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Wednesday 1 March 2017

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Mercredi 1^{er} mars 2017

**Standing Committee on
the Legislative Assembly**

Petitions

**Comité permanent de
l'Assemblée législative**

Pétitions

Chair: Monte McNaughton
Clerk: William Short

Président : Monte McNaughton
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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

**STANDING COMMITTEE ON
THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY**

Wednesday 1 March 2017

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

**COMITÉ PERMANENT DE
L'ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE**Mercredi 1^{er} mars 2017

The committee met at 1301 in committee room 1.

PETITIONS

The Chair (Mr. Monte McNaughton): Well, good afternoon, everyone. Welcome to the Standing Committee on the Legislative Assembly. We're here today to discuss this committee's favourite topic, electronic petitions. We invited today Todd Decker, the Clerk of the Legislative Assembly, and Kirk Cameron, director of technology services for the Legislative Assembly, to have a discussion with us about the proposal that we've all seen and to answer questions that any committee members may have. I'm hoping, ideally, at the end of this we can have a decision whether to move forward with electronic petitions, and then obviously we have to go to the Board of Internal Economy to decide. Hopefully we can get to that point—whether to move forward or not—by the end of this presentation.

I'd like to call Todd and Kirk to come forward and, I guess, outline their proposal for a few minutes. Then we can just have an open informal discussion.

The Clerk of the Assembly (Mr. Todd Decker): Thank you, Mr. Chairman and committee members. Maybe I'll just very quickly recap all of the steps that got us to where we are today.

About a year ago last February, this committee presented to the House its report on e-petitions, recommending that the assembly adopt and move toward an e-petitioning system for the Ontario Legislative Assembly. That report was subsequently adopted shortly after that by the Legislature. So, the House has lent its endorsement to the committee's recommendation that there be an e-petition system for the assembly.

One of the recommendations in the report was that the Clerk of the Legislature examine options for moving forth for establishing an e-petition system and look at different ways that that could be accomplished and to consider what the potential cost of an e-petition system would be. My predecessor, the former Clerk, Deb Deller, did establish a working group that consisted of myself; your committee Clerk, Will Short, who was senior Clerk of House documents; the procedural researcher, who worked with the committee on the e-petition report, Joanne McNair; and a gentleman from the legislative information systems office who left the assembly last December and is no longer with the assembly, but also worked on the working group.

The working group looked at all of the options that the committee asked us to: the possibility of using an open-source software platform for an e-petition system; commercial off-the-shelf system; looking at the possibility of developing, designing and building an in-house application that could be used.

We looked at all of those and, coincidentally, around the time shortly before the committee had adopted its own report, the Canadian House of Commons had just released its own e-petition platform. After the 2015 election in November 2015, the House of Commons launched its e-petition system.

This committee's recommendations on how you want your e-petition system to work—the number of signatures that would be required, the length of posting—all of those sorts of details are very, very similar to the Canadian House of Commons system, how it operates and the rules around their e-petition system. It struck us that there is already an existing built system in Canada that has similar rules and procedures around the e-petitions that we could look at. So we made an overture to the Canadian House of Commons and were happily surprised to learn that they would be more than happy to work with the Ontario Legislature to try to adapt a module of their e-petition system for our use.

That is what has led us to recommend that that be done. That's probably the easiest, safest, most cost-effective way to get an e-petition system for the Legislative Assembly. If the approvals came through fairly quickly in the upcoming fiscal year, the House of Commons feels that they could get us a functioning e-petition system by the end of this calendar year. So that's our recommendation to the committee.

The one-time cost: It's \$222,000 to create the application, develop and customize the e-petition system of the House of Commons for the Ontario Legislative Assembly—that's basically their IT staff time that would be used to develop a customized version of the e-petition system—and \$57,200 for support and maintenance in the first year. So it's around \$279,000, total-in, for an up-and-running e-petition system.

Earlier today, I looked at their system again and I noticed that, in the current session that began after the last election, they've had 257 e-petitions on their system. It's a fairly significant number, and they're obviously handling the load. Some of them have thousands and thousands of signatures. So they've built and designed a very stable system that, I think, is a good option for us.

I have Kirk with me to answer any technical questions. He's the person for that.

The Chair (Mr. Monte McNaughton): Do you have anything you want to add, Kirk, before we go to questions?

Mr. Kirk Cameron: I just want to reinforce that it is a very stable and secure solution that they've provided in the House of Commons, and it meets all of our requirements.

The Chair (Mr. Monte McNaughton): Excellent. We'll open it up to committee members.

Ms. Kiwala.

Ms. Sophie Kiwala: Thank you for the work that you've done on this file. It's new information for me, so I'm very interested to find out what's happening on it.

You have commented on the House of Commons system, but Quebec and Northwest Territories have also been using e-petitions, as I understand it. I'm wondering if you can tell me what some of the differences are between the federal system and the two provincial systems that are currently present in Canada.

The Clerk of the Assembly (Mr. Todd Decker): I'm not familiar with the technical aspects. I know that the House of Commons system is a Microsoft SharePoint-based system. The Northwest Territories, I'm not sure what their system is.

Ms. Sophie Kiwala: Microsoft SharePoint?

The Clerk of the Assembly (Mr. Todd Decker): SharePoint.

Mr. Kirk Cameron: Microsoft SharePoint, yes.

Ms. Sophie Kiwala: Okay. And the costs involved—you've highlighted \$222,000 for IT staff and \$57,200 for support and maintenance in the first year. What are the costs of the hardware? That's just IT and training. What about the hardware?

Mr. Kirk Cameron: That's a very good question. The solution that the House of Commons is providing is what we call a software-as-a-service, or a hosted, solution that is in the cloud. It's a subscription rate that they charge us per month to host it at no hardware cost. It's approximately just over \$3,000 per month.

Ms. Sophie Kiwala: It's \$3,000 per month?

Mr. Kirk Cameron: The actual price is \$3,095.67.

Ms. Sophie Kiwala: Okay. Thank you.

The Chair (Mr. Monte McNaughton): Just so all committee members are aware, this was distributed last week at the meeting, I believe—these costs—so you'll have a copy in your office as well.

Ms. Sophie Kiwala: Okay.

The Chair (Mr. Monte McNaughton): Any other questions for the Clerk and our IT person? Bob, did you have a question?

Mr. Robert Bailey: Well, I was going to ask—maybe you've already answered. Thank you for your presentation today, Clerk. Say we went with it: Ongoing, it would be \$57,000 for maintenance and upkeep? Is that it, roughly: \$57,000 a year?

The Clerk of the Assembly (Mr. Todd Decker): Yes. If this option were selected—regardless of whatever

option is selected—we would end up having a service level agreement with the provider of the House of Commons. They're prepared to enter into a contract with us to provide annual maintenance, help desk support and all of that, ensuring that our e-petitions module, based on their system, would be up 24/7. That would be the annual cost of purchasing that level of service from the House of Commons.

Mr. Robert Bailey: Just to clarify—you've got a good point there. I'll be honest, I got that report, but I only looked at the numbers; I didn't look at all the details. That's an interesting point—24/7. I could access or a resident in my riding on Saturday night at 10 o'clock, if they're at home, they could go on or they could sign in, however it works, with a password or whatever—they could go in and actually fill in that petition at that time? So it's not general office hours; it's 24/7?

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The Clerk of the Assembly (Mr. Todd Decker): Anytime, anywhere. You can go and look at the existing Canadian House of Commons petition system on their website. It's Web-based, so you can be anywhere in the world on any device and sign any petition—at 2 o'clock in Taipei if you wanted to.

Mr. Robert Bailey: So I'd stand up and—I'm trying to picture the logistics of it. I've got an online petition about my asbestos bill, for example—Bill 88, just to give it a plug—on my website. So then I would stand up—what would I do? So I'd look at it after a week and I'd say, "Okay, I've got a couple of thousand names on my online petition," and then I would stand up in the House and I would read that? How would that work? I'm trying to picture how the mechanics—

The Clerk of the Assembly (Mr. Todd Decker): The system that the committee recommended to the House: It would be separate and independent from online petitions that MPPs might currently have on their websites. This would be an entirely assembly-hosted website. It would be on the Legislative Assembly website, and petitions would be started by citizens wanting to start their own e-petition about whatever the topic might be—asbestos—and it would be completely independent from a petition that you would be circulating.

Mr. Robert Bailey: Then we'd be able to go and see every week and get a summary of how many names or what the numbers are?

The Clerk of the Assembly (Mr. Todd Decker): Yes.

The Chair (Mr. Monte McNaughton): What we will do, just so the committee is aware—the Clerk and I just spoke—we'll send that report around. I understand and recognize there are a lot of new members on this committee since we first started going through the process and things.

Mr. Randy Hillier: There are some new members, and after I believe four years of studying e-petitions we've had some change. I think it might be important, just to follow up on Mr. Bailey's comments—and hope-

fully you haven't already stated this, if I missed it earlier. What is the role, maybe you could explain, under this new platform, if it's adopted, of the individual member with regard to e-petitions?

The Clerk of the Assembly (Mr. Todd Decker): Under the system that's been recommended by the committee, there would be no role for MPPs. E-petitions would be a separate, parallel track for petitions to come to the Legislative Assembly. It's a deviation from what the House of Commons's system is. In order for an e-petition to make it to the House of Commons's e-petition platform, it must first be sponsored by an MP. This committee made the decision to recommend that that not be required. So John Smith can simply go to the e-petition system and start it. It needs five other Ontarians who support it for it to be put up on the assembly website, and that's it.

Mr. Randy Hillier: So just to continue following up, there's no role for the MPP? Who would actually read the petition into the House once it's completed its process, on this recommended process?

The Clerk of the Assembly (Mr. Todd Decker): Again, that wouldn't happen. It would find its way into the House by having achieved the necessary number of signatures in order to require a response from the government—that being 500 signatures. Again, these are the recommendations of this committee.

Mr. Randy Hillier: So under the present system, what we have with paper petitions or member-driven e-petitions which are then printed out and put into the House, there is an obligation on the government to respond to the petition. So does that obligation remain on this new platform, and who does the government actually respond to? Is it each and every one of the individuals who signed the petition?

The Clerk of the Assembly (Mr. Todd Decker): Yes. The way it would work, as recommended by the committee, an e-petition, assuming it meets all of the requirements to be in order, would be put on the Legislative Assembly website for a maximum of 120 days. If in that period of time it receives at least 500 signatures, then the petition is directed to the government for a response, just like paper petitions are now.

Every person who signs the petition will have the option to get email feedback from the e-petitions system, so if they want to be informed of the future progress of that petition, there will be an automatic email going to them to let them know that the petition has achieved 500 signatures, that an answer has been provided by the government, and here's a link to the answer. The answer itself would be posted on the Legislative Assembly website, together with the e-petition.

Mr. Randy Hillier: Okay. So if I heard correctly, you're looking at the ongoing costs to administer and provide this proposal, and it was \$57,000? So that's including the assembly's costs to get those responses out, to track who has put their name forward on an e-petition, which one it was, and that the appropriate response has been provided?

The Clerk of the Assembly (Mr. Todd Decker): Right. Well, what we're proposing at this point is to absorb the administrative work that would be involved in this e-petition system within existing staff in the House documents office, on the expectation that it will be manageable with existing staff. The software theoretically does most of the work: It does all of the emailing automatically, so the staff requirement should be manageable, we expect.

If the House of Commons experience is any indication—as I said, there have been 257 e-petitions mounted in the last 16 months, so about 20 or so a month. That should be manageable with existing staff.

Mr. Randy Hillier: I do recall that there was also a dissenting report provided during the deliberations and recommendations from the committee, but I don't recall that the committee was recommending that the members were not permitted to sponsor an e-petition. It sounds like we've taken a slightly different route, that under this format there would not be an opportunity for me to—I grant that you don't want to limit individuals from participating, but it seems that we've gone a little bit farther and we've eliminated MPPs from their role in petitions.

The Chair (Mr. Monte McNaughton): Sorry. I was just going to say that recommendation 17 on page 4 does say that there would be no member involvement at any stage of the e-petition process.

Mr. Randy Hillier: Oh, okay. My mistake.

The Chair (Mr. Monte McNaughton): Ms. Kiwala?

Ms. Sophie Kiwala: Petitions generally that we have had have really been for Ontarians. It's about Ontario; it's for Ontarians. The question that comes to mind is, of course, what happens if you have a single interest that can be hijacked by input from another country, for example, on a specific issue? Is there anything within the software or anything within the requirements of those who are signing the petition that would prevent that kind of thing from happening?

Mr. Kirk Cameron: Yes. The House of Commons solution does have an algorithm built in to prevent possibly misrepresented individuals from signing petitions. If we see them coming from other countries or other designations outside of the area they should be coming from, it would flag that and mute it out.

Ms. Sophie Kiwala: So how will they know if it's from another country?

Mr. Kirk Cameron: Not to get too technical, but quite often we use IP addresses. Everyone who sends an email has an address hidden inside the email saying where it's coming from.

Ms. Sophie Kiwala: Okay, that's good.

The Chair (Mr. Monte McNaughton): We had a lot of discussion on that, as well, to make sure that there were checks and balances there.

Ms. Sophie Kiwala: Okay.

The Chair (Mr. Monte McNaughton): Ms. Wong?

Ms. Soo Wong: Thank you for being here to talk a little bit about the costs. I'm looking at implementation

questions. Let's say the committee makes a decision, goes back to the House and gets approval. What's the timeline for this kind of implementation of this kind of software and getting it rolled out? How long would that take?

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The Clerk of the Assembly (Mr. Todd Decker): Basically, in adopting this report, the House has basically delegated to this committee the responsibility for making a decision about moving forward with an e-petition system and on what basis. If that ends up being the decision of the committee, then I think the next step would be to present a proposal to the Board of Internal Economy to approve the funding that would be required. If that's approved, then we could start working with the Canadian House of Commons to have their system adapted for our use. As I said, if it happens relatively quickly, they feel they can have it ready to go before the end of calendar 2017.

Ms. Soo Wong: Wow. Okay. I want to hear more implementation questions because I think that's what will get us into trouble, not just putting the dollars and cents. Right now, when we have the hard-copy petition tabled in the House, people sign it. Anybody can go in and put Laurie Scott's name on the thing. How do we verify, not just that they're Canadian, but that it's not bogus—you know, someone's dog, someone who is deceased. How do you prevent that? How is that being done in the House of Commons?

The Clerk of the Assembly (Mr. Todd Decker): I was just looking at it this morning. They have a terms-of-use document. Basically, I guess it's a bit of an honour system, but a person—going in, you have to provide your name, your email address and your postal code. Your signature will not go on until you receive an email at that email address and you confirm that that was you who wanted to sign that e-petition, and then it will go on. It's prohibited, under their system, to make a false signature on an e-petition. I guess really all that one can do is depend on people's honour. I suppose it's possible for someone to do just what you described.

Ms. Soo Wong: Given the challenge, right now, we have in our schools with online bullying, how does—I mean, people do all kinds of crafty stuff online. You just said to us it's prohibiting false signatures. What are the consequences? Because we can't be assuming that everyone is ethical, with moral standards. Is there legislation federally that, if you falsify somebody's name, there are consequences? Right now, we're struggling, all of us as MPPs, with online bullying among young people. I can only speak for me, but I know other colleagues are saying the same thing. In the House of Commons, is there federal legislation that it's against the law if you falsify or you impersonate? When we're dealing with serious online bullying amongst young people, how do you prevent this?

The Clerk of the Assembly (Mr. Todd Decker): I guess if a person is determined to falsely put someone's name on an e-petition, as long as they can create—they

can only sign an e-petition once. So they would have to create new email addresses each and every time. I guess as long as they're creating valid email addresses and the exchange goes back and forth, it would be permitted.

Ms. Soo Wong: I've got a lot to—I don't want to monopolize—

The Clerk of the Assembly (Mr. Todd Decker): I will say, though, that the subject matter of a petition could never be offensive or anything like that. They are always going to be moderated by assembly staff just like they are now.

The same rules that apply to the orderliness of petitions currently would apply to e-petitions. They must be respectful, pertain to an area of responsibility and jurisdiction of the provincial Legislature—all those sorts of things. An offensive petition would never find its way onto the site.

Ms. Soo Wong: Thank you.

The Chair (Mr. Monte McNaughton): Mr. Hillier, and then Mr. Mantha.

Mr. Randy Hillier: Yes, just to follow up a little bit on the content of the petition. I'm sure it's in the report, but I just don't have the report in front of me. Maybe you can tell me, what is the vetting process? I decide I want to have a petition, as an individual; I send that to the Legislative Assembly. Who and what mechanism is there now to determine that the language of the petition or the substance of the petition is within the jurisdiction of the Legislative Assembly, and how does that roll out? If you could maybe explain a little bit—

The Clerk of the Assembly (Mr. Todd Decker): Under the current standing orders for paper petitions, the Clerk of the Legislative Assembly or the table officers are responsible for that. When members bring a petition to the table to have it certified so that they can present it, we look at it carefully to make sure that it complies with the requirements for a petition in the standing orders.

The committee, in its report, wants a similar sort of role to be played for vetting e-petitions. An e-petition cannot automatically find its way onto the website until it has been approved by the Clerk of petitions. Again, it would be very similar to paper petitions. We would look carefully at the wording of it—that it's respectful and that it is in fact asking for something to be done that's within the jurisdiction of the provincial assembly to do. The same criteria would apply.

Mr. Randy Hillier: So the Clerk's office will vet all requests.

Drafting of petitions doesn't come intuitively to most people, so we can expect that there will be exchanges between the Clerk's office and the proponent of the petition.

The Clerk of the Assembly (Mr. Todd Decker): Absolutely. I've talked to my colleagues at the House of Commons, and they say that that's quite common. There is an exchange back and forth to help people wanting to mount e-petitions to get the wording correct.

I will say that this committee has recommended that e-petitions can be in more plain language, if you will. It's

not necessary for them to be “whereases and whereases,” the way paper petitions are currently required to be. They can be more narrative in form. I think that would also make it easier for people to craft a petition that would be in order.

Mr. Randy Hillier: Once again, you’re saying that you can absorb the additional administrative requirements within the existing framework of the Clerk’s office?

The Clerk of the Assembly (Mr. Todd Decker): Our plan is to attempt to do that at the outset, and confirm that we can do it. If in fact it’s not doable, then, yes, we might have to look at adding some staff.

Mr. Randy Hillier: On the federal side, it’s the individual member who would vet it, the sponsor of the petition.

The Clerk of the Assembly (Mr. Todd Decker): No. They have a specific position called Clerk of Petitions, so it is still a procedural Clerk who does that vetting before the petition gets mounted on the website.

Mr. Randy Hillier: Right. But again, the member, the sponsoring member, still has a role in developing it, or providing assistance, or whatever it may be.

Have there been additional costs borne on the federal side with their influx of e-petitions? I get it that you’re anticipating, and we don’t know how many petitions we’re going to get. But the federal model probably gives us some reasonable forecast. On the federal side, they haven’t needed to hire additional people for the administration?

The Clerk of the Assembly (Mr. Todd Decker): I honestly don’t know, Mr. Hillier. When we had a meeting with them, I don’t recall them saying that that was an issue, but I don’t know that it wasn’t. I’m sorry, I don’t know. I could find out.

Mr. Randy Hillier: Yes, I think it would be nice to see just how much this is going to—

The Clerk of the Assembly (Mr. Todd Decker): I will ask them. I’ll get back to you.

The Chair (Mr. Monte McNaughton): Mr. Mantha.

Mr. Michael Mantha: I just wanted to touch on the vetting. As far as what I understood, being part of those discussions, there’s going to be a very good vetting period in regard to what can go up, so that some of the concerns that my colleague Ms. Wong brought up don’t happen.

The other part that I wanted to ask, and to follow up on what Ms. Wong brought up, is, I want to sign in and I want to put my e-signature on this petition. By doing so, I’m going to put an email attached to it. That email will be either confirmed, triggering a response, or—if I choose to or not. If I’m signing it off as “I, Elvis Presley” or whatever—there has to be a validated email attached to that signature in order for it to trigger a response. That will be able to be that footprint that we need, to anybody who may be doing some bullying, if we want to go down that route.

The petitions themselves: The automatic trigger for a response is the 500 number. At no point whatsoever in

there—as those 500 signatures are accruing, there’s nothing stopping me from reading a written petition, the same written petition, in the House, indicating my support for the petition or that an individual asked me to introduce that petition—at no point in time. Whether it’s sitting there on the OLA website or not, I can still read that petition into the record in the House.

1330

The Clerk of the Assembly (Mr. Todd Decker): Absolutely. The current paper petition system that we have is completely unaffected by this. The two things run parallel to each other but don’t cross paths.

Mr. Michael Mantha: For some of my colleagues who weren’t here, the reason why we took the requirement for a sponsorship for an MPP was to take the politics out of petitions, because there are organizations that are out there that don’t want to be perceived as being of any colour and nature. They want to be able to present something which highlights a concern of theirs. That was my understanding in the discussions that we had as a whole at the committee.

The Clerk of the Assembly (Mr. Todd Decker): Yes, and there’s discussion of that in the committee’s report. You’re exactly right.

Mr. Michael Mantha: C’est bon.

The Chair (Mr. Monte McNaughton): Merci beaucoup. Ms. Kiwala?

Ms. Sophie Kiwala: Can you tell me if the working group spoke to government at all to find out what the cost would be associated with the ministries responding to those petitions?

The Clerk of the Assembly (Mr. Todd Decker): We did not; no.

Ms. Sophie Kiwala: No. Okay. Another question on costs: You had mentioned in the first year \$57,200, presumably to get the wrinkles ironed out because it’s the first year etc., and get people trained, but then following that there would be a monthly fee, I guess to host, of just over \$3,000. So in terms of your initial set-up, you have got the \$222,000—I just want to make sure I’m absolutely clear—for the initial set-up, the IT, and then the first year \$57,000, plus \$3,000 a month on top of that, forever. Correct?

The Clerk of the Assembly (Mr. Todd Decker): Right. So ongoing it would be \$91,000 a year, representing the payment to the House of Commons for their maintenance and support of the system, and \$37,000 a year for the hosting of the Microsoft Azure, hosting on the cloud.

Ms. Sophie Kiwala: So that’s ongoing, per year.

The Clerk of the Assembly (Mr. Todd Decker): Correct.

Ms. Sophie Kiwala: Okay. Is there any way to find out what sort of costs might be involved with the additional work that would fall on the ministries in terms of staff time for responding to those petitions? Just so we have a very accurate picture of what we are getting into and when and how—

The Clerk of the Assembly (Mr. Todd Decker): I'm sure it's all over the map. It probably depends on the ministry, the complexity of the petition. Currently that exists for paper petitions. They do go to government, who must respond to them within 24 sitting days. This would be the same thing for e-petitions. Possibly somewhere in government they do have an awareness of what the overall cost or load is to respond to the average petition, because they are doing it currently for paper petitions.

Ms. Sophie Kiwala: The e-petitions for the House of Commons—since its inception, they have had about 257 of them. Have we forecasted how many we might have within the province? Do we know how many Quebec and the Northwest Territories take in?

The Clerk of the Assembly (Mr. Todd Decker): I don't know. I didn't look at their websites to see what they are up to in their current sessions. It's hard to predict what the popularity of it might be.

Ms. Sophie Kiwala: I guess we would probably be comparable to Quebec, just because of how our population compares, but that might be an interesting piece of information to find out and may provide us with some sort of guideline which would then enable us to have a look at or make some estimation on what costs we might anticipate for the various ministries, going forward.

The Clerk of the Assembly (Mr. Todd Decker): Together with the information I'll get for Mr. Hillier, I'll find out if I can find out from Quebec what their annual load of e-petitions is.

The Chair (Mr. Monte McNaughton): The one thing to remember, I think, too, is that ministerial staff are responding to paper petitions now when there is only one signature, so at least these ones would have to hit a 500-signature plateau, or a minimum.

Ms. Sophie Kiwala: Yes, that's true.

The Chair (Mr. Monte McNaughton): And if they have done—sorry, you said 257 in how many months, federally?

The Clerk of the Assembly (Mr. Todd Decker): It launched in November 2015, right after the last election, so it's about 16 months.

The Chair (Mr. Monte McNaughton): And that's nationally, so hard to predict, but probably less than what the federal House has seen.

Ms. Sophie Kiwala: Yes.

Just to pick up on something that MPP Hillier said regarding an MPP's potential involvement with a petition—I think that that was maybe where your question was coming from; you obviously want to represent your constituents. We all do. You would just basically print a page of the petition—you wouldn't have to duplicate the petition—and then get hand signatures? Or how would that work if an MPP was to read a petition into the record in the House?

The Clerk of the Assembly (Mr. Todd Decker): I guess if there's an e-petition on the e-petitions system that a member is interested in, the member could duplicate the text of the petition and gather written signatures,

the way they currently do, and on any given day present it in the Legislature.

Ms. Sophie Kiwala: So you'd have to have handwritten hand signatures. You wouldn't be able to just print a sheet off of the computer and then read out the petition from there.

The Clerk of the Assembly (Mr. Todd Decker): That's right. The committee made no recommendations to the House to alter the current paper petitions process. Barring any decision to change that, it would remain intact as is.

Ms. Sophie Kiwala: Okay.

The Chair (Mr. Monte McNaughton): Yes, the current petition format, the status quo.

Ms. Sophie Kiwala: Yes, okay.

The Chair (Mr. Monte McNaughton): Any other questions for the Clerk and the director of technology services? Mr. Dickson.

Mr. Joe Dickson: Is the cost of this incurred by the presenter?

The Clerk of the Assembly (Mr. Todd Decker): No.

Mr. Joe Dickson: Why?

The Clerk of the Assembly (Mr. Todd Decker): It would be entirely borne by the Legislative Assembly as a public service to allow people to have access and express their opinions to the Legislature.

Mr. Joe Dickson: Was that a unanimous decision?

The Clerk of the Assembly (Mr. Todd Decker): I don't know. I don't think the committee thought of imposing a user fee or anything like that.

The Chair (Mr. Monte McNaughton): No, we didn't. We didn't go near that one. This was in the name of democratic engagement.

Mr. Joe Dickson: Interesting.

The Chair (Mr. Monte McNaughton): Any other questions?

I just wanted to say to the Clerk, to you and your staff, thank you very much for all that you've done for this committee, working through this—and the former Clerk as well. Please pass along our regards. Thanks to all of your staff for your work on this.

The Clerk of the Assembly (Mr. Todd Decker): Thank you very much.

Mr. Kirk Cameron: Thank you.

The Chair (Mr. Monte McNaughton): Thanks for being here today.

Is the committee ready to move forward on this and move this to the Board of Internal Economy? Can we have a discussion on that, if anybody would like to lead that off? Ms. Wong.

Ms. Soo Wong: Mr. Chair, I didn't want to monopolize the meeting. I have a lot of implementation questions. I'd like to sleep on what I just heard today, because the Clerk didn't really answer my question about implementation time. All he said was if we approve it today, it goes to the Board of Internal Economy, as I heard.

I need to think this thing through, because the access is one piece, but there are a lot of implementation issues. I'd like to be able to think it through and maybe have a

conversation with my colleagues and figure this one out. I think we need to make some final decision, because it has been labouring in this committee for two years—I get it—but I have a lot of implementation concerns.

The Chair (Mr. Monte McNaughton): Mr. Bailey.

Mr. Robert Bailey: What would be the process? Maybe the Clerk can give us a little explanation. After Ms. Wong and others think about it and we sleep on it, if we come back, say, a week from now and we decide, “Okay, we’re going to move ahead with it,” so the next step is it will go to the Board of Internal Economy and then they would probably hash it over and make sure the numbers all jibed and then they would make a recommendation—how does that go? Clerk?

The Clerk of the Committee (Mr. William Short): Hypothetically speaking, the committee makes a decision, let’s say, at next week’s meeting on whether or not to go forward with it. If the committee decides to go forward with it, then there would be a dollar amount taken to the Board of Internal Economy, which would have to be voted on at the Board of Internal Economy, approving set amount of dollars to implement and start an e-petitions project.

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Then there would have to be a change and a revision in the standing orders that the House would have to approve, amending standing order 39, which is the current written petitions standing order, allowing for e-petition signatures and whatnot to be accepted, plus the responses and everything. We already have that drafted up; it was in the working group report to you guys.

Then, according to what we’ve heard from the House of Commons, if we got back to them by April, they said six to nine months on having an up-and-running e-petitions site for us.

Mr. Robert Bailey: So there are a lot of checks and balances between our approval meeting next week, or whenever, and it actually being implemented. There’s many a slip betwixt the cup and the lip, more or less.

The Clerk of the Committee (Mr. William Short): Yes.

Mr. Robert Bailey: Okay.

The Chair (Mr. Monte McNaughton): Ms. Scott.

Ms. Laurie Scott: I’m sorry. Because I’m new to this, if someone could give me a little short synopsis. The whole goal was to engage more of the public into posting petitions, but yet, in the federal chamber, it still has to be an MP who sponsors the petition.

What we do now is create our own petitions based on our communities. There was a call for a bigger net from the general public to be able to engage in the petition process in the Legislature, or how do we—because, basically, people can create petitions out there and they get them signed now. It’s just that it’s up to us to present them, but we can just table them or stand up.

I don’t have any issue with groups in my riding bringing me petitions that they’ve created, as long as they follow the rules. We either guide them or they’ve already known the rules. Is it the coming of age that we just want

electronic petitions, which some of the members do now? I know you do.

Mr. Randy Hillier: Yes.

Ms. Laurie Scott: We do electronic petitions. I get some. There are—and I could have missed that earlier and I apologize if I did—electronic petitions out there, but we still can’t really read them in the Legislature.

The Chair (Mr. Monte McNaughton): Well, like we discussed earlier, unless a member wanted to pull it off and get signatures locally—

Ms. Laurie Scott: We could do a cover sheet with it and get real signatures. Right.

The Chair (Mr. Monte McNaughton): Yes. I can sort of answer part of that. In the early discussions, we had talked a lot about more democratic engagement. We talked about other jurisdictions like the UK, other provinces and the federal government moving towards this, so—

Ms. Laurie Scott: It’s just the trendsetting that is out there.

The Chair (Mr. Monte McNaughton): I think, from the early days, that was sort of the vision of electronic petitions.

Mr. Hillier.

Mr. Randy Hillier: The genesis of this goes back over a period of time. I don’t know if there were others—

The Chair (Mr. Monte McNaughton): You were here.

Mr. Randy Hillier: I know I authored some motions for this committee to consider e-petitions. The concept at that time was that individual members were doing electronic petitions, but there was no mechanism for those electronic petitions to be recognized in the House.

What we have now as a recommendation is that members’ electronic petitions will still not be recognized—we have to do it the old-fashioned way—and that the assembly will host an e-petition site. The assembly will make that avenue available, but not MPPs.

As it is today, there is no cost to the assembly and no requirement of the Board of Internal Economy for individual members to do e-petitions. Now we’re looking at about \$300,000 upfront and then—what did I hear?—about \$91,000 total—

Ms. Laurie Scott: Roughly \$90,000 a year—\$91,000 a year.

Mr. Randy Hillier: —in yearly costs.

The Chair (Mr. Monte McNaughton): Annually, yes.

Mr. Randy Hillier: As compared to the no-cost member route. That’s a short synopsis.

The Chair (Mr. Monte McNaughton): Ms. Kiwala.

Ms. Sophie Kiwala: I think you’re right, but at the same time, there would be nothing to stop a member from bringing up a petition that is hosted on the Legislative Assembly website. Right? It will be public there. You could go in and you could say, “Okay, there’s a petition hosted here that has so-and-so’s signature, blah, blah, blah.” Right? There’s nothing to stop a member from engaging in that way.

The Chair (Mr. Monte McNaughton): The current way we do petitions would stay the same, and we could copy those ones.

Ms. Sophie Kiwala: Okay. Just to be clear on the final costs, it's going to be \$91,000 plus \$37,000 for the monthly maintenance, per year.

The Chair (Mr. Monte McNaughton): No, it's \$57,000.

Interjection.

The Chair (Mr. Monte McNaughton): Sorry, about \$91,000 a year.

Ms. Sophie Kiwala: So \$91,000 altogether.

The Chair (Mr. Monte McNaughton): Yes.

Ms. Sophie Kiwala: Okay.

The Chair (Mr. Monte McNaughton): Mr. Hillier.

Mr. Randy Hillier: I know the member mentioned questions about implementation. Clearly, the only ones who can answer those questions are the people who just left. So I do think it would be worthwhile, then, if members need some time to think this through and construct those questions about implementation, that the committee meet again next week and have the Clerk of the House scheduled to come back in to have those discussions on implementation. That would be my suggestion.

The Chair (Mr. Monte McNaughton): I will say, you were right, Ms. Kiwala, with the costs. If I wasn't clear, it's \$91,000 plus the \$37,000.

Mr. Randy Hillier: Oh, so \$130,000—

The Chair (Mr. Monte McNaughton): Yes, \$120,000 or \$130,000.

Mr. Michael Mantha: Say those numbers again.

The Chair (Mr. Monte McNaughton): It's \$91,000, plus \$36,000.

So I know we've talked a lot about implementation early on. Is it the will of the committee to go back to having those conversations again, or do you just want some time to think and discuss and then come back next week?

Ms. Sophie Kiwala: Just a little bit of time would be great, if that's okay.

The Chair (Mr. Monte McNaughton): Is everyone okay to come back, then, at 1 o'clock next Wednesday, to

maybe have our final discussion and get some guidance from the committee on if we want to push this to the Board of Internal Economy for a final decision?

Mr. Michael Mantha: You may not get that final decision next week. You may get another reflection of information that is going to be shared from the Clerk. We're inviting him for the meeting but—

The Chair (Mr. Monte McNaughton): Is it the will of the committee, then, to have the Clerk come back, to go back and have these implementation discussions?

Mr. Robert Bailey: Well, he's the only one who can answer this.

The Chair (Mr. Monte McNaughton): Okay. In the meantime, we're going to redistribute the reports that we've had done, for the new members if they haven't seen them, because a lot of these questions have come up before and they've been answered. I think it will be of some value to the new members.

Mr. Michael Mantha: Just for clarity, and I did read the report, I just want to make sure my numbers are right. The \$3,095.67 per month that the Clerk indicated, that's the maintenance fee per month. Is that the \$36,000 the speaker just indicated right now?

The Chair (Mr. Monte McNaughton): Yes.

Mr. Michael Mantha: The \$91,000 is the initial set-up?

The Chair (Mr. Monte McNaughton): No, it's the annual hosting and support.

Ms. Laurie Scott: I think the \$3,000 is the maintenance. Is it not?

Interjections.

The Chair (Mr. Monte McNaughton): So the \$3,000 is hosting the site and the \$91,000 is the support. We're going to pass these numbers out; we'll distribute those.

Just to let the committee know, before next Wednesday, we'll distribute the two questions that committee members had for the Clerk today. We'll make sure you have those as quickly as possible.

Thank you, everyone.

The committee adjourned at 1349.

STANDING COMMITTEE ON THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

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Mr. Monte McNaughton (Lambton–Kent–Middlesex PC)

Vice-Chair / Vice-Présidenté

Ms. Laurie Scott (Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock PC)

Mr. Robert Bailey (Sarnia–Lambton PC)

Mr. James J. Bradley (St. Catharines L)

Mr. Joe Dickson (Ajax–Pickering L)

Ms. Sophie Kiwala (Kingston and the Islands / Kingston et les Îles L)

Ms. Harinder Malhi (Brampton–Springdale L)

Mr. Michael Mantha (Algoma–Manitoulin ND)

Mr. Monte McNaughton (Lambton–Kent–Middlesex PC)

Ms. Laurie Scott (Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock PC)

Ms. Soo Wong (Scarborough–Agincourt L)

Also taking part / Autres participants et participantes

Mr. Randy Hillier (Lanark–Frontenac–Lennox and Addington PC)

Clerk / Greffier

Mr. William Short

Staff / Personnel

Ms. Erin Fowler, research officer,

Research Services