



## NEWS RELEASE

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### **Department of Canadian Heritage Funding Advances OJEN's Francophone Programming**

Thanks to a contribution from the Department of Canadian Heritage, OJEN is developing a Francophone mock appeal program. This program will give French-speaking students in Ontario an opportunity to gain a deeper appreciation for the rights and protection afforded under the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

### **Using the Charter to Protect Rights and Advance Social Change**

OJEN's Charter Challenge program uses mock appeal scenarios based on significant Charter cases as a platform for youth to explore complex social issues. In the process, they gain a greater understanding of the Charter's importance as a system for addressing the challenges that result from competing values and interests. They also discover how discriminatory laws and policies are struck down, learn about the limits of the law, and engage in conversation about other avenues for social change.

With support from teachers, lawyer coaches and online "mentors", student teams prepare and submit written arguments in favour of either the appellant or respondent. An online discussion forum staffed by volunteers knowledgeable in constitutional law, gives students an opportunity to engage on the issues and pose legal questions. The top two teams are invited to present their arguments to a panel of judges at the Ontario Court of Appeal.

To guide the development of this program, OJEN has hired 12 Francophone students from across Ontario to form a Youth Leadership Team. Working with OJEN staff and partners, they are taking a leading role in designing the mock appeal activity for French-language students. Together with OJEN staff and partners they will identify relevant Charter cases and brainstorm ways to make the project interesting to Franco-Ontarian youth.

## **Youth Take Charge Program**

The Canadian Heritage, Youth Take Charge Program, provides OJEN with two years of funding, culminating in March 2022. The objective of the program is to strengthen youth attachment to Canada through engagement. OJEN's Charter Challenge program advances this goal. Engaging students in hands-on experiential learning about the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms will develop greater knowledge of and appreciation for, not only our country's diversity, but our shared common values and interests. Exploring the ways in which the Charter has historically protected the rights of minority communities, including official language minorities, will help to strengthen Francophone students' attachment to Canada.

Providing justice education in both official languages is a priority for OJEN. Through the Canadian Heritage, Youth Take Charge Program, we are delighted to make the Charter Challenge program available to over 500 French speaking high school students throughout the province before April 2022.

*"Our government is proud to support OJEN's initiative to engage French-speaking students in Ontario in this experimental learning opportunity, through the Youth Take Charge program. This hands-on experiential learning will help students grasp today's complex social issues and guide them in becoming active and engaged citizens."*

—**The Honourable Steven Guilbeault, Minister of Canadian Heritage**