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**Standing Committee on
Social Policy**

**Comité permanent de
la politique sociale**

Committee business

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1st Session
42nd Parliament
Wednesday 5 May 2021

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Mercredi 5 mai 2021

Chair: Deepak Anand
Clerk: Tanzima Khan

Président : Deepak Anand
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Salle 500, aile ouest, Édifice du Parlement
111, rue Wellesley ouest, Queen's Park
Toronto ON M7A 1A2
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Wednesday 5 May 2021

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

COMITÉ PERMANENT DE
LA POLITIQUE SOCIALE

Mercredi 5 mai 2021

The committee met at 0901 in committee room 2 and by video conference.

The Chair (Mr. Deepak Anand): Good morning, once again, everyone. The Standing Committee on Social Policy will now come to order.

As you know, we have MPP Joel Harden present. Along with him, we have MPP Aris Babikian, MPP Jeff Burch, MPP Mike Harris, MPP Bhutila Karpache, MPP Natalia Kusendova, MPP Lorne Coe, MPP Bob Bailey and MPP Effie J. Triantafilopoulos. We're also joined by staff from legislative research, Hansard, and broadcast and recording.

I'm going to request everyone to please speak slowly and clearly and wait until I recognize you before starting to speak.

COMMITTEE BUSINESS

The Chair (Mr. Deepak Anand): On the agenda of committee business, I just want to start by asking, are there any motions? I do see MPP Mike Harris. MPP Harris, please go ahead.

Mr. Mike Harris: I move that the committee enter closed session for the purposes of organizing committee business and that broadcasting staff be permitted to remain in the closed session meeting for the purposes of operating the electronic meeting technology.

The Chair (Mr. Deepak Anand): MPP Harris has moved a motion. At this point, I'm going to ask, is there any debate? I do see MPP Harden. MPP Harden, go ahead, please.

Mr. Joel Harden: I was just wondering if my friend MPP Harris could elaborate as to why he believes we need to move into closed session.

The Chair (Mr. Deepak Anand): Okay. Further debate? MPP Harris.

Mr. Mike Harris: Listen, we've gone over this before. We would normally do these types of things in a subcommittee meeting, and they've been very difficult to organize. I'm not going to necessarily lay blame on any one person, but this is the way we're going to continue doing things for now, until we can get back to the better relationships, I guess, that we had previous to this with some members of the opposition.

This is way it's going to go. As we've said before, all of this would normally be done during subcommittee, and instead of having to then call a meeting later and vote and do everything, we're just doing it now.

The Chair (Mr. Deepak Anand): Further debate? I see MPP Joel Harden.

Mr. Joel Harden: Thank you to MPP Harris for that response. I confess, Chair, I'm a little confused, because this is a really important bill that the government has put forward. Our committee really does need to consider how we organize debate and discussion around this fulsomely. I can honestly say there are numerous community groups back home that are following the progress of this bill.

I have a great working relationship with MPP Harris. Even though we may philosophically disagree on things, we can discuss and we can get along. So, I'm going to try to encourage my friend in debate right now, Chair, through you, to actually organize this meeting publicly, because I want my friends back home—and I can tell you, just in case MPP Harris thinks I'm filibustering, I'm actually quite serious. There are nurses at home, for example, who are writing to our office in agonized terms because they've only received their first of two vaccinations. These are patient-facing staff. These are people who are right in the middle of our swelling ICUs. They're writing me. They're following this bill. Their unions are following this bill. I can tell you people who work in street health at home with our homeless and at-risk organizations are following this bill. I can tell you that several personal support workers—there's a schedule of this bill devoted to a college for personal support workers—are following the progress of this bill. They want to see not only me but all of us talking about how we organize discussion and debate about this bill.

We can decide, as MPPs, how we can conduct the work of this committee—with your excellent help, Chair. I want to try to convince my friend MPP Harris and the other members of the government: Let's organize how we have debate about this particular bill out in the open. There's no need to move into closed session. All of us, I think, have a duty to people back home to have transparency so they can follow what we're doing.

The Chair (Mr. Deepak Anand): Thank you, MPP Harden. Further debate? I see MPP Bhutila Karpache. Go ahead, MPP Karpache.

Ms. Bhutila Karpache: I just want to echo my colleague MPP Harden and say that I agree. We really need to be as transparent as possible, especially on an important [inaudible] in the House. At least at the committee, where the eight of us are here, we can do our best to be transparent to the public, including regarding organizing for committee. Thank you.

The Chair (Mr. Deepak Anand): Thank you so much. I do see MPP Babikian. MPP Babikian, do you want to say anything?

Mr. Aris Babikian: Please correct me if I am wrong. My understanding is that there will be an opportunity for a public hearing and all those who are interested in this bill will be able to follow up on our discussion. It will be an open session.

This motion is only to organize the committee meeting; the nuts and bolts of the next few days, the meetings etc. I don't know if the opposition side will agree with me, but this is just an internal issue. It will not affect the public, and the public will be able to follow up on our open discussions.

The Chair (Mr. Deepak Anand): Thank you, MPP Babikian. I'm just going to read the motion: I move that the committee enter closed session for the purpose of organizing committee business and that broadcasting staff be permitted to remain in the closed session meeting for the purpose of operating the electronic meeting technology.

Further debate? MPP Joel Harden.

Mr. Joel Harden: Me, Chair?

The Chair (Mr. Deepak Anand): Yes.

Mr. Joel Harden: Oh, sorry. I thought I heard you say "MPP Jeff," so I just wanted to make sure it wasn't MPP Burch who raised his hand before me.

The Chair (Mr. Deepak Anand): No, no, MPP Harden.

Mr. Joel Harden: Okay. Again, I'm going to keep at it, trying to persuade my colleagues, through you, to take this motion off the floor. I'm going to name a particular community group back home that is watching this bill, just so my friends on this committee know that I'm actually quite serious about it this morning.

Arwen McKechnie is a street health worker for the Somerset West Community Health Centre. She is following this particular debate about how we look at health care organization and administration in this pandemic with great interest. Why is she following this particular debate with great interest? I've been corresponding with Arwen all week. Because, sadly, on April 23, we lost a street health worker. We lost a street health worker in Centretown West, for people who are familiar with downtown Ottawa. His name was Carl Reinboth.

Interjection.

Mr. Joel Harden: Pardon me?

The Chair (Mr. Deepak Anand): No, no. Go ahead, MPP Harden.

Mr. Joel Harden: Thank you. He was killed; he was killed in our community. It speaks to the profound nature of the mental health crisis in our community that this tragedy happened. Arwen and the people at the Somerset West Community Health Centre want to know how we're going to be organizing hearings at this committee so they can figure out how much notice we give the public, how much time we give the public to weigh in on this matter. Because I can honestly tell you, our community right now at home is grieving. We have a pronounced mental health

crisis in our community. We have an opioid crisis which, sadly, is killing more people on a per capita basis than the pandemic continues to.

But from a health care administration standpoint, we haven't seen the resources come into our community at the speed to prevent tragedies like what happened in my community on April 23, when Carl Reinboth, who had devoted himself, Chair—I have to tell you. Carl had devoted himself to helping people struggling with trauma and addiction. He, himself, had stopped using drugs in 1992.

0910

Interjection.

Mr. Joel Harden: Yes?

The Chair (Mr. Deepak Anand): MPP Harden, I truly respect—and these heartbreaking stories are extremely important for our discussion. That's why we're going to be going through the committee meeting and discussing them. I respectfully just want to say that we are debating how we can tackle this motion on organizing committee business.

I just want to take a second.

Interjections.

The Chair (Mr. Deepak Anand): I truly respect what you are trying to advocate, but at the same time, I would truly appreciate—let's concentrate on the motion. Respectfully, back to you, sir.

Mr. Joel Harden: I totally hear what you're saying, Chair. I'm endeavouring to concentrate on the motion. The motion before us, as I understand it, is asking us to move into closed session on how we organize the business. I believe, and I'm trying to articulate, through you to my friends on the committee, that we have a duty and an obligation in this moment to not move into closed session on how we organize our committee's business. We have a duty and an obligation particularly—I'm trying to articulate the tragedy of what happened in our community with Carl Reinboth on April 23.

The lead for street health at Somerset West Community Health Centre, Arwen McKechnie, and that whole team are watching this debate. They're watching this debate because they want to know how much time we are going to give community members to engage this committee's work about this important bill. So I feel a duty as the MPP for Ottawa Centre to advocate as strenuously as I possibly can to convince my friends in government to not move into closed session at this moment. I understand it has been a practice lately, but I don't think it helps us.

I think there's consensus across the political spectrum to deal with mental health. I've talked to the minister responsible at length. I've heard other members of this committee comment on this matter before, but I think we take a step backwards as legislators if we start organizing the ways in which legislation is debated at committees like ours in secret. I don't like that. I don't think it helps us. I think people are following us more than we realize, particularly in the age of social media. As I've been trying to understand what happened to Carl and what's happening to too many members of our community in

mental health crisis, I want to make sure that we have these discussions out in the open, about how much time we are allowing community members to find out when they can depute to us but also about how much time we're going to give them.

For the last three years, I've struggled, to be honest, to figure out how we get more Ottawa voices into our conversations. I love my friends in Toronto—this is a great city—but what tends to happen, given the notice we give out from our committees, is that most of our proceedings are very dominated by folks from Toronto. I like Toronto, but I want to make sure that Ottawa and Ottawa Valley voices are part of our conversations. It's a much bigger province, and the geographic diversity of our province has to be reflected in the work.

I think if I can persuade my friends in government to not move into closed session on this matter, we can give ourselves the opportunity, in the full light of day, to plan how we do hearings for Bill 283, to deal with how we organize ourselves so that we invite as much community engagement as possible. I think it helps every single member of this committee. I think it helps our Legislature.

I respect what MPP Harris is saying, but I haven't heard a persuasive argument yet. The member and I get along perfectly fine together. The other members of this committee: We get along perfectly well. Let's set a new precedent. Let's send a message to the leadership of all our parties that we can work together. We don't have to move into closed session.

The Chair (Mr. Deepak Anand): Further debate? MPP Burch.

Mr. Jeff Burch: I'm not going to repeat what my colleagues have said. I think they've laid out the reasons why we don't want to go into closed session. I will just say that closed sessions should never be the default position of a committee. We should always have a reason. We should

always be transparent until we have a reason to go behind closed doors, and being afraid that we're not going to get along is not an adequate reason to go behind closed doors, so I won't be supporting it.

The Chair (Mr. Deepak Anand): Further debate? No further debate. Are the members ready to vote? At this time, I would request all the members to turn their video on so we can see everybody and it is easier for our Clerk to—

Interjection.

The Chair (Mr. Deepak Anand): Give me a second. Point of order?

Mr. Joel Harden: It's to request a roll call vote, please.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Pardon me?

Mr. Joel Harden: I request a recorded vote, please.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): All right. Since it is going to be a recorded vote, our Clerk is going to call the names. Are the members ready to vote? Yes. Shall the motion carry?

Ayes

Babikian, Bailey, Coe, Harris, Kusendova, Triantafilopoulos.

Nays

Burch, Harden, Karpache.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): The motion is carried.

At this time, we will be moving into closed session. Please allow the Clerk a few minutes to confirm that the committee is ready to proceed. We will be back in two minutes.

The committee continued in closed session at 0917.

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