprète de ne pas être défavorise en conséquence,

(a) dans les procédures consécutives Aune infraction créée par une loi du Parlement, ou

(b) dans les procédures consécutives Aune infraction créée par une loi d'un corps législatif provincial et passible d'une peine d'emprisonnement.

(Source: Comité Permanent des Ministres sur la Constitution, *Droits et Libertés à l'Interieur de la Fédération Canadienne, Document de Travail*, Doc: 830-81/027 (Montréal: 8-11 juillet 1980). Click [HERE](#).)

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September 3, 1980: Conference Fédérale-Provinciale des Premiers Ministres, Document de Travail, Charte Canadienne des Droits et Libertés

13. Une partie ou un témoin a le droit de bénéficier des services d'un interprète s'il ne comprend pas ou ne parle pas la langue dans laquelle se déroulent les procédures.

(Source: Conference Fédérale-Provinciale des Premiers Ministres, *Document de Travail, Charte Canadienne des Droits et Libertés* (3 septembre 1980). Click [HERE](#).)

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September 24, 1980: Resolution for joint address to Her Majesty the Queen respecting the constitution of Canada

14. La partie ou le témoin qui, lors de procédures, ne comprennent pas ou ne parlent pas la langue employée ont droit à l'assistance d'un interprète.

(Source: Canada, Parliament, DRAFT, "Resolution for joint address to Her Majesty the Queen respecting the constitution of Canada" (24 September 1980). Click [HERE](#).)

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October 2, 1980: Proposed Resolution for a Joint Address to Her Majesty the Queen respecting the Constitution of Canada with Handwritten Notes [Draft, Version1]

14. La partie ou le témoin qui, lors de procédures, ne comprennent pas ou ne parlent pas la langue employée ont droit à l'assistance d'un interprète.

(Source: Canada, Parliament, DRAFT, Proposed Resolution for Joint Address to Her Majesty the Queen Respecting the Constitution of Canada, Version 1 (2 October 1980). Click [HERE](#).)

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October 2, 1980: Proposed Resolution for a Joint Address to Her Majesty the Queen respecting the Constitution of Canada with Handwritten Notes [Draft, Version 2]

14. La partie ou le témoin qui, lors de procédures, ne comprennent pas ou ne parlent pas la langue employée ont droit à l'assistance d'un interprète.

(Source: Canada, Parliament, DRAFT, Proposed Resolution for Joint Address to Her Majesty the Queen Respecting the Constitution of Canada, Version 2 with Handwritten Notes (2 October 1980). Click [HERE](#).)

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October 2, 1980: Proposed Resolution for a Joint Address to Her Majesty the Queen respecting the Constitution of Canada

14. La partie ou le témoin qui, lors de procédures, ne comprennent pas ou ne parlent pas la langue employée ont droit à l'assistance d'un interprète.

(Source: Canada, Parliament, "Proposed Resolution for a Joint Address to Her Majesty the Queen respecting the Constitution of Canada" in *Sessional Papers* (1980). Click [HERE](#).)

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January 9-12, 1981: Briefing Book for Clause by Clause Consideration of the Resolution:

14. La partie ou le témoin qui, lors de procédures, ne comprennent pas ou ne parlent pas la langue employée ont droit à l'assistance d'un interprète.

(Source: Canada, *Briefing Book for Clause by Clause Consideration of the Resolution* (January 1981). Click [HERE.](#))

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January 12, 1981: Version formally presented to Special Joint Committee by Jean Chretien²

14. La partie ou le témoin qui, lors de procédures, ne comprennent pas ou ne parlent pas la langue employée ont droit à l'assistance d'un interprète.

(Source: Canada, Parliament, *Minutes of Proceedings and Evidence of the Special Joint Committee of the Senate and of the House of Commons on the Constitution of Canada*, 32nd Parl, 1st Sess, No 36 (12 January 1981). Click [HERE.](#))

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February 13, 1981: Special Joint Committee, Final Report Submitted to Parliament:

14 La partie ou le témoin qui ne peuvent suivre les procédures, soit parce qu'ils ne comprennent pas ou ne parlent pas la langue employée, soit parce qu'ils sont atteints de surdit , ont droit   l'assistance d'un interpr te.

(Source: Canada, Parliament, *Minutes of Proceedings and Evidence of the Special Joint Committee of the Senate and of the House of Commons on the Constitution of Canada*, 32nd Parl, 1st Sess, No 57 (13 February 1981). Click [HERE.](#))

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² See also [January 9-12, 1981: Briefing Book for Clause by Clause Consideration of the Resolution.](#)

Statutes and International Agreements

June 20, 1978: Bill C-60: An Act to amend the Constitution of Canada

[...] —the right to the assistance of an interpreter in any proceedings before a court, tribunal, commission, board or other authority in which the individual is involved or is a party or witness, if he or she does not understand or speak the language in which the proceedings are conducted;

(**Source:** Bill C-60, *An Act to amend the Constitution of Canada with respect to matters coming within the legislative authority of the Parliament of Canada, and to approve and authorize the taking of measures necessary for the amendment of the Constitution with respect to certain other matters*, 3rd Sess, 30th Parl, SC, 1978 (June 20, 1978). Click [HERE](#))

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