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**Official Report
of Debates
(Hansard)**

A-7

**Journal
des débats
(Hansard)**

A-7

**Standing Committee on
Government Agencies**

Intended appointments

**Comité permanent des
organismes gouvernementaux**

Nominations prévues

2nd Session
42nd Parliament

Tuesday 7 December 2021

2^e session
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Mardi 7 décembre 2021

Chair: Gilles Bisson
Clerk: Tanzima Khan

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

STANDING COMMITTEE ON
GOVERNMENT AGENCIESCOMITÉ PERMANENT DES
ORGANISMES GOUVERNEMENTAUX

Tuesday 7 December 2021

Mardi 7 décembre 2021

The committee met at 0900 in committee room 2 and by video conference.

The Chair (Mr. Gilles Bisson): The meeting will come to order. This is the regular meeting of the Standing Committee on Government Agencies. We're going to review a couple of appointments this morning, as well as dealing with the report by the subcommittee that will be tabled in a minute.

I just want to remind members that we are live, so just be conscious that this is being broadcast on the Internet for those who are watching.

SUBCOMMITTEE REPORT

The Chair (Mr. Gilles Bisson): Mr. Yakabuski, I believe you have a motion.

Mr. John Yakabuski: I do, Chair.

The Chair (Mr. Gilles Bisson): I don't know why I knew that.

Mr. John Yakabuski: I tell you, you're very intuitive. I can actually read these. Good lights in here.

I move adoption of the subcommittee report on intended appointments dated Thursday, December 2, 2021, on the order-in-council certificate dated November 26, 2021.

The Chair (Mr. Gilles Bisson): Very good. Is there any discussion on the motion? Seeing no discussion on the motion, all those in favour, please signify by putting your hand up. Any opposed? Carried.

INTENDED APPOINTMENTS

MS. EMILY ROBB

Review of intended appointment, selected by official opposition party and government party: Emily Robb, intended appointee as member, Landlord and Tenant Board.

The Chair (Mr. Gilles Bisson): We are going to go to our first intended appointment, and that's to the member for the Landlord and Tenant Board. We have with us Emily Robb.

We will start with the official opposition once we start the questioning with Ms. Robb. If you wish to introduce yourself and use some time to talk about why you would be a wonderful appointment to the board, please do so, but that time will come from the government side. You have the floor.

Ms. Emily Robb: Good morning. I would like to thank you for inviting me to speak to you today. I will apologize in advance; I have a written statement, but I'll try my best to maintain eye contact.

A little bit about me: In 2008, I was a single mother to a five-year-old little girl. I was working full-time in a retail job, but I was not really able to provide her the life that she deserved, so I decided to go back to school. I enrolled in Durham College in their two-year paralegal program, and, during the summer of my first year, I was offered a position in the centre for students with disabilities where I continued working into my second year whenever I had time in between classes.

I started my placement as well in my second year at Durham Community Legal Clinic, was able to shadow [*inaudible*] graduated with honours from Durham College in April 2010, and was offered a full-time position at Durham Community Legal Clinic as tenant duty counsel. In that role, I was at the Landlord and Tenant Board in Whitby about three days a week. I offered summary legal advice to low-income residents—

The Chair (Mr. Gilles Bisson): Ms. Robb, just for the record, we're having a bit of a hard time hearing you. If you can maybe get closer to your mike that might be able to help, because it's choppy. Thank you. Carry on.

Ms. Emily Robb: When I was at the Landlord and Tenant Board, I was offering summary legal advice to low-income residents of Durham region, and when I was not at the board I was back at the clinic. I was the only community legal worker at the clinic who offered tenant services. At the clinic, I would give summary legal advice to tenants, assisted with drafting tenant applications to help tenants prepare for their eviction hearings and I attempted to negotiate with their landlords.

During my first couple of years at the clinic, although my primary role was as tenant duty counsel, I was able to cover some short-term employee leaves and learn other areas of [*inaudible*] law. I covered for my social assistance colleagues for a three-month period, and again for a year's maternity leave where the workload was Ontario Disability Support Program appeals to the Social Benefits Tribunal as well as applications to the Criminal Injuries Compensation Board.

Working at the clinic also involved participating in community outreach activities. My main role in this regard was giving in-person presentations to our community partners such as St. Vincent de Paul, the Oshawa seniors

centre, local libraries and Ontario Works offices. The clinic would also hold full-day community forums where we would present on all the areas of law that we could offer.

Around April 2015, the Durham Community Legal Clinic was fortunate enough to receive some additional funding from Legal Aid Ontario. With that, we were able to bring on three more community legal workers to work at the clinic. While we were brainstorming ideas about how we could use this funding, I suggested that we open up satellite offices to reach people in the areas of our community that would have difficulties coming to our clinic in Oshawa.

In October 2015, our satellite offices were launched in Ajax, Uxbridge, Cannington and Beaverton. In my time running the satellite offices, I carried a full caseload of crucial benefits files as well as offering summary legal advice in most of the areas of law that the clinic offered. Our satellite offices were busy and our objective to reach more of our vulnerable populations was realized.

In November 2019, I was given a letter that terminated my employment with the clinic in November 2020 due to funding cuts from Legal Aid. In January 2020, I was asked to assist our housing team with their growing workload, and that is where I was at the start of the pandemic.

At the start of the pandemic, we were all working from home, and even though there was a moratorium on evictions in Ontario, we were still very busy. My colleagues and I developed [*inaudible*] regarding housing for community partners to keep them up to date on what was happening with evictions and tenant applications at the board level. In September 2020, the board started conducting virtual hearings, and my colleagues and I would find ourselves in multiple hearing rooms, acting as tenant duty counsel for Durham region.

In January 2021, I started at the firm where I currently am, Anderson Aylwin Begg. At this firm, the majority of the files that I have are acting for landlords in eviction proceedings, mainly non-payment of rent applications. We also assist several social housing landlords including Ontario Aboriginal Housing, Canadian Mental Health Association Durham and Nishnawbe Homes.

I believe my experience from the clinic has been an asset in this position. I'm comfortable negotiating with tenants and landlords. I understand their position, and I'm able to manage expectations in clear, plain language [*inaudible*] to landlords that retain us.

I'm humbled to be before you today and to answer any questions you may have.

The Chair (Mr. Gilles Bisson): Thank you very much, Ms. Robb. We're going to start the questioning with Mr. Gates. You have 15 minutes.

Mr. Wayne Gates: I appreciate that, Chair. Thank you very much.

Good morning. What was your primary motivation for seeking this nomination, and could you give us a brief overview of how you view the current status of the LTB and the overall housing crisis we face in this province?

Ms. Emily Robb: My primary motivation, I believe, is driven from my experience that I gained at the clinic, also

the experience I've had the past year at the firm I currently work at. I have a lot of experience dealing with landlords as well as tenants. Even in my role as tenant duty counsel, oftentimes I was negotiating with landlords to come up with solutions for the issues that tenants were facing at the board.

Also, I'm used to a very heavy caseload. At the clinic, oftentimes, my caseload, including Landlord and Tenant Board files, was over 150 files, so I'm accustomed to being pretty busy in terms of caseload. As for my motivation for applying for this position, I think I have the experience.

As for—could you repeat your second question?

Mr. Wayne Gates: I understand that you previously worked at the Durham Community Legal Clinic. Our legal clinic here in Niagara deals with a great deal of landlord and tenant issues. Was this the case in the Durham clinic?

Ms. Emily Robb: Absolutely. We practised in a number of areas of law at the Durham Community Legal Clinic, but the housing department was always the busiest, for sure.

Mr. Wayne Gates: I ask this to everybody, so you're not special, just for the record: Have you ever donated to a political party?

Ms. Emily Robb: No, I have not.

Mr. Wayne Gates: Provincially, federally—never?

Ms. Emily Robb: Never.

Mr. Wayne Gates: Have you ever worked on a campaign?

Ms. Emily Robb: Never.

Mr. Wayne Gates: Do you want to? I could always use some help. It's just a thought. You said you had a few spare minutes of your week, so I just thought I'd ask.

The Chair (Mr. Gilles Bisson): You don't have to answer that. That was obviously humour.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Do we get to ask the same question?

The Chair (Mr. Gilles Bisson): Yes, sure, you do.

Mr. Wayne Gates: You could ask whatever you like, man. It's your 15 minutes.

Can you describe some of the experience you have had with legal clinics regarding adjudicating issues between landlords and tenants? In a lot of cases, I know they can be pretty tough to negotiate with.

Ms. Emily Robb: Absolutely. The majority of the cases that we help with—or that I helped with at the clinic—involve a non-payment of rent. Obviously, that's a big issue. I think when you manage people's expectations about what they're going to get from the board if you go there, they're a little bit more willing to try to work out something ahead of time in terms of payment plans and realizing that the board does consider a tenant's circumstances when they do suggest a payment plan, to fit our tenant's personal circumstances and how they got into the position that they're in. So I believe I've had pretty good success resolving issues before they even get to the board level when I was at the clinic in Durham.

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Mr. Wayne Gates: I don't know if you face this at all, but I know down in Niagara we're facing a lot of

renovictions. We've had a lot of outside people come in and buy entire apartment buildings and then end up saying they're going to fix them up, so you end up with renovictions. Unfortunately, a lot of them are seniors and a lot of them are young families. The rents are usually around \$800, \$900. They do the renoviction and then you already see it—even before they've moved out, they're already renting them out for \$1,600, \$1,800, \$2,000. Was that an issue in Durham at all?

Ms. Emily Robb: We did see that in Durham, yes. I believe that with Bill 184 the board has put in some more protections in terms of what landlords are able to do when they serve those types of notices, but it was definitely, yes, something that happened in Durham.

Mr. Wayne Gates: Many times, landlords issue N12 notices to tenants, pretending they will be moving into the unit, forcing the tenant out, only to renovate the unit and rent the unit out for a lot more. I gave you that example. Many times it's difficult for tenants to challenge this at the LTB. Do you think there are steps that can be taken to address this serious problem right across the province of Ontario?

Ms. Emily Robb: As I mentioned before with Bill 184, there has been an introduction in terms of what landlords must provide when they're filing applications based on N12s. When they file the L2 application they would have to disclose to the board if they've served any of these notices to any properties that they've had.

I do agree it's difficult for a tenant to prove bad faith at a hearing. However, our tenant applications that carry pretty stiff penalties for a landlord when a tenant—T5 applications, where a tenant would bring a landlord to the board for bad-faith evictions, and they've just increased the amount of money that a tenant potentially could gain from proving that the landlord did in fact serve that notice in bad faith.

Mr. Wayne Gates: Landlords that issue an N12 for personal use have to live there for one year. Some do not, yet are hoping to increase rental rates with new tenants. Do you think the LTB should be actively tracking landlords that do this? It seems to be a problem where they buy a number of them. And should this information be public?

Ms. Emily Robb: I'm not sure if it's the role of the Landlord and Tenant Board to track. I do believe, as I said, that they have interim steps to try and make things not as cut and dry for landlords in terms of serving these N12 notices in bad faith.

Sorry, what was the second part of that question?

Mr. Wayne Gates: Should this information be public so that communities are aware that individuals are doing this all over the province, so we can track it a little better? I don't know about you, but a lot of our calls are obviously about renovictions—with people who can't afford affordable housing, people who are living in places for \$800, \$850, then the next thing you know, there's nowhere to go. If you take a look at rents today, I'm sure you're aware of this, rents today are \$1,800, \$2,000, \$2,200. Toronto, I'm hearing, it's even more than that. I'll be

honest with you, I don't know how people can afford to live and pay rent with the wages that are out there. So should this information be made public? Do you believe that we should be doing more to make sure that these people who are just, quite frankly, fly-by-night and want to make money at the expense of people ending up homeless or living on the street and then they're on social assistance—it's a cycle that has to be broken somehow.

Ms. Emily Robb: I am aware of groups that do publish this information and advocacy groups who gather this information. I believe that the board has been trying to—by way of Bill 184 and the changes to the legislation that they're introducing, they have been trying to curb the abuse of N12 notices that have been served for that reason.

Mr. Wayne Gates: We spoke with previous appointees about the current issues with the—

The Chair (Mr. Gilles Bisson): Just one moment. I'm wondering if you're having a broadband problem, as far as your Internet. If you would turn off the video, maybe the audio will be better.

Ms. Emily Robb: Okay.

The Chair (Mr. Gilles Bisson): Go ahead, Mr. Gates.

Mr. Wayne Gates: We spoke with previous appointees about the current issue with the LTB, especially now with virtual hearings leading to even more evictions for the most vulnerable tenants. How do you view this problem? And are you concerned?

Ms. Emily Robb: In my role at the clinic, I understand what the issue is in terms of access to justice and having access to those participating in video hearings. Honestly, when I was at the clinic, we were helping the most vulnerable people in our society, and I didn't see the connectivity problem as a great big issue for the people that we helped. They could call in to the hearings. They could come into the clinic and we could help them get connected. So I don't see access to justice as a huge issue in terms of holding video hearings.

Mr. Wayne Gates: In your view, what are the main issues facing the board today?

Ms. Emily Robb: I can speak to this as a person who appears before them, but not as a member; I'm not a part of the board yet. But I will say that definitely the backlog that was caused by COVID and the amount of time it takes to get to a hearing—I believe that has been substantially improved since they started holding hearings again.

Mr. Wayne Gates: Could you describe a previous experience that might be of assistance for your undertaking this position?

Ms. Emily Robb: Yes. I have appeared before the board in the capacity of tenant duty counsel numerous times, and in my role now I am working primarily for landlords, so I feel like I have a very good understanding of both sides. As I mentioned before, I'm used to a very heavy workload and I think that would definitely assist in my ability to be a member of the Landlord and Tenant Board.

Mr. Wayne Gates: And what contribution do you think that you can make once you get on the board?

Ms. Emily Robb: I think I've always approached my jobs with an idea of integrity and fairness, and I think those will carry over to being an adjudicator at the Landlord and Tenant Board.

Mr. Wayne Gates: Okay. I have no further questions. Thank you.

The Chair (Mr. Gilles Bisson): Okay. That concludes the time—unless, Ms. Stiles, are you here? Oh, I just broke the rules of the Legislature.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Again.

The Chair (Mr. Gilles Bisson): Again. I can't believe it. I've been here how many years?

Mr. John Yakabuski: First time in 31 years, right?

The Chair (Mr. Gilles Bisson): First time in 31, yes.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Well, going on 32.

The Chair (Mr. Gilles Bisson): Yes, 32 in the fall, along with—

Mr. John Yakabuski: Mr. Arnott and Mr. Wilson.

The Chair (Mr. Gilles Bisson): —Ted and Jim.

Okay. Mr. Yakabuski, you have the floor.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Thank you very much, Ms. Robb, for joining us this morning. We have a daughter Emily, so you've got me on your side right off the bat. I'm biased in that regard.

But I had a chance to look at your background, and I also read and listened to your address, and I'm really pleased that our government is bringing forward potential appointees such as yourself who have good lived experience as well as an employment background. That's what we're looking for as a government. We want balance, and you've got it, because you've worked on both sides of it. Also, I say the legal clinic's loss could be the board's gain, should your appointment be approved. So I do want to congratulate you and thank you for your service to date.

You did touch on the caseload that you've always dealt with in your professional life. Can you elaborate a little bit more about how you will manage heavy caseloads? You indicated that it has been a heavy caseload. Can you elaborate a little bit more about how you would manage that heavy caseload at the board?

Ms. Emily Robb: Yes. As I touched on before, at the clinic my caseload would be a mix between housing files and social benefit files and would usually exceed 120 cases. All those cases come with very strict deadlines in order to either have medicals in or evidence in. I'm very accustomed to my own time management and running myself in terms of knowing when does this need to be done and I'm very strict on maintaining schedules in terms of caseload. That is something that's going to be very important if I'm appointed to the Landlord and Tenant Board.

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Mr. John Yakabuski: Thank you very much. I will pass it to MPP Pang.

The Chair (Mr. Gilles Bisson): Mr. Pang, you are next.

Mr. Billy Pang: Thank you for putting your name forward, Ms. Robb. When you are joining the LTB, I

would like to know, what do you believe it takes to be an effective member on the Landlord and Tenant Board?

Ms. Emily Robb: I believe that to be an effective member of the board, you definitely have to be impartial, you have to be fair and you have to be timely in your decisions. I believe that I possess all of those things.

Mr. Billy Pang: When you're talking about being fair, there are a lot of issues that happen at the LTB, no matter on the landlord side or the tenant side. How do you balance the so-called "fair"?

Ms. Emily Robb: It depends on the circumstances of the individual case. It depends on the individual and what they have been through in terms of why they're in front of the board and what circumstances they face that contributed to them being in front of the board, but also, you have to balance the rights of the landlord as well—just being able to look at the situation as a whole, coming to a decision that is as fair as you could be to both parties.

Mr. Billy Pang: Thank you very much. I pass it to MPP Norm Miller.

The Chair (Mr. Gilles Bisson): Mr. Miller, you are next.

Mr. Norman Miller: Thank you, Ms. Robb, for putting your name forward for the Landlord and Tenant Board. I'm just interested in your community involvement. What sort of engagement do you have in your community, what have you learned from it and how will that inform the work you do on the Landlord and Tenant Board?

Ms. Emily Robb: Most of my community involvement happened when I was at the clinic. A big part of the role you have as a community legal worker is engaging and maintaining relationships with different community partners. The bulk of that work happened after hours, not necessarily in the 9 to 5. That involved [inaudible] on information presentations to tenants, to community partners that have housing, or social housing providers. A lot of the time, as I ran satellite offices up in the north, I did a lot of presentations to tenants that utilized social services in the north. Presentations would mainly involve [inaudible] or their rights as tenants.

Unfortunately, being a single mom, I didn't have a lot of time to take on my own community involvement. However, every year since 2014, my daughter and I collected donations, went downtown and handed them out to homeless people on Christmas Eve, and that was maintained until COVID.

Mr. Norman Miller: Super. Thanks. I'll pass it on to MPP Martin.

The Chair (Mr. Gilles Bisson): MPP Martin, you're next.

Mrs. Robin Martin: Thank you, Ms. Robb, for your presentation. I must say, you have a very impressive personal background, and it's kind of inspiring to hear a woman like you talking about all that she's accomplished, given challenges. I think it's wonderful.

Another kind of challenge we're facing right now is challenges because of COVID-19, and it's making operating the Landlord and Tenant Board and other hearings really difficult because we can't really do in-person

hearings right now. So I'm just wondering about how you think the Landlord and Tenant Board can adapt to this, and if you have any concerns about not being able to conduct in-person hearings at this time.

Ms. Emily Robb: In my role at the clinic, when they first started conducting virtual hearings, part of the issue with tenants was not necessarily not being able to connect to the hearings but just not understanding the process and being intimidated by the process of conducting a hearing virtually. I think we've come a long way in terms of educating tenants about the virtual process of hearings that help calm their fears going into it.

The second part of your question? I'm sorry.

Mrs. Robin Martin: Just whether you have any concerns about the lack of ability to conduct the in-person hearings at this time.

Ms. Emily Robb: I don't believe I have any concerns. In my experience both at the clinic and the firm that I'm at now, it has worked out fairly well. I know that the board does have regional offices that tenants can go to if they're unable or don't have the equipment to connect. The board does offer that as a system.

Mrs. Robin Martin: Okay, great. Thanks very much. I'll just pass it on to MPP Coe.

The Chair (Mr. Gilles Bisson): MPP Coe, you have the floor.

Mr. Lorne Coe: Thank you, Chair, and through you to Ms. Robb: Ms. Robb, thank you very much for all the work that you did at the Durham Community Legal Clinic.

Earlier, MPP Yakabuski spoke about some of the professional experience that you have. Can you speak, please, and share with the committee how that professional experience has prepared you for the work at the Landlord and Tenant Board?

Ms. Emily Robb: Yes. Through my job at the clinic, the foundation that I built or that the clinic instilled in me was a very good understanding of the Residential Tenancies Act, and my interaction with tenants has been extremely helpful and I believe will be extremely helpful in terms of understanding processes.

Also, my job now: I've just been here a year, but I have a good understanding of landlords' perspective and I believe that will definitely aid in my ability to become a member of the Landlord and Tenant Board should I be appointed.

Mr. Lorne Coe: I thank you for that response.

Through you, Chair, to MPP Oosterhoff, please.

The Chair (Mr. Gilles Bisson): MPP Oosterhoff, it is your floor.

Mr. Sam Oosterhoff: My thanks for the presentation and for coming before the committee and explaining a little bit more. I'm wondering if you could share a little bit more about your personal experiences that made you realize this was something you wanted to do. There are so many different options when it comes to public service, there are so many different ways that people can give back, but you chose to apply for this very specific type of role. I'm wondering if you can walk us through some of the

ways that you saw this necessity and that led to you coming to that decision.

The Chair (Mr. Gilles Bisson): You have about 30 seconds to respond.

Ms. Emily Robb: Okay. At the start of my career, I was obviously assisting tenants as duty counsel. I've always had an interest in landlord and tenant issues. I believe that was my motivating factor in applying for this appointment to the Landlord and Tenant Board. With my experience and foundation, my career has been focused on the Landlord and Tenant Board and the Residential Tenancies Act.

The Chair (Mr. Gilles Bisson): That brings us to the end of the time. Thank you very much for appearing before the committee. You will be informed of the results of the committee in due time.

MS. NATALIE JAMES

Review of intended appointment, selected by official opposition party: Natalie James, intended appointee as member, Landlord and Tenant Board.

The Chair (Mr. Gilles Bisson): We are now going to move to another appointment. This time again for the Landlord and Tenant Board. This is Natalie James.

In order to compete with my friend Mr. Yakabuski, our youngest daughter is Natalie, so, if I was a voting member of the committee, I would have to vote for her. So, please start.

Mr. John Yakabuski: I'll change you positions.

The Chair (Mr. Gilles Bisson): Well, I could. You want to sit here? Not a problem.

Go ahead, Natalie.

Ms. Natalie James: Good morning, Mr. Chair and members of the committee. Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today to discuss my potential appointment as a member of the Landlord and Tenant Board.

My name is Natalie James. I'm a proud mother of three teenagers, a wife of 21 years and a passionate entrepreneur with a long history in public service and not-for-profits. I am here today to highlight my professional experience and the skills that qualify me to be a valuable member of the Landlord and Tenant Board. More importantly, I want to leave you with the confidence that I am someone you can trust to serve the people of Ontario—your constituents—with respect, fairness and impartiality.

As you know from my resumé, which you were all provided with, I spent some time here at Queen's Park, from 1997 to 2003. I held various positions, including legislative assistant, press secretary and communications adviser under MPPs Dan Newman and Marilyn Mushinski and in the Office of the Premier.

0930

Shortly after, I had the privilege of joining the dedicated team at the Markham Stouffville Hospital Foundation. I had the honour to work with my community during the hospital's campaign for expansion. During this time, I witnessed stories of joy and extreme sadness, and learned the importance of supporting and helping those who need

it most. I worked alongside multiple boards and committees consisting of different business leaders and community members who all exemplified different points of view, which highlighted what is achievable when people work together for the greater good. After seven years working alongside the fantastic volunteers, donors and hospital staff, I returned to government as chief of staff to Paul Calandra when he was a federal member of Parliament.

After more than 20 years working in both provincial and federal government and with my local hospital, I decided to pursue my passion for business and ventured into entrepreneurship. After spending the better part of two years researching and planning, I opened the doors to my first brick-and-mortar business in Toronto. However, being a business still in its infancy, we were hit hard by the pandemic, and ultimately I made the difficult decision to close the doors permanently. From then on, I have dedicated myself full-time to my small consulting business, where I primarily work with entrepreneurs and small businesses to develop business plans, communication materials and marketing and branding strategies.

When building and leading my team, I created a culture of inclusion, respect and acceptance. We celebrated our differences and learned from our shared experiences. This provided me with valuable perspectives on the lived experiences of others. These roles allowed me to build strong ties in my community, travel across the country and province, meet people from all walks of life and see first-hand the issues many face.

During my time in public service, we represented diverse communities, which meant dealing with individuals from various cultural backgrounds and different socio-economic statuses, and people with language barriers. I saw first-hand the challenges and hardships people face. I gained valuable experience in mediation and applied the core principles of justice while exercising impartiality.

My collective experience working in these roles, assisting constituents, donors, grassroots organizations, special-interest groups and community leaders from all party stripes, has allowed me and awarded me the skill set needed to become a valuable member of the Landlord and Tenant Board.

There's a saying that I've always told my kids: "When you help another up the mountain, you're a little closer to the top yourself." Public service is just that: serving others.

There were many things I took away from my time in government, but partisan politics was not one of them. I consider myself very lucky to have had the honour to work provincially and federally. I am very grateful for the tremendous opportunity that helped shape me into the person I am today. However, as you know, our time in politics is short, and yet our wish to have some involvement in public service continues. Over the last number of years, this is something I have missed. So when I considered the opportunity to seek a public appointment, this seemed like a perfect way for me to utilize my experience and again serve the people of Ontario.

In the interest of being open and transparent, I'm at a point in my life where my three children are now teenagers—19, 16 and 13—and if any of you are parents, you understand that they begin to need you less as they get older. As they begin new chapters, I am hoping to do the same. I firmly believe that the best indicator of future behaviour is past behaviour. I have demonstrated how honesty, integrity and fairness are core values that I believe have guided me in my success, carried into all areas of my life.

The role and mandate of the Landlord and Tenant Board is to resolve applications between landlords and tenants by providing fair, effective, timely and accessible dispute resolution. I am committed to the principles and values of the tribunal, and I would execute this role with the highest level of honesty, integrity and impartiality. I am excited by this opportunity to be of service to the people of Ontario, and I believe this appointment would allow me to thrive and utilize my skill set in a new and meaningful way. Thank you, and I'm happy to answer your questions.

The Chair (Mr. Gilles Bisson): Thank you very much, Ms. James. I guess we're going to start with Mr. Yakabuski.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Thank you very much, Ms. James, for joining us today, and thank you very much for your candour and speaking clearly and fully about your background, because we know that the opposition will raise that background; that is their job, that is what they do. But I'm also very pleased to have heard it.

I'm just going to give you a couple of quick stories, because people don't understand how important sometimes that involvement in a political life is.

I had a young man—I took him on as a summer student. My daughter Emily had taught him as a peer tutor. He was struggling through school, and Emily said, "You should take him along for a job in your const office." I took him as my shadow for the summer and he's told me since more than once—he's now a teacher in Windsor and he was unsure just what he was going to do. He was struggling through school, had some issues. He said that summer of experience being in a political realm, meeting people of all walks of life, as you have said in your address as well, taught him more about responsibility, accountability and himself than anything in his past. And he said that really helped guide him to make some of the choices he made later on. So I do appreciate all the background that you have.

I do want to ask you a specific question, too. You were recommended for this position following Tribunals Ontario's competitive merit-based recruitment process. What was your impression of the process, and why do you think you are best candidate for this role?

Ms. Natalie James: Thank you for your question. Well, I will start by saying it was indeed a long and thorough process, one which began I think for me about eight months ago, so it's taken quite some time to get to this point. That being said, all of the tribunals deal with issues that impact people's lives in fundamental ways. So

I believe that the application, interview and testing process needs to be thorough and that those who are vetting applications and applicants do their due diligence to ensure the right people are selected to do this important work. I believe my collective experience throughout my career with constituents and community leaders, clients, special-interest groups, grassroots organizations and, of course, donors has really prepared me for a role like this, and that is why I believe I was selected.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Thank you very much, Natalie. I will now pass it to MPP Martin.

The Chair (Mr. Gilles Bisson): MPP Martin, you have the floor.

Mrs. Robin Martin: Thank you so much, everybody. I'm really enjoying hearing about all your inspiring work, Natalie. I really appreciated hearing some of your background.

Look, we know that the Landlord and Tenant Board has high caseload volumes. I wondered if you could tell us about your experience managing heavy caseloads and how you'll ensure, basically, that you can stay on top of your workload and deliver decisions within the targeted processing times.

Ms. Natalie James: Thank you for your question. As you are all very aware, the caseloads and day-to-day functions within constituency offices is very demanding and requires processes and safeguards to ensure that people receive assistance in a timely manner. In addition, being a small business owner comes with a workload unlike any other. As you can imagine, we wear multiple hats, if not all of them, and have to juggle a number of competing priorities at once. This requires important skills, and I believe those are time management and organization, proficiency in writing and of course, prioritization.

Staying on top of the workload and delivering timely decisions would be my top priority. I would ensure that I managed my time effectively and that I am well prepared for all hearings and allocate ample time to ensure that all processing times are met.

Mrs. Robin Martin: Thank you very much. Now, I would like it pass it over to my colleague MPP Oosterhoff.

The Chair (Mr. Gilles Bisson): Mr. Oosterhoff, you have the floor.

Mr. Sam Oosterhoff: I appreciate you coming before the committee today. My question is quite simple: What do you believe it takes to be an effective member of the Landlord and Tenant Board? What do you think are the key attributes that should be seen in any member of the board and that you yourself bring to the table in that regard?

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Ms. Natalie James: I believe to be an effective member you must possess the core competencies that ensure the process is fair, effective and, of course, accessible. First and foremost, a member must remove any and all bias. They must be open and transparent, of course address any needs either party may have, speak in clear and plain language, and exercise active listening. This is so that all parties feel comfortable, respected and heard. And, of

course, it's important to clearly explain the process to manage all the expectations and any potential fear or anxiety that anyone may have surrounding the process, because I would imagine it would be quite intimidating for them.

In order to conduct a hearing in this manner, it requires critical thinking, problem-solving, sound judgment and strong communication skills, of course. You need to be highly organized, and, I think, experience in dealing with policy and interpreting legislation is really important, and of course impartiality. I had to exercise these skills in each of the roles that I've had, and I would say that I've always been able to do so effectively.

Mr. Sam Oosterhoff: Fantastic. Thank you, Natalie. I will now turn it over to my colleague MPP Pang.

The Chair (Mr. Gilles Bisson): Mr. Pang, you have the floor.

Mr. Billy Pang: Good morning, Ms. James. It's nice to see you. I am impressed by your experience in the government and in different areas. But more than your professional and your government experience, what sort of engagement do you have in your community—say, volunteer work etc.—that you have learned from, and how would it inform your work on the Landlord and Tenant Board?

Ms. Natalie James: As I mentioned in my opening statement, I have strong ties to my community and have had the privilege of working and raising my family within Markham and Stouffville for many years. I continue to dedicate my time wherever I can, whether it be volunteering with Markham Stouffville Hospital, where all three of my kids were born, and I have certainly spent a fair share of time with two boys who play hockey and a daughter who has always been determined to outperform her brothers in everything she does. I also support local teams and organizations that have taught my kids the importance of teamwork and camaraderie.

And being a woman in business, I strongly believe in helping those who are following a similar path. I contribute to a culture of supporting women at every opportunity.

Lastly, whenever possible, I speak and volunteer my time with organizations that dedicate their time to inspiring and building confidence in young girls, as well as mental health initiatives, after I lost a dear friend to her battle in 2020.

Mr. Billy Pang: I'm glad that you are so engaged in the Markham area. I would like to pass the next turn to my colleague MPP Miller.

The Chair (Mr. Gilles Bisson): To Mr. Miller, and Mr. Miller, you have about 40-some-odd seconds.

Mr. Norman Miller: Thank you, Chair.

The Chair (Mr. Gilles Bisson): Not much of a thanks, but that's what you got.

Mr. Norman Miller: Thank you for putting your name forward, Ms. James. I'm just wondering about COVID and the challenges that will present for the Landlord and Tenant Board, doing hearings perhaps by Zoom instead of in person, and your feelings about that.

Ms. Natalie James: The COVID pandemic has presented all sectors with various challenges, but I believe

because this is an issue that hit every corner of the world, we're navigating it together and have had to find ways to pivot and seek alternative solutions. We have celebrated birthdays, participated in virtual events and—

The Chair (Mr. Gilles Bisson): Sorry, Ms. James, but we are done with the government's time.

We'll now move to the official opposition. Mr. Gates, you have 15 minutes.

Mr. Wayne Gates: Good morning. Were you approached to apply for this position, and if so, by who?

Ms. Natalie James: No, I was not approached to apply for this position. I applied on my own.

Mr. Wayne Gates: I think my colleague has already mentioned that I'd probably ask some of these questions, but don't feel special; I ask everybody these questions. I'm just letting you know.

You have said this, but I had already written it down, so I'm going to read it out. Can you confirm you were former staff to MPP—or MP, I guess it was—Calandra between 2010 and 2015, when he served as MP, and can you clarify your roles, please?

Ms. Natalie James: Yes, I did work for Paul Calandra when he was a federal member of Parliament from 2010 to 2015. I was his chief of staff and I managed his constituency office and his staff in Ottawa.

Mr. Wayne Gates: You did the const office as well?

Ms. Natalie James: Yes. I was primarily based in the constituency office.

Mr. Wayne Gates: Do you have any secrets about Paul you can tell us?

Laughter.

Ms. Natalie James: No, I do not.

The Chair (Mr. Gilles Bisson): Very good answer, very good answer.

Mr. Wayne Gates: He obviously taught you well.

The other question that I always ask as well is, have you ever donated to a PC Party?

Ms. Natalie James: Yes, I have.

Mr. Wayne Gates: Do you have any idea of the amounts?

Ms. Natalie James: I believe it was \$600 to the Conservative Party of Canada.

Mr. Wayne Gates: Ever donate provincially?

Ms. Natalie James: No, I have not.

Mr. Wayne Gates: You ever worked in a riding—you ever handed out leaflets and stuff for Paul?

Ms. Natalie James: Of course.

Mr. Wayne Gates: Did you go door to door?

Ms. Natalie James: I did when I worked for him, during—

Mr. Wayne Gates: Did you like it? Do you like going door to door?

Ms. Natalie James: Yes, I did.

Mr. Wayne Gates: It's my favourite thing to do; that's why I ask. I didn't know if—I guess when they work for you, it's kind of part of your role as well to do that. But door to door has always been fun for me.

The other part that is part of what's been given to me is, can you elaborate on the consulting business you were

involved with, with, well, currently MPP Calandra, and Blueprint strategies, I think it was called? Are you still involved with that particular business today?

Ms. Natalie James: Yes, I did work for—I believe it was a three-month period with Blueprint consulting. It was a very short time, and then I kind of went on my own to seek my own entrepreneurial endeavours.

Mr. Wayne Gates: Do you still have that business today?

Ms. Natalie James: No. I have my own consulting business, but it is not affiliated in any way with Blueprint.

Mr. Wayne Gates: What do you consult on?

Ms. Natalie James: I primarily work with entrepreneurs and small businesses to help them with their communications strategies and digital marketing, things like that.

Mr. Wayne Gates: Did you do any consulting or helping trying to get the business grants in COVID?

Ms. Natalie James: No, not at all.

Mr. Wayne Gates: I wish you did. I could ask you some questions, because it's been a challenge, I can tell you. The program itself has handed out some money, but there are a lot of people who have unfortunately been denied. Certainly, we'd like to see a third round of grants for those businesses.

You just talked about being in a small business and how hard it was during COVID. I think you said, if I got you correctly, you had closed your doors, some of the reasons being COVID. I think the grants were very helpful. We haven't had a grant for the third wave, and now it looks like we could be in a fourth wave—or a fourth wave plus, I guess you could call it. Who knows what's going to happen over the next couple of months? But we could certainly use more grants for small business.

I'm just wondering, do you agree with that? Would it have helped your business maybe stay in business?

Ms. Natalie James: Like I said in my opening statement, I was a business that was still in its infancy. Although we were thriving pre-COVID, obviously, we were all hit hard by this. I made the choice to close the doors. I guess personally, it was just a decision that I decided to make. My industry was one that really relied on tourism and women with busy social lives, events and all of those sorts of things. So it was a personal decision. I'm sure grants would help businesses, but it wasn't something that I wanted to pursue.

Mr. Wayne Gates: I will say—because I don't normally disagree with my guests that hard. I disagree with government once in awhile, but I will disagree with you that my kids need me less now. My kids are 44, 42 and 24, and I've got grandkids as well. I think the challenges on my time are even more than when they were growing up. It's kind of interesting—and it's one of the good things about having daughters, by the way. They seem to really go to their dads a lot as well, which is kind of nice.

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The Chair (Mr. Gilles Bisson): It's because mom's there.

Mr. Wayne Gates: It could be. Yes, it could be.

Okay. What experience do you have in advocating on behalf of tenants?

Ms. Natalie James: I don't personally have experience advocating for tenants, other than the work that I did in constituency offices. In some cases, that did involve challenges that they were facing. So although it isn't necessarily adjudicative experience per se, I do have experience in mediation and dispute resolution, and helping those people through navigating those various issues.

In addition to that work, being a small business owner and being a tenant myself, I do have perspective in that regard. Your research may not have indicated this, but I did grow up with some various challenges of my own and was within the rental system myself, so I'm fully aware of it from lived experience.

Mr. Wayne Gates: Well, sometimes they're the toughest, by the way.

If you've worked in a constit office—but you're going back almost 10 or 11 years. I don't think the housing crisis and the tenant crisis was as bad in 2010 as it currently is today. Speaking to my 24-year-old—I've said this a few times now in the House—trying to find a house that's affordable is almost out of reach for young families like yours, quite frankly, where they're going to be able to own a home and live in the community where they grew up and were raised.

I'm just asking: Were there as many rental crises in the constit office back then? Because my staff, really, they spend half their day on renovictions, trying to find housing for, in particular, seniors being renovicted. When you were in the constit office, did you see that as well?

Ms. Natalie James: Well, of course, federally, this isn't something we really dealt with, but provincially it was definitely something that affected people. This is going back a long time, so as you have said, a lot has changed.

Mr. Wayne Gates: I appreciate that answer.

Are you aware of the current issues with the LTB, especially now with virtual hearings leading to even more evictions for the most vulnerable tenants?

Ms. Natalie James: I'm definitely aware of the work of the Landlord and Tenant Board, but at the moment I'm not currently a member, so I can't really speak to the current issues that they are facing. I certainly do read the news and hear of various things that are happening, but without having specific details about cases, it's really hard for me to comment on that.

Mr. Wayne Gates: That's fair. Many people in our community are facing issues with renovictions. Many times, landlords issue N12 notices to tenants, pretending they are moving into the unit and forcing the tenant out, only to renovate the unit and rent out the unit for more money. Many times it's difficult for tenants to challenge this at the LTB. Do you think there are steps that can be taken to address this serious problem in Ontario?

Ms. Natalie James: Again, I am not a current member, so it would be hard to comment on specific things like that. However, I will say that each case has its own merits and the mandate of the Landlord and Tenant Board is to

resolve these applications between landlords and tenants, and to be fair and effective in a timely, impartial manner. My role would be to weigh the various merits of each case, apply the legislation and determine a resolution that was fair based on all of those merits.

Mr. Wayne Gates: I appreciate that. Landlords that issue an N12 for personal use have to live in that unit for a year—or to live there, if it's not a unit, for a year. Some do not, who are hoping to increase rental rates with new tenants. Do you think the LTB should be actively tracking landlords that do this? And should this information be public?

I'll give you an example. In Fort Erie, we had an outside buyer come in and buy an apartment building. They said they were going to fix it up. They then painted the apartments. They were paying about \$800 at the time. Some were on disability; some were on ODSP. Before they were even finished painting the walls—that was what they did—you could see the advertising in the local paper for those very same apartments for \$1,800. What was also interesting is that they were going around from unit to unit, offering them between \$2,000 and \$4,000 just to move out, knowing full well that they would be able to make that money up very, very quickly with the increase in rents. So that's an example.

So should those types of situations be made public, and should those individuals who are doing that—and they're doing it all over the province. This isn't just a Niagara issue or an issue in Toronto; it's all over the province they're doing this. I don't know about up north, because there are different living situations up there, obviously, and probably the markets aren't quite as—and people aren't quite as desperate. Maybe you could answer that.

Ms. Natalie James: Well, I appreciate the references that you've made and the stories that you've told. I can't speak to specific cases, because I haven't heard those first-hand, and my role on the landlord and tenant tribunal would be to assess those cases and the merits of them. Again, I am not a current member, and so I haven't had the training or the onboarding as of yet to be able to determine what the processes in place are for those situations where people have violated the rules and the decisions that they were provided with. Once I am a member, I could certainly answer that question better.

Mr. Wayne Gates: I appreciate that. What are the main issues facing the board today? Do you have any idea?

Ms. Natalie James: Although, again, I'm not a current member at the moment, so I can't speak to all of the issues, however, from an outsider's perspective and from what I have learned in my preparation, they are experiencing high volumes of cases, and there's quite a backlog that they're trying to get through. So ensuring that there are sufficient resources and adjudicators in place to make the increasing demands and, of course, make those timelines would be a top priority, from what I would suggest.

Mr. Wayne Gates: Why do you think there's an increase in demand?

Ms. Natalie James: I think COVID has caused a lot of those problems, and, of course, there is a transition period from in-person hearings to virtual hearings. With that

comes some growing pains, I can imagine. However, I know that they are taking all the steps that they can to ensure that they're getting through these backlogs that currently exist.

Mr. Wayne Gates: What contribution do you think that you could make to the board if you are appointed? I will give you a little more confidence. There is a majority government. I do like your chances of getting appointed to the board, I'm just saying. I'm just trying to build your confidence in the last 30 seconds of the questioning.

The Chair (Mr. Gilles Bisson): You have about a minute left, Ms. James.

Mr. Wayne Gates: Oh, you've got a minute. Go ahead.

Ms. Natalie James: I believe that my collective experience over the last 25 years in both provincial and federal politics as well as in not-for-profit and, of course, my experience in the business sector have given me the transferable skills and experience to really execute this role effectively, and I really do look forward to serving the people of Ontario in this manner.

Mr. Wayne Gates: I was the campaign chair for the United Way for two years, going back a few years. What were some of the not-for-profits that you had volunteered for, as we really have to honour all our volunteers during COVID, who just stepped up?

The Chair (Mr. Gilles Bisson): You have about 15 seconds.

Ms. Natalie James: Of course, my local hospital is something that I'm very passionate about. I've worked for them, but I continue to be a donor and support all the initiatives that they have. And, of course, through my business, I always supported local businesses—

The Chair (Mr. Gilles Bisson): Thank you, Ms. James. That concludes the time that we have. All of this is by standing order, so we need to work according to the schedule.

The first thing we will do now is, I think, Mr. Yakabuski will move the first concurrence.

Mr. John Yakabuski: I move concurrence in the intended appointment of Emily Robb, nominated as member of the Landlord and Tenant Board.

The Chair (Mr. Gilles Bisson): Is there any discussion on the first concurrence? Seeing no discussion, all those in favour, please signify by raising your hand. All those opposed? Okay, that is done and that is passed.

All right, second concurrence.

Mr. John Yakabuski: I move concurrence in the intended appointment of Natalie James, nominated as member of the Landlord and Tenant Board.

The Chair (Mr. Gilles Bisson): Any discussion in regard to the second concurrence? Seeing no discussion, then, all those in favour, please signify by raising your hand. And all those opposed? Carried.

Okay, now that brings us to the end of that part of the meeting, and if members want to raise something, we have a few minutes. Mr. Yakabuski, I know you're interested, so please, do.

Mr. John Yakabuski: I just want to say to all of the members, I haven't been here long but it's been very, very fruitful and interesting and I want to thank each and every one of you in the room for their time and contributions, and wish everyone a blessed and merry Christmas. I look forward to meeting again when the Legislature resumes in February.

The Chair (Mr. Gilles Bisson): Very good. Mr. Gates? Anybody else? Just raise your hand.

Mr. Wayne Gates: Yes, I think I'll echo my colleague's comments, although I think he's been here too long. But—

The Chair (Mr. Gilles Bisson): Don't say that in front of me, please.

Mr. Wayne Gates: I can say it in front of him. I think he gets it.

I want to wish everybody a merry Christmas, and a happy new year. Stay safe, enjoy your time with your family. We don't get enough time to spend with our family, all of us, that's for sure. So, stay safe, and enjoy your holidays and I'm looking forward to the new year and continuing on this committee for at least another four months, and then we'll go from there after that. Thank you very much.

The Chair (Mr. Gilles Bisson): We'll see where we are.

On behalf of the entire committee, we want to thank everybody for their participation and wish everybody a merry Christmas. Until we meet again. Unless the sub-committee decides to bring us back early, we might be back here in January.

With that, the meeting is adjourned.

The committee adjourned at 1002.

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