

Deaf Wireless Canada Committee Hearing Presentation

Broadcasting Notice of Consultation CRTC 2025-2

The Path Forward - Working towards a sustainable Canadian broadcasting system

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1. Opening Remarks - Slide #3 (Jeff)

Commissioners, imagine a Canadian broadcasting system where our national sign languages, American Sign Language (ASL) and Langue des signes québécoise (LSQ) are not only included, but celebrated. A system where Deaf, DeafBlind, and Hard of Hearing (DDBHH) Canadians are not only audiences but also creators, decision-makers, and cultural leaders.

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you. Deaf Wireless Canada Committee (DWCC) is here to help shape Canada's broadcasting future - one where our sign languages, cultures, and expressions are fully recognized as vital components of Canadian content and national identity.

2. Sustainable Canadian Broadcasting System (Jeff)

A truly sustainable Canadian broadcasting system must serve *all* Canadians, not just the majority. Sustainability is not limited to technology or economics. It is about social inclusion, cultural representation, and sign languages access. - **Slide #4**

Cultural and Linguistic Inclusion - Slide #5 (Jessica)

DDBHH Canadians form a distinct cultural and linguistic minority with unique languages: ASL and LSQ. Despite technological advancements, structural barriers continue to exclude sign language users from full participation in Canadian media. These inequities compromise the sustainability and inclusivity of Canada's broadcasting system.

Representation at Every Level - Slide #6 (Gary)

A sustainable system must **empower DDBHH communities** to lead in content creation, executive leadership, and policy. A national feasibility study co-developed with DDBHH leaders would lay the foundation for an inclusive broadcasting framework.

This approach follows DWCC's recommendations in 2024-288 and is in alignment with Broadcasting and Telecom Regulatory Policy CRTC 2009-430, further reinforced in paragraph 140 of CRTC TRP 2023-41. The broadcasting system should adopt a similar approach to ensure that DDBHH communities are meaningfully included and financially supported.

Sign Languages as Cultural Content - Slide #7 (Jessica)

Accessibility is a right, not a "feature". Recognizing ASL and LSQ as core Canadian content drives innovation, expands digital infrastructure, and enriches national identity. Inclusive media strengthens democratic values, cultural understanding, and civic engagement. When DDBHH Canadians see their lives, languages, and perspectives reflected on screen, it enriches all of our Canadian society.

Legal Obligations - Slide 8 (Gary)

Canada's legal and policy commitments, from the Charter of Rights and Freedoms (e.g., Eldridge decision), 2023 CRTC Policy Direction, the Accessible Canada Act, and the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, create obligations. These are not merely symbolic gestures; they are actionable obligations. They must guide policy design, implementation, and enforcement.

Commissioners, we are asserting the right of DDBHH Canadians to be fully included under the CRTC's legislative and international obligations. *Sign languages content is not supplemental. It is Canadian culture in its own right.* Recognition is not optional. It is required under the Broadcasting Act and the Accessible Canada Act. Modelling after LumoTV, as proposed in BNC CRTC 2024-288, is a tangible start and DDBHH communities are more than ready to lead.

3. The Sign Languages Economy: A Thriving Sector (Gary)

Employment and Economic Impact - Slide 9 (Gary)

The sign languages economy spans media, arts, education, interpretation, and digital content. Investing in sign languages broadcasting will generate sustainable jobs for DDBHH professionals and allies, stimulate innovation, and strengthen Canada's creative industries. This is not just about inclusion, it is economic growth rooted in equity and cultural visibility.

Underrepresentation in Traditional Broadcasting - Slide 10 (Gary)

ASL and LSQ remain largely invisible in traditional Canadian broadcasting, limiting both access and authentic representation for DDBHH audiences. When sign languages are present, they are often treated as an afterthought; confined to small interpreter boxes or brief appearances, reinforcing the notion that they are supplemental rather than central. Notably, CBC Gem has no ASL/LSQ-first original programming. This must change.

DDBHH Canadians experience persistent exclusion. Alvin Witcher, a Deaf man recently interviewed by the *Waterloo Region Record* (June 5), described being rejected by both CTV and CBC. His experience reflects a broader systemic unpreparedness for disability inclusion and highlights the urgent need for transformation.

Digital Platforms and Discoverability - Slide 11 (Jeff)

Streaming platforms offer potential, but sign language content remains scarce and difficult to find. Few platforms provide programming in ASL or LSQ and when they do, it is rarely discoverable. Sign languages content must be treated as core programming with proper promotion, labelling, and integration.

Cultural Preservation - Slide 12 (Jessica)

The Broadcasting Act mandate includes cultural preservation. ASL and LSQ are integral to the identities of DDBHH Canadians. Embedding them into content creation, funding, and policy frameworks affirms their place in Canadian culture. Establishing a Canadian Sign Languages Broadcasting Fund (CSLBF), as recommended in the CRTC 2024-288 is essential.

Governance of the CSLBF to be determined by the CRTC Feasibility Study - Slide 13 (Jeff)

The CRTC would oversee the CSLBF in partnership with DWCC, appointed by the DDBHH communities. The fund's board structure modelled on the governance of the British Sign Language Broadcasting Trust (BSLBT) as well as its contribution mechanisms and disbursement models, would be determined by a feasibility study.

Recommended Contribution Mechanisms:

1. Regulatory Benefits from Ownership Transactions
2. Equity-Based Contributions Framework under CRTC Oversight
3. Public Funding or Parliamentary Appropriation via Canadian Heritage
4. Mandatory Contributions from Licensed Broadcasters and BDUs
5. Mandated Contributions from Broadcasting and Streaming Services

4. Current Sign Languages Gaps (Jessica)

No National Sign Languages Mandate - Slide 14 (Jessica)

Canada has no national policy or regulatory mandate requiring Canadian broadcasters to include sign language programming. Captioning and described video are mandated, but sign language remains optional and inconsistently applied. This results in persistent gaps in access, representation, and cultural inclusion for DDBHH Canadians.

Recommendation (Gary)

National sign languages content targets, such as the 5% target recommended by DWCC in the BNC 2024-288 proceeding, would recognize ASL and LSQ as integral to Canada's cultural and linguistic diversity. It would drive equity, stimulate innovation, and support sustained investment in accessible broadcasting.

DWCC recommends phasing in the target over a 10-year period to allow for industry readiness, infrastructure development, and sustainable funding uptake. The proposed targets are 1% by Year 2, 2% by Year 4, 3% by Year 6, 4% by Year 8, and reaching 5% by Year 10.

This aligns with Section 3(1)(d)(iii) of the Broadcasting Act, Paragraph 2(d) of the 2023 CRTC Policy Direction, and Article 30 of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which affirm the right to participate in cultural life through accessible media.

Discoverability Challenges - slide 16 (Jessica)

Even when sign language content exists, it is difficult to find and often scattered. There is no central platform or standardized labelling. For instance, *NHL in ASL* (presented by Scotiabank on Sportsnet+) and the federal leaders' debate with ASL and LSQ interpretation were commendable, but difficult to locate as viewers had to search through multiple channels or platforms to find accessible programming.

Sign language programming must be **searchable, prominently featured, and clearly labelled**.

The current lack of discoverability limits access, shrinks audience reach, and undermines the visibility and impact of sign language content. A central sign languages platform would be a meaningful and necessary solution. If ASL and LSQ are to be treated as equal languages within Canada's broadcasting system, they must be as easy to find as English and French content.

News Media Access - Slide 17 (Jeff)

Captions in news broadcasts are not enough. ASL and LSQ are distinct languages with their own grammar, structure, and culture. Receiving news in a second language, especially through notoriously inaccurate live captioning, creates barriers to comprehension and denies DDBHH communities the right to access information in the language most natural and effective for them.

Canada needs daily news in sign languages, delivered by DDBHH anchors. This affirms linguistic rights and ensures cultural relevance. Access to information in sign languages is not just a convenience. It is about equity and identity.

5. Call to Action - Slide 18 (Gary)

Commissioners, this proceeding is a historic opportunity to reshape Canadian broadcasting into a space that truly reflects the full diversity of our nation. DDBHH communities have long been excluded, both as creators and decision-makers, from the media landscape. This systemic exclusion must end.

DWCC recommends the Commission to:

- 1. To set and regulate a new CRTC TV & Digital Access Code**
- 2. Establish a Canadian Sign Languages Broadcasting Fund (CSLBF) of \$10 million annually, modelled on the British Broadcasting Fund (BSLBF)**
- 3. Mandate a national sign languages content target of at least 5%, phased in over 10 years**
- 4. Initiate and conduct a feasibility study on a Canadian Sign Languages Broadcasting, including an examination of potential contribution mechanisms**

6. Closing Remarks (Jeff)

Let's Make History! - Slide 19

Let's build a broadcasting system where ASL and LSQ are embraced, and where sign languages creators lead the way. Where accessibility is a foundation, and sign languages are integral to Canadian culture.

It's time to make history by ensuring Canadian sign languages are a cornerstone of our national identity: visible, valued, and celebrated by all Canadians including DDBHH.