

# NEWS RELEASE



For Immediate Release

## **NTI Awaits Nunavut Court Decision On An Appeal Brought by the GN To Halt Education Equality Rights Lawsuit**

(February 13, 2024 – Iqaluit, Nunavut) Today, the Nunavut Court of Appeal heard an appeal brought by the Government of Nunavut (GN), asking the Court to dismiss a lawsuit launched by two Inuit families alongside Nunavut Tunngavik Inc. (NTI) in 2021. In that lawsuit, NTI and the Inuit families are seeking protection under s. 15 of the *Charter of Rights and Freedoms* on behalf of all Inuit.

Inuit students face systemic discrimination in Nunavut's education system because of the GN's amendments to the *Education Act* and the *Inuit Language Protection Act* in 2020. The GN's amendments removed from the act a previous requirement to provide Inuktitut education in Nunavut's schools in all grades by 2019. Instead, the GN now only commits to providing one course taught in Inuktitut as a language arts class.

"Inuit are losing Inuktitut fluency at an alarming rate, and the Government of Nunavut through the school system is perpetuating that loss and the associated harms," said NTI President Aluki Kotierk. "Despite Inuktitut instruction for Nunavut students repeatedly being written into GN legislation since 1999, students in Nunavut still have no choice but to be taught primarily in English or French. In a territory where Inuit are the majority, whose majority and preferred language is Inuktitut, Inuit have no choice but to attend a public-school system that erodes their language and culture. The resulting negative impacts on Inuit students are immense."

The lack of formal education delivered in Inuktitut creates real barriers for Inuit, resulting in lower educational attainment, higher unemployment levels, and more dire economic prospects for Inuit students than those facing non-Inuit students in Nunavut. The lack of education in Inuktitut is harming Inuit, undermining connections to Inuit culture and identity and perpetuating negative stereotypes about the value of Inuktitut and Inuit culture as a foundation for their academic achievements.

A lack of Inuit governance in education affects attendance and graduation rates, undermining educational outcomes and proficiency for Inuit students when compared with non-Inuit students. This results in a widening of the socio-economic gap between

Inuit and non-Inuit, including income disparity and representation in public service employment.

"For Inuit to achieve the self-determination we seek in Nunavut, Inuit children must be given the best tools to succeed in the education system," said President Kotierk. "When Nunavut Inuit cannot be taught in the language of their parents and grandparents, they are being denied the most important means by which they can achieve that success. ."

The GN sought to dismiss the claim brought by the Inuit families and NTI at an early stage. Its "motion to strike" was dismissed by the Court in March 2023. The GN's appeal of that decision was heard today. Meanwhile, for the last two years, the GN has used its motion to strike to delay the case from moving through the courts. NTI continues to be disappointed with the GN's approach to the litigation.

The question in the case is profound and urgent: whether the GN needs to ensure a substantial portion of public schooling is delivered in Inuktitut, so that Inuit students have equal access to the benefit of public education. Considering the fast decline in Inuktitut proficiency and the adverse effects of English-only schooling on Inuit students, the case needs to get to trial quickly, so the claim can be determined fairly on the evidence. Nunavut Inuit deserve to have this important case heard on the evidence in a timely manner, and NTI hopes the Court of Appeal will render judgment quickly to avoid any further delays.

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