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**Standing Committee on
Justice Policy**

Selection of estimates

1st Session
43rd Parliament

Wednesday 10 May 2023

**Comité permanent
de la justice**

Sélection des budgets
des dépenses

1^{re} session
43^e législature

Mercredi 10 mai 2023

Chair: Goldie Ghamari
Clerk: Thushitha Kobikrishna

Présidente : Goldie Ghamari
Greffière : Thushitha Kobikrishna

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ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

STANDING COMMITTEE ON JUSTICE POLICY

COMITÉ PERMANENT DE LA JUSTICE

Wednesday 10 May 2023

Mercredi 10 mai 2023

The committee met at 0900 in committee room 2.

SELECTION OF ESTIMATES

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): Good morning, everyone. I call this meeting of the Standing Committee on Justice Policy to order. On April 20, 2023, the Lieutenant Governor transmitted to the Legislative Assembly the estimates of certain sums required for the services of the province for the year ending March 31, 2024. Pursuant to standing order 62(b), these estimates, upon tabling, are deemed to be referred to the standing committees to which the respective ministries and offices were assigned pursuant to standing order 113(b).

All committee members should have received an electronic copy of the 2023-24 estimates from the Clerk.

The objective of today's meeting is to select the estimates of certain ministries or offices for review by the committee. Standing order 63 sets out the process by which the committee makes its selections. Each of the recognized parties on the committee shall select the estimates of up to one ministry or offices in each turn. The official opposition selects first, followed by the government. If members of one party decline to make a selection, the selection then passes to the next party in the rotation. The process concludes when either there are no further ministries or offices available to select or if both recognized parties decline to make any, or any further, selections.

Pursuant to standing order 63(c), these selections are to be reviewed in the order that they were chosen; however, this order may be altered by unanimous agreement of the subcommittee on committee business or by order of the House.

Pursuant to standing order 63(d), the time for the consideration of the estimates of each ministry or office shall be determined by the respective committee.

The estimates of those ministries or offices not selected for consideration will be deemed to have been passed by the committee. As Chair, I will report those unselected estimates back to the House and they will be deemed to be adopted and concurred in by the House.

In accordance with standing order 66(a), the committee must present a report to the House with respect to the estimates it selected and considered by the third Thursday of November of this year: November 16, 2023. If the committee fails to report by the third Thursday in November, the estimates and supplementary estimates before the

committee will be deemed to be passed by the committee and deemed to be reported to and received by the House.

When making your selections, I would also like to add that if members could please look at the list of ministries and offices placed in front of you and give the correct name of the ministries or offices when they select them for consideration.

Do members have any questions before we begin?

I'll start with the official opposition for their first selection. MPP Wong-Tam.

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: I would like to move that we advance the Ministry of the Attorney General for selection.

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): Okay, Ministry of the Attorney General.

Next is the government for their first selection. MPP Jones.

Mr. Trevor Jones: Ministry of Francophone Affairs.

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): Thank you.

The official opposition.

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: The Ministry of Indigenous Affairs, please.

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): Back to the government. MPP Jones.

Mr. Trevor Jones: Ministry of the Solicitor General.

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): Back to the official opposition.

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: Ministry of Public and Business Service Delivery.

Ms. Goldie Ghamari: Thank you.

That is basically all of the ministries that our committee has selected, so there being no further selections, I'd like to thank you all.

Is there any other business which members may wish to raise? Seeing none, then—

Interjection.

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): Oh, yes, MPP Wong-Tam?

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: I do have some motions to arrange for consideration regarding times and meetings of the dates for us to meet. The motion has been provided to the Clerk.

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): You're welcome to move the motion.

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: Okay, thank you. Chair, I'd like to move that consideration of estimates for the Ministry—

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): Sorry, one moment. Could we just pass this around first so committee members can read it?

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: Maybe for the purpose of expediency, if the Clerk can advance all the motions. Is that all right?

The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Thushitha Kobikrishna): I'll just do them once they get moved.

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: Oh, okay. Otherwise you will be up and down on your feet a few times.

Interjections.

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: I move that consideration of estimates for the Ministry of the Attorney General be 15 hours in total; and

That, until the time allotted for consideration of estimates of the selected ministry has expired, the committee shall meet from 9 to 10:15 a.m. and 1 to 6 p.m. on Wednesdays and Thursdays during weeks the House is sitting and from 9 a.m. to 12 p.m. and 1 to 5 p.m. on Wednesdays and Thursdays during weeks the House is not scheduled to meet.

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): MPP Wong-Tam has moved a motion. Is there any debate? Seeing none, are members prepared to vote? All those in favour of MPP Wong-Tam's motion, please raise their hands. All those opposed? I declare the motion lost.

Is there any further debate? MPP Jones.

Mr. Trevor Jones: I'd like to put forward a motion for the scheduling.

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): Okay. Can we put that up on the screen?

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: Chair, on a point of order: I still had a few other motions. Should I wait until the very end?

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): Yes. MPP Jones has already moved the motion, so we'll have to wait.

Do you want to move your motion while we pass it around? I do have it in front of me.

Mr. Trevor Jones: Thank you, Chair. Through you, I move that, pursuant to standing order 63(d), the following time be allotted to the consideration of the estimates of the ministries selected by the committee:

- the Ministry of the Attorney General for two hours;
- the Ministry of Public and Business Service Delivery for two hours;

- the Ministry of the Solicitor General for two hours;
- the Ministry of Indigenous Affairs for two hours;
- the Ministry of Francophone Affairs for two hours;

and

That the ministers responsible for those respective ministries be invited to appear before the committee; and

That for each ministry the minister be allotted 20 minutes to make an opening statement followed by question and answer in rotations of 20 minutes for the official opposition members of the committee, 10 minutes for the independent member of the committee and 20 minutes for the government members of the committee for the remainder of the allotted time; and

That the committee meet for the purpose of considering the estimates of the selected ministries at the following times:

- on Wednesday, June 7, 2023, from 9 a.m. until 10:15 a.m. and from 1 p.m. until 6 p.m.; and

- on Thursday, September 14, 2023, from 9 a.m. until 10:15 a.m. and from 1 p.m. until 6 p.m.; and

That if any invited minister is unavailable to appear before the committee, the parliamentary assistant or parliamentary assistants may appear before the committee in their place.

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): MPP Jones has moved a motion. Is there any debate? MPP Wong-Tam.

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: I would argue that a two-hour allocation for a ministry as complicated as the Ministry of the Attorney General, or even the Solicitor General—all of these ministries are extremely robust. They have multiple program lines. There are significant challenges that we have already identified with respect to either under-spending or perhaps service delivery. This was noted, of course, by the Auditor General in their ongoing work. We have seen the Financial Accountability Officer also note that we need to be able to properly adhere to the guidelines that the government has set forth on behalf of those ministries, to be able to deliver the programs in a way that actually reaches the residents and the stakeholders that they were intended to. The time allocations, as condensed and truncated as they are, are simply not going to give us enough time.

In the experience that I've had in this committee, 20 minutes of a presentation from the minister has oftentimes just been, really, not necessarily always speaking to the issue. They speak about aspirations; they speak to, perhaps, things that they would like to achieve, things that may be in motion. But with respect to operations, execution of service delivery, when it comes to fiscal prudence and management of the finances on behalf of the people of Ontario, we don't get the time required to do that work.

In my experience at the city of Toronto, either on the audit committee or the budget committee, and even as we're dealing with interim reports, we certainly provide much more time for that type of deliberation, for the questions of either—in this case it would be the minister, but in the case of the municipality it would have been city staff, providing opportunities for a bit more fluid back-and-forth. That just hasn't taken place in this building for whatever reason—I'm not sure—but yet the expenditures here are far larger, the services expected to be delivered are far more broad-reaching, and I find it to be almost theatrical, because we're not getting to the issues.

In order for us to do our good job as parliamentarians, to actually fix the problems that Ontarians expect us to, I think that we need to provide more time. It is absolutely critical, as government members, opposition members, independent members, that we actually do the people's good work while we're here, and I see no purpose and reason why we need to condense everything, especially if it means that we don't get to everything.

We could easily spend two hours on court services or two hours on the victims and vulnerable persons program

or two hours on prosecuting-crime programs, but instead, we spend two hours on the entire ministry. I think that is one of the reasons why we're not going to get to full execution of the estimates.

I think that even the time in the motion that I moved is actually fairly short. If we don't use all the time in the motion I moved—I recognize the government members have just defeated the motion—that's okay; we can relinquish that time, give it back. But it's difficult to expand the number of hours if MPP Jones's motion is adopted, and then we're stuck with where we are and we won't necessarily be able to come back and do work even if there's something that comes up that everybody in this committee is interested in digging a little bit deeper into, because we need to do work—so we've actually handcuffed ourselves from doing that work.

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): Further debate? MPP Jones.

Mr. Trevor Jones: I respect my colleague's opinions, but I'd argue that every ministry has a certain level of complexity that could probably warrant endless debate and line-by-line consideration.

With respect to the times, I think this challenges our ministers, our government, their parliamentary assistants and the entire bureaucracy to deliver an organized, succinct and accountable presentation to this important committee. And I'd argue that to be prudent and to value the time and to attempt to move government to operate at the speed of business and to be accountable to our taxpayers and to one another, this time allotted is more than sufficient.

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): Further debate? Or are members prepared to vote? MPP Stevens.

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: Is there time for me to make an amendment on the motion on the floor?

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): Yes.

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: Thank you. I'd like to make an amendment that we allot at least seven and a half hours for total of debate for each ministry.

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): MPP Stevens has moved an amendment—

Interjection.

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): We'll need just five minutes' recess for the Clerk to write up the amendment on the screen, and then we'll resume as soon as she's ready.

The committee recessed from 0913 to 0923.

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): Thank you, everyone, for your patience. We will now resume.

MPP Stevens has moved this amendment to the motion that MPP Jones put on the floor. MPP Stevens, would you like to read your motion amending the motion on the floor?

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: I move that the motion be amended by striking out "two hours" wherever it appears in paragraph 1 and replacing it with "7.5 hours"; and

That paragraph 4 be struck out and replaced with the following: "That, until the time allotted for consideration of estimates of the selected ministry has expired, the committee shall meet from 9 a.m. to 10:15 a.m. and 1 p.m. to 6 p.m. on Wednesdays and Thursdays during weeks the House is sitting and from 9 a.m. to 12 p.m. and 1 p.m. to 5

p.m. on Wednesdays and Thursdays during weeks the House is not scheduled to meet"; and

That paragraph 5 be struck out.

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): MPP Stevens has moved this motion. Is there any debate? MPP Stevens.

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: I feel that this motion—I put it on the floor because, as my colleague had stated, two hours is not long enough. It will be approximately 70 minutes with opening statements and with rotations. I do feel that seven and a half hours will give at least the courtesy of the people that are watching the estimates selections—the courtesy of letting them know that we do take the interests of what they want in consideration. I think that if the government will allow to meet halfway at seven and a half hours, I think that's a fair assumption, for them to take into consideration.

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): Further debate? MPP Wong-Tam.

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: I want to just provide an observation. Thank you to MPP Stevens for advancing this motion, which I think is a very eloquent compromise motion. I recognize that in the committee process, this is where, as parliamentarians, we really get to do some extra work. We roll up our sleeves and we get into the details, especially as we review the estimates. But one thing I have observed—and this has happened to just about everybody that I can recall, especially on the government side of the benches, just because there are so many more MPP's on the Conservative side—is that you have oftentimes not been able to give yourselves enough time to speak. I have seen on many occasions where there's an MPP who takes a lead on, perhaps, a question of a ministry, and then it leaves 30 seconds for another member to ask any other questions. So it limits not even just the mechanisms for accountability and transparency, but it actually limits the members' own ability to do their work.

I recognize there are only three members of the opposition and one member of the independents—we'll get our time. It actually allows you less time. So government members are censoring themselves. Government members in this House are actually restricting their own ability to act on behalf of their constituents to do the work that they've been sent to Queen's Park to do, and I want to submit that for some consideration.

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): Further debate?

Mr. Brian Saunderson: I want to thank the members opposite for their concern about our timing. To be very clear, this side of the committee takes our role here very seriously and understands the importance of what we do here. We did have this discussion, I think, the last time we were going through estimates, and my understanding is that the system has been revamped, and that previously, there was a much smaller number of ministries which you could pick. I think we've given ourselves ample time. We have five ministries, so that will be ten hours of debate, and that is on par with what was happening previously.

So while I appreciate the concern of the members opposite about whether or not we get our opportunity to ask our questions, I think we can organize that amongst ourselves.

This is for the efficient operation of this committee. We intend to do our job and do it well, and so I look forward to the discussion we will have with the allotments that have been put on the floor by MPP Jones.

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): Is there further debate or are members prepared to vote? MPP Wong-Tam.

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: In speaking with my colleague in reference to what the honourable member across has just provided in terms of his testimony that this is how it has been done before, MPP Stevens reminds me, and I want to remind all members here, that this has never been done like this before, where a ministry is restricted to just 20 minutes of review of estimates. This has not been done before. This is a brand new process, and one that I think handcuffs us from doing a good job and good work on behalf of our residents.

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): Further debate? Or are members prepared to vote? MPP Stevens has moved a motion. All those in favour of the motion, please raise their hands. All those opposed? I declare the motion lost.

Turning now to MPP Jones' motion on the floor, are members prepared to vote? MPP Blais.

Mr. Stephen Blais: Could we have it back up on the screen, please?

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): Yes, of course. I think it was distributed as well. Can we provide one to MPP Blais?

Mr. Stephen Blais: Given that September is still several months away, was there a particular need for the 14th rather than a different day that week? Or in June, or perhaps later in the summer, once we're closer to that time frame, is there an opportunity to amend that to another day that week if that's needed? And what would the process for that be?

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): Sorry, you're asking—

Mr. Stephen Blais: Well, I'm asking the mover if the 14th was for a particular reason or if another day that week is perhaps doable. And understanding that that is still several months away, is there an opportunity to address

that particular day as we get closer to—after all of us better understand what's going on three months from now.

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): MPP Jones.

Mr. Trevor Jones: Thank you for the question, sir. I believe we just anticipated. We looked at the anticipated schedule, rostering, the calendar year and looked for vacancies for the greater portion of committee members. I think we'd have to take the advice through the Clerk and the Chair, and the committee may have to be recalled to select or to amend that date as the time comes closer. But for right now, I'd propose that just to anticipate and to have a good placeholder, with lots of time to—like I said, we keep that undisturbed for now.

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): MPP Stevens.

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: Can we have a recorded vote, please?

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): A recorded vote has been requested.

MPP Jones has moved the motion. All those in favour, please raise their hands.

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: Recorded vote.

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): Yes, I've already confirmed it's going to be a recorded vote.

Ayes

Bailey, Dixon, Flack, Trevor Jones, Kusendova-Bashta, Saunderson.

Nays

Blais, Mamakwa, Stevens, Wong-Tam.

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): I declare the motion carried.

Is there any further business from the committee? In that case, our business is concluded. Thank you, everyone, for attending today's meeting. This meeting is now adjourned until Thursday, May 11, at 9 a.m.

The committee adjourned at 0932.

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