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February 9, 2016

Honourable Don Morgan
Minister of Education
Room 361, Legislative Building
2405 Legislative Drive
Regina, SK S4S 0B3

Dear Minister Morgan:

SaskCulture is a community-driven, non-profit organization that works with its over 140 member organizations and community partners to build a culturally vibrant Saskatchewan. Thanks to funding from the Saskatchewan Lotteries Trust Fund for Sport, Culture and Recreation, SaskCulture is able to support cultural groups in their work to offer many different cultural activities in the province.

SaskCulture's diverse volunteer board of fourteen (14) directors from throughout the province met on January 29, 2016. During that meeting the board discussed its disappointment at the Ministry of Education's very recent decision to discontinue funding for heritage language learning through the Saskatchewan Organization for Heritage Languages (SOHL) following the current 2015/16 fiscal year. SaskCulture was even further disappointed at hearing that the Ministry of Education also informed SOHL that the current 2015/16 Agreement for the Heritage Language Teaching Program Grant would be cut by one-third. We understand that SOHL was informed of both these decisions just three months prior to its current fiscal year-end. The latter decision has left this relatively small, but very effective and efficient, provincial not-for-profit cultural organization scrambling to try and cover expenses for programs that have, for the most part, already taken place.

SaskCulture's board of directors was so disappointed with this decision by the Government of Saskatchewan's Ministry of Education that it passed a unanimous motion directing the preparation of this letter of concern. SaskCulture has a long and proud history of working with government so the writing of such a letter is not something we take lightly.

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This news has had a devastating impact on the province's many community-based heritage language schools, coordinating agencies (Saskatchewan Intercultural Association – SIA in Saskatoon, and the Multilingual Association of Regina - MLAR), on SOHL itself and on the entire cultural community in Saskatchewan. At a time when Saskatchewan is growing and welcoming new immigrants and refugees to our province to help fuel our growth it is imperative to have resources that make newcomers feel welcome. Heritage language schools contribute to the retention of immigrants in our province by helping people, particularly the children of immigrants, to maintain their culture, identity, and traditions, while simultaneously learning about their new life and Canadian way of life. If newcomers do not have services like these in their new communities they are apt to not stay. They will move to larger urban centres in other provinces so that they can partake in such services.

Studying another language also has many benefits for all Canadians, especially in today's global economy. As Saskatchewan reaches out to conduct business with other countries it will be much more successful if those conducting such business are familiar with other languages and customs. The heritage language program that was supported through SOHL provided a very low cost means of such training.

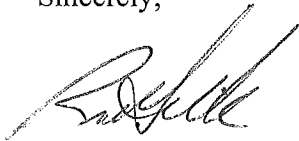
The Ministry of Education has been providing financial support to Saskatchewan's heritage language schools continually since 1991. For almost 25 years now, the language schools have depended on this modest funding to help sustain their programs. SaskCulture, through the Culture Section of Saskatchewan Lotteries Trust fund for Sport, Culture and Recreation provides significant amount of annual operating funds to SOHL as a provincial umbrella organization for over 80 community-based non-profit language schools and multilingual organizations in the province. For many years now, these organizations have operated in Saskatchewan with minimal financial support and largely on dedicated volunteer efforts. Although Saskatchewan Lotteries Trust Fund for Sport, Culture and Recreation is in a stable position as a result of the current 5-year lottery license agreement, for which we are very grateful to the current government, we will not have sufficient funding to cover off the gap created by the loss of the funds from the Ministry of Education for SOHL without taking those funds from other very significant cultural programming in the province.

SOHL works with teachers, volunteers, and cultural communities to promote and develop the teaching and learning of heritage languages. It supports a variety of heritage language schools and multilingual organizations throughout Saskatchewan. More than 2,600 students are learning heritage languages after school hours in 64 community-based heritage language schools and 24 Hutterite schools throughout the province. Student enrolments in heritage language programs have risen steadily since 2011, with an average of ten new heritage language schools forming per year as a result of the increasing diversity of our province.

February 9, 2016

It is our understanding that representatives of SOHL, MLAR and SIA have asked for an in-person meeting with you to further discuss this decision and that as of the writing of this letter they have not had a response regarding their request. Given the work of these organizations and their members throughout the province, SaskCulture urges the Ministry of Education to meet with these community minded, volunteer led groups to discuss the situation. By meeting with the leadership of these organizations the Ministry will, at the least, be able to provide them with a more informed articulation of the reasons behind the decision so that they, in turn, can share that information with the 70+ organizations impacted by the decision.

Sincerely,



Rose Gilks
General Manager

C.c. Honourable Brad Wall, Premier
Mark Docherty, Minister of Parks, Culture and Sport
Tamara Ruzic, Executive Director, Saskatchewan Organization for Heritage
Languages
SaskCulture Inc. Board of Directors