

Brief to City Council, March 29, 2016 – Delegate #2 (Mary Kolitsas)
Saskatchewan Multicultural Centre Association (SMCA)

Thank you for the opportunity to present our request for a tax exemption at 2144 Cornwall Street. Our Mayor and many City Councillors have attended our events and have an understanding of who SOHL and MLAR and their many volunteers are and the services that they offer our multicultural residents.

I am an immigrant. I was five when my family came from Greece to Winnipeg. Because I was young, I never experienced the difficulties that my parents and most immigrants face when moving to a new country with a new language, customs and way of life. I have worked as a volunteer with many immigrants most of my life and they have shared many of their worries and fears regarding their new home. They want to find similarities between their own way of life and that of their fellow Canadians. They want to learn the way of life here but they also want to keep their language and culture.

I am a former Heritage language student. When I was young, our multilevel Greek class was held at our church basement, taught by our priest. For immigrants, having a school where their language and culture can be maintained is of great importance. It allows them to have a successful settlement. There has been and continues to be a great influx of new immigrants to Regina and other cities and towns in Saskatchewan. One great benefit for the new immigrants, so that they will feel at home, is their language school. The teachers at the schools are often well educated but not professional teachers. MLAR and SOHL step in by providing professional development opportunities and guidance for their schools. These heritage language programs are for immigrants, refugees, Aboriginal and all Canadians. I hope that you understand the very important role that our many volunteers play in this endeavor. With limited funds, there are great outcomes in the promotion and retention of languages. In Regina most schools are housed at Balfour and Campbell Collegiate.

Prior to 1992, MLAR held board meetings in homes of their committed volunteers until they were able to rent a small space. The late Councillor Badham sat on SMCA's first board in 1992 and helped us establish our home for SOHL and MLAR at 2144 Cornwall Street. The city understood the important role that these organizations played in the lives of the immigrant population. With the tax increase and the funding cuts, we do not know if we will be able to keep our home. We hope that you will support the tax exemption.