

Legislative  
Assembly  
of Ontario



Assemblée  
législative  
de l'Ontario

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## **Official Report of Debates (Hansard)**

SP-32

## **Journal des débats (Hansard)**

SP-32

### **Standing Committee on Social Policy**

Improving Real Estate  
Management Act, 2024

1<sup>st</sup> Session  
43<sup>rd</sup> Parliament

Tuesday 20 February 2024

### **Comité permanent de la politique sociale**

Loi de 2024 sur l'amélioration  
de la gestion des biens  
immeubles

1<sup>re</sup> session  
43<sup>e</sup> législature

Mardi 20 février 2024

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Chair: Brian Riddell  
Clerk: Lesley Flores

Président : Brian Riddell  
Greffière : Lesley Flores

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House Publications and Language Services  
Room 500, West Wing, Legislative Building  
111 Wellesley Street West, Queen's Park  
Toronto ON M7A 1A2  
Telephone 416-325-7400  
Published by the Legislative Assembly of Ontario



Service linguistique et des publications parlementaires  
Salle 500, aile ouest, Édifice du Parlement  
111, rue Wellesley ouest, Queen's Park  
Toronto ON M7A 1A2  
Téléphone, 416-325-7400  
Publié par l'Assemblée législative de l'Ontario

ISSN 1710-9477

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

**STANDING COMMITTEE ON  
SOCIAL POLICY**

**COMITÉ PERMANENT DE  
LA POLITIQUE SOCIALE**

Tuesday 20 February 2024

Mardi 20 février 2024

*The committee met at 0903 in committee room 1.*

**IMPROVING REAL ESTATE  
MANAGEMENT ACT, 2024**

**LOI DE 2024 SUR L'AMÉLIORATION  
DE LA GESTION DES BIENS IMMEUBLES**

Consideration of the following bill:

Bill 151, An Act to amend various statutes regarding infrastructure / Projet de loi 151, Loi modifiant diverses lois relatives aux infrastructures.

**The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell):** Good morning, everyone. I call this meeting of the Standing Committee on Social Policy to order. We are here for public hearings on Bill 151, An Act to amend various statutes regarding infrastructure.

The Clerk of the Committee has distributed today's meeting's documents with you virtually through SharePoint.

To ensure that everyone who speaks is heard and understood, it's important that all participants speak slowly and clearly. Please wait until I recognize you before starting to speak. As always, all comments should go through the Chair.

Are there any questions before we begin?

**STATEMENT BY THE MINISTER  
AND RESPONSES**

**The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell):** I will now call on the Honourable Kinga Surma, Minister of Infrastructure.

Minister, you will have 20 minutes to make an opening statement, followed by 40 minutes of questions from the members of the committee. The questions will be divided into two rounds of seven and a half minutes for the government members, two rounds of seven and a half minutes for the official opposition members, and two rounds of five minutes for the independent members of the committee. I will provide one-minute reminders of the time remaining during the presentation and questions.

Please state your name for the Hansard before you begin.

**Hon. Kinga Surma:** Welcome back to the session. I hope you all had a very good Christmas and holiday season and got to spend some time in the ridings. It's so nice to see you all.

I am pleased to have this opportunity to speak to all of you about Bill 151, the Improving Real Estate Manage-

ment Act, 2024. This proposed legislation is the next phase in our government's plan to build a stronger Ontario by providing a more coordinated and strategic approach to managing real estate, one of the province's greatest resources. If passed, the proposed changes would help ensure consistent, efficient and sustainable real estate services that could ultimately unlock cost savings, increase efficiencies, improve accountability and support the province's priorities, such as building more housing, including affordable housing and long-term care.

Infrastructure is the backbone of a strong and healthy economy and is essential for the high quality of life that Ontarians enjoy and that they deserve. Building essential infrastructure to keep pace with the demands of a rapidly growing population is more critical than ever. Ontario is the fastest-growing region in North America. In fact, in 2023 alone, Ontario grew by more than 500,000 people. By 2041, Ontario's population is expected to grow by approximately 30%. To ensure our standard of living remains high, we must take an innovative approach to building and managing our infrastructure efficiently, ensuring it meets both existing and growing demands so that Ontario remains the best place in the world to live, work and grow for years to come.

Under Premier Ford's leadership, our government is building a stronger and more prosperous Ontario. We understand that when a new road, highway or transit line is built, we are helping hard-working residents get home to their families safely, conveniently and on time. When new high-speed Internet infrastructure is installed, we give families the opportunity to work and educate their children in their own communities and help support businesses to grow and succeed. When we build hospitals and long-term-care homes, we're ensuring our most vulnerable have access to the care that they need and that they deserve. And when we invest in water, waste water and stormwater infrastructure, we're addressing the housing crisis by unlocking housing options for hard-working Ontarians and their families while also bringing our government one step closer to meeting its goal of building at least 1.5 million homes by 2031.

Through the proper oversight and management of real estate, we ensure taxpayer dollars aren't wasted because of uncoordinated or unregulated real estate decision-making.

Simply put, government is acting to preserve quality of life and to increase housing supply across the province.

I'm incredibly proud to be part of a government with a clear plan to build a stronger Ontario and a thoughtful strategy to get the job done fast. We are moving forward with Ontario's most ambitious capital plan by investing \$185 billion over the next decade—investments fundamental to the province's plan for growth and long-term prosperity. I am honoured to serve as the Minister of Infrastructure and to work shoulder to shoulder with the team delivering on our government's priority to build a stronger Ontario.

The proposed legislation we are discussing today, the Improving Real Estate Management Act, 2024, is yet another example of our government's continued progress in delivering on Ontario's historic plan to build. Centralizing and/or realigning the oversight of real estate is integral to our government's strategy for increasing economic growth and saving taxpayers money. Opting for a more centralized approach to real estate management will allow Ontario to deliver critical priorities more cost-effectively, like constructing additional affordable housing and long-term-care facilities.

Since 2020, the Ministry of Infrastructure has engaged in consultations with the central stakeholders as part of our government's ongoing efforts to enhance the use of real estate. This collaborative effort includes 15 oversight ministries representing 39 organizations. Of these 39 organizations, 10 organizations and one proposed organization would be impacted by the proposed legislative amendments under Bill 151, the Improving Real Estate Management Act, 2024. During these consultations, I was pleased to hear that many of these organizations support our proposed plan to enhance real estate management and that our plan aligned with their initiatives to enhance efficiency and effectiveness. The support of our plan is also highlighted in numerous third-party reviews on the benefits of a more centralized real estate model to optimize decision-making capacity.

#### 0910

In 2017, the annual report of the Auditor General detailed recommendations to ensure the effective and economical management and maintenance of properties in Ontario. The Auditor General's report recommended that the Ministry of Infrastructure thoroughly examine and implement enhancements in the management of government properties. It also highlighted the potential for increased efficiency in operating the ministry's general real estate portfolio through centralized authority and decision-making.

The 2018 Ernst and Young line-by-line review of government spending also aimed to verify the Ontario government's commitment to restoring trust and accountability, and maximizing the value of tax dollars. The report recommended that ministries manage their capital assets with the assistance of Infrastructure Ontario, and emphasized the benefits of a centralized approach to real estate property and a more efficient asset management process. The benefits of a centralized approach could lead to reduction in overall government spending, a consolidated and efficient asset management life cycle, and improved policy alignment, enabling a more efficient and cohesive government-wide decision-making process.

An assessment conducted in 2018 by PricewaterhouseCoopers highlighted challenges in the way the Ministry of Infrastructure, other ministries and Infrastructure Ontario managed real estate, particularly for office space. The report emphasized that adopting a centralized model for real estate would enhance transparency, decision-making and reporting, while fostering integration with ministry programs.

Better management or rethinking the use of real estate can enhance accountability and align its use with our government's overall priorities. We have seen first-hand how managing real estate in a decentralized manner can lead to underperforming assets that waste taxpayer dollars. Siloed approaches result in decisions lacking a more strategic and holistic vision.

The research and feedback on the ground reiterate the benefits of a centralized real estate model—the same model we are proposing, in part, through the proposed Bill 151, the Improving Real Estate Management Act, 2023. If passed, it will help increase efficiencies by allowing for better planning, as well as improved maintenance and management of real property. It will reduce costs by eliminating duplication of responsibilities and providing clear guidelines, and while improving the quality of processes and services Ontario delivers. A more centralized approach will allow us to align the allocation and use of properties to support Ontario's broader goals and initiatives.

Our government has embraced the opportunity to enhance the efficiency of managing real estate. These efforts are part of our promise to make life better for Ontarians by working harder, smarter and more efficiently. By centralizing resources and expertise, we can avoid duplication, reduce administrative costs and negotiate better deals for large-scale property transactions.

Centralized real estate management, in whole or in part, reduces bureaucratic hurdles, improves information flow, enhances collaboration and provides a more comprehensive understanding of the portfolio. This insight enables our government to optimize the use of assets and identify opportunities for centralization or realignment, redevelopment or divestment, to maximize value. This approach also provides the flexibility to adapt to changing economic conditions, allowing us to respond effectively to evolving needs and changes in the real estate landscape.

Last spring, the Legislature passed the Reducing Inefficiencies Act (Infrastructure Statute Law Amendments), 2023. If proclaimed into force, part of this legislation will empower the province to enhance real estate management. The other piece of this legislation is already in force, making the class environmental assessment process more efficient. The passing of this legislation marks the first step of our government establishing a framework to centralize real estate authority. If proclaimed into force, the amendments for real estate management would establish an initial framework to remove and/or modify the real estate authority of the specific organizations and provide myself, the Minister of Infrastructure, with authority over real estate previously under these organizations' control.

Only with the initial frameworks set out in the Reducing Inefficiencies Act, 2023, can we propose some of the changes we are here for today through Bill 151, the Improving Real Estate Management Act, 2023. The proposed amendments, if passed, would facilitate centralizing or realigning the real estate authority of 10 organizations and one proposed organization, allowing the government to act as one holistic organization to manage real estate, while also meeting these organizations' highly specialized service delivery needs—such as museums, science centres, convention centre corporations, and art gallery.

The proposed legislation we're reviewing today suggests modifications in two key areas. The first includes proposed changes, which, if passed, would make the ability of certain entities to hold interest in land subject to limits imposed by section 11.0.1 of the Ministry of Infrastructure Act, 2011. The four organizations and one proposed organization impacted by these changes would include: the Ontario Agency for Health Protection and Promotion, or Public Health Ontario; Ontario Health; the Centennial Centre of Science and Technology, or Ontario Science Centre; the Niagara Escarpment Commission; the proposed Ontario Health atHome.

Secondly, this bill also proposes a tailored approach to modify the realty authority, in part, for the following six organizations: the McMichael Canadian Art Collection; the Metropolitan Toronto Convention Centre Corp.; the Ottawa Convention Centre Corp.; the Royal Ontario Museum; Science North; the Algonquin Forestry Authority.

Under the proposed approach, these organizations would be restricted from engaging in specific real estate activities. These organizations would maintain control over real estate but would also need government approval and must adhere to potential regulatory requirements to dispose of property.

For instance, if passed, the legislation would prohibit the Royal Ontario Museum from buying or selling property without permission from the Lieutenant Governor in Council, also known as the LGIC. The museum would only be allowed to sell property if it followed specific rules set by the LGIC. So the museum could only sell its prime location at the intersection of Bloor Street and Queen's Park if the LGIC approved the sale and if the museum followed a prescribed set of rules set by the LGIC.

Another example is, the Algonquin Forestry Authority would need permission from the Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry to buy and sell any property.

This proposed legislation represents the next steps in a clear and cohesive framework our government has created to consolidate information and decision-making processes related to real estate management—a framework that prioritizes fiscal responsibility by identifying and eliminating redundancies, negotiating favourable terms to better serve the needs of all Ontarians and, overall, making cost-effective decisions. This increased efficiency serves the interests of taxpayers and aligns with a complex and continually changing regulatory landscape governing public properties.

By centralizing real estate authority under the purview of the Minister of Infrastructure, our government aims to

enhance accountability for spending taxpayer dollars while safeguarding essential services the people of Ontario rely on.

Together, we are building a stronger and more resilient Ontario today and for generations to come.

Thank you very much. I'm happy to take questions. Back to you, Chair.

**The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell):** Thank you, Minister.

We will now go to the government members for the first round, for seven and a half minutes. I recognize MPP Dowie.

**Mr. Andrew Dowie:** Thank you, Minister, for being here.

I think of some very specific instances in my community—one on the federal level, particularly. There was an announcement between two departments exchanging real estate. This took about four months of work. Another was identifying a piece of military property for armouries that could potentially be used for housing, but because department A doesn't talk to department B—an absence of that centralized approach means that we just wait and wait for action to happen. So I was delighted to see this bill.

I'm wondering if you might be able to elaborate as to how this bill can help align government initiatives. For example, developing more homes and ensuring more community services—to invest in our infrastructure and support communities—can actually come to fruition, thanks to this bill.

**0920**

**Hon. Kinga Surma:** I think there are many members who can speak to similar examples.

I think the two most important pieces of this legislation, through centralization, would be the flow of information and data. Ministers would be aware of the real estate decisions that their agencies and institutions would be making; the Ministry of Infrastructure would be aware; cabinet would be aware, through LGIC. Therefore, if there was another need or another purpose in which certain real estate can serve the public, then government can make that deliberation and that discussion and then, of course, increased collaboration.

As you mentioned, departments have a manner in which they so often work in silos. We hope that the centralization efforts will bring ministries together and agencies together so that we can make more strategic, cohesive and holistic decisions to better serve the community.

Should there be a circumstance in the future, should this bill be passed and enforced—perhaps there's a piece of property that could be used for affordable housing or for another government purpose—then we will have an opportunity to discuss it and make a determination, as opposed to an agency being able to just dispose of that property for market value and retain those funds.

I think this allows government to respond to housing needs, to the needs to build more long-term care and/or any other government need that would exist.

**Mr. Andrew Dowie:** I'll pass to MPP Barnes.

**The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell):** I recognize MPP Barnes.

**Ms. Patrice Barnes:** Good morning, Minister. This is the second stage of this centralization process. What has happened so far with phase 1?

**Hon. Kinga Surma:** You're right. We passed a previous bill, the Reducing Inefficiencies Act, Bill 69, before, which centralized the real estate authority for 14 different entities. Since that time, we've been developing a framework and consulting, but also focusing on the next round of agencies. There are approximately 54 entities that we are looking at; we've presented the legislation for the first 14; now, through this piece of legislation, Bill 151, we're looking at 10 plus one, 11, and then we have some more to go. The agencies that have not been included in legislation to date are more complex in nature and, therefore, we need to take more time to work with our partner ministries.

**Ms. Patrice Barnes:** Thank you.

How much more time do we have?

**The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell):** We have three minutes and 37 seconds.

I'll recognize MPP Wai.

**Mrs. Daisy Wai:** It is really exciting to see how the ministry has been optimizing the use of assets and also has the opportunity to centralize realignment and redevelopment.

When we are doing this, it sounds as if we are also taking away certain authorities that some of these entities will be doing. What powers will these organizations still have over their realty when this bill comes into effect, and what restrictions are we putting in place for them?

**Hon. Kinga Surma:** The purpose of this bill is simply to have agencies report to their respective ministry or cabinet through LGIC or the Ministry of Infrastructure when they would like to acquire and/or dispose of land so that government is aware of that situation. If there is a future opportunity where an agency would like to dispose of land, we would like to be made aware so that government can then, again, have that determination and evaluation to see if that particular piece of land can be used for another service that Ontario taxpayers need.

That is all we are asking here—just for better information and for there to be a process of approvals in place before an agency acquires or disposes of land so that, again, government is aware, has oversight and can make a determination whether that is the best use.

**The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell):** I recognize MPP Martin.

**Mrs. Robin Martin:** Thank you, Minister, for being here and sharing your thoughts on the legislation with us.

This is all under the Centralization of Broader Real Estate Authority initiative, which, as we've discussed, has a few phases, and you've talked about the earlier phase.

Can you talk to us about what the plan benefits are for the province, for the impacted organizations and for the public, generally, from the legislation and the initiative?

**Hon. Kinga Surma:** I'll reference the 2017 AG report. The AG report made recommendations to government—

**The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell):** One minute.

**Hon. Kinga Surma:** —to manage real estate assets more efficiently, more cohesively. That is the intention of this bill, Bill 151, as well as Bill 69.

Essentially, government would like greater oversight, greater knowledge of real estate transactions so that, again, the government can make a determination whether that is

the best use. I referenced, for example, the ROM in my remarks. It would be, I think, a great shame if there was an opportunity, if there was a piece of property that an agency or an organization did dispose of, without us being made aware—and by “us,” I mean government—and it could have been used potentially for a long-term-care site, for affordable or attainable housing, or for another service.

**The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell):** We'll now go to the official opposition for seven and a half minutes. I recognize MPP French.

**Ms. Jennifer K. French:** Good morning, Minister. I think we're all glad to be back at it, although I might be a little rusty this morning.

I appreciated your comments. There are a few things I wanted to touch on in terms of the specifics. You talk about 39 organizations in this bill that will be impacted, and that most organizations supported—I'd like to know what you've heard from the ones that didn't. So if you've got 39 involved, how many are supportive and how many are not? Certainly, we can't find, publicly, any of that from the ministry.

**Hon. Kinga Surma:** Thank you to the member for the question.

This specific bill, Improving Real Estate Management Act, addresses the following organizations, just so we're clear: Public Health Ontario, Ontario Health, Ontario Science Centre, Niagara Escarpment Commission, Ontario Health atHome, and then, of course, McMichael Canadian Art Collection, Ottawa Convention Centre Corp., Royal Ontario Museum, Science North, and Algonquin Forestry Authority.

My ministry consulted with our respective ministries. We consulted with the agencies. Generally, there was support for finding more efficiency when it comes to the real estate space.

I can call on Bruce to help answer some of those specifics.

**Ms. Jennifer K. French:** I think it's something that those who have concerns—you've mentioned that before and in the House, that most are onside. Those that aren't—what are their concerns? Is it a matter of trust? Is it a matter of specifics? If someone can present that, that would be great.

I do have a further question that I'll ask.

You've referenced the Auditor General's report, and this is a bit of a stretch, because this bill doesn't address the actual problem cited by the Auditor General with respect to the Ministry of Infrastructure's poor oversight of real estate services in Ontario. When we see that, in effect, Infrastructure Ontario has been the landlord for the science centre, and it hasn't been a good landlord—Infrastructure Ontario previously took over the property management of the Ontario Science Centre. We've been hearing a lot about that. Minister, you've talked about the state that it's in, but ultimately it was Infrastructure Ontario that failed to do the necessary repairs.

Why is the government making Infrastructure Ontario's role permanent when it comes to looking after—you've talked about better management—improved maintenance?



How on earth can we anticipate that when we've seen what they've done to the Ontario Science Centre?

**Hon. Kinga Surma:** Well, I will address the first question.

**0930**

I believe that agencies had questions about how centralization would work. Since the introduction of the first bill, Reducing Inefficiencies Act, Bill 69, we've continued to communicate with the responsible ministries and agencies, as you can see reflected in Improving Real Estate Management Act, 2024: the McMichael Canadian Art Collection, the Metropolitan Toronto Convention Centre Corp., the Ottawa Convention Centre Corp., the Royal Ontario Museum, the science centre, and Algonquin Forestry Authority. Those are tailored approaches so that the organizations can continue to have flexibility in real estate. Our goal and our objective here is to be made aware should there be a real estate transaction, so that government can review to see if there is another purpose in which perhaps a disposition of property can serve—

**Ms. Jennifer K. French:** Minister, the Ontario Science Centre's repair backlog falls at the feet, in terms of responsibility, of the private contractor, CBRE, responsible for facility management, and Infrastructure Ontario as the effective, or ineffective, landlord—in effect, the landlord. So it's quite interesting when we look at their 2019-20 business plan and we see that they highlight the repair backlog.

Where can the minister point for us to look, to see that we will have faith in them continuing these landlord arrangements, now with more of Ontario's treasures?

**Hon. Kinga Surma:** To the member: I cannot speak to the decisions and the management of previous governments. I can only speak to the decisions that this government makes and that the Ministry of Infrastructure makes under my rule.

What I can say is that when it comes to the science centre, we inherited a facility that had deferred maintenance to the extent that it would cost more to rehabilitate the existing facility than it would to build a brand new facility. There were—

**Ms. Jennifer K. French:** Well, Minister, those are numbers that we can—you show me yours; I'll show you mine. That, I would say, is nonsense.

**Hon. Kinga Surma:** With all due respect to the member opposite, the AG justified that in his latest report. We also have a business case that was issued by this government and a business case that was issued by the previous government, when we were not in this building, that suggested the exact same outcome.

**Ms. Jennifer K. French:** The risk assessment note in the 2019-20 business plan says that the Ontario Science Centre can capably manage the repairs it controls, but that the “bigger issues” include the degree to which the centre is able to influence decisions related to building improvements. However, that's the landlord, Infrastructure Ontario—

**The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell):** One minute.

**Ms. Jennifer K. French:** —and its private contractor that basically, I would say, have been slacking in terms of repairs.

And now here we are with this bill, the one before and, as you said, another one coming which says, “Trust Infrastructure Ontario to do what needs to be done.”

I'm looking for reassurance, because there are so many layers—you've got Infrastructure Ontario maintaining a permanent presence of embedded private contractors to do core functions—

**Mrs. Robin Martin:** Excuse me, Chair. Point of order.

**The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell):** Point of order. I recognize MPP Martin.

**Mrs. Robin Martin:** I'm so sorry to interrupt—

**Ms. Jennifer K. French:** No, you're not.

**Mrs. Robin Martin:** Could you please instruct members not to have props on their desks before the camera moves?

**Ms. Jennifer K. French:** This is my time right now.

**Mrs. Robin Martin:** I'm sorry. It's a point of order.

It's opposed to the rules. So before the camera moves, could you please instruct members not to have props on the desk?

**The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell):** Thank you. I'd like to remind members that props and political statements are not permitted in the chamber or in the committee room and to ask that any such items be removed.

You can now continue.

**Ms. Jennifer K. French:** Okay. And the time that was taken up highlighting someone else—

**Mrs. Robin Martin:** Remove your prop.

**Ms. Jennifer K. French:** I'm not going to have a fight for someone else. Can you wait until it's their time, please?

**The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell):** Please remove your mug.

**Mr. Adil Shamji:** Chair, I checked with the Clerk before coming in. Minister Clark actually came in to his committee hearing with a mug that said “NIMBY Tears” on it, so there can't be a double standard here.

**Mrs. Robin Martin:** There's no double standard. It's a prop.

**Mr. Adil Shamji:** There is a double standard.

**Ms. Jennifer K. French:** Oh, my God.

**Mr. Adil Shamji:** I'm not talking to you. I'm talking to the Chair.

**Ms. Jennifer K. French:** Okay.

**The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell):** Everything goes through me.

I'll please ask you to remove it. Thank you.

I'll give you 20 seconds to continue.

**Ms. Jennifer K. French:** Thank you.

When Infrastructure Ontario hands out mega-contracts for a few property management firms, they're sending millions of public dollars to private pockets. We see the government here again adding layers of private profit to the government real estate service costs instead of having publicly accountable civil servants do this core work. It's all part and parcel.

My question to this minister is, why can't we allow the public to have trust in this government?

**Hon. Kinga Surma:** I will respond to the science centre comments.

What this government did—

**The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell):** I'm going to hold you there.

Now I'm going to the independent members. I recognize MPP Brady.

**Ms. Bobbi Ann Brady:** Thank you to the minister for her time this morning.

Minister, you spoke about trust and accountability, and one of the ways I think that government can quickly establish both of those things is by doing a proper cost-benefit analysis and bringing forward the necessary evidence for legislative changes.

By wresting realty functions from the agencies contained within the act—I would love to see more numbers on how this is actually going to impact the Ontario taxpayer.

The example of the ROM and the need for them, if they wanted to dispose of property, to come to the minister and have the government give them permission to do so—is this government saying that we no longer trust the decisions of boards of directors? We all know that government doesn't do everything the best. So here's an example. Are we saying, "We don't trust you to be cost-effective and efficient anymore?"

**Hon. Kinga Surma:** No, that is not the intention at all. The intention of this legislation and the legislation before, Bill 69, is simply to have better flow of information, to work in a more collaborative way and to work in a more strategic way to address needs in communities.

We know that there is a housing crisis. It is our obligation, as a government, to do everything we can to address the housing crisis. We know that we must build as many long-term-care homes as possible, because we know we have an aging population, and we know governments previous to us did not build. We know that there are also other community needs out there.

All we're simply asking is for agencies to work with government, to share information about real estate with us, so that should there be a circumstance where we truly feel that perhaps this particular property or this particular piece of land could be used to address one of the critical priorities of this government, which is a priority of the people of the province—we were elected by them—then we can make that determination. That is all we're simply asking for.

We have great boards across the province. We have great agencies and institutions that do tremendous work.

All we're asking for is better flow of information and to have an established process for real estate.

**Ms. Bobbi Ann Brady:** Thank you, Minister, for that response.

You mentioned other community needs. In my riding of Haldimand-Norfolk, we have a lot of needs—long-term-care homes, hospitals and schools. All of them are busting at the seams. A few years ago, long-term-care beds were announced across my entire riding, and yet we don't see a shovel in the ground. A school promised for Caledonia—not a shovel in the ground.

Minister, you said that Ontario is the fastest-growing region in North America. And while many think that it is a good thing that people want to come to Ontario, my

constituents continually tell me that they are frustrated by the fact that their kids are in portables, by the fact that they're waiting two years for a loved one to get into long-term care.

With all these legislative changes, including the Reducing Inefficiencies Act and now Bill 151—if these bills pass, will my constituents see long-term care, hospitals and schools being built at a greater rate?

**Hon. Kinga Surma:** Thank you very much for the question.

This bill pertains to—

**The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell):** One minute.

**Hon. Kinga Surma:**—government agencies and the centralization of the real estate decisions. That does not have a direct influence on some of the issues that you raised, unfortunately.

That being said, infrastructure is one of those things that—you can't build a hospital overnight. If I could, I would do that, but I don't have that power, unfortunately. Infrastructure does take time.

**0940**

When we proposed a rapid delivery model for long-term care—it was the first time in the province that we built a long-term-care home in two years. That is a record. That is the fastest that we ever did it, and we did it throughout COVID, throughout a very uncertain time, with a lot of instability. But it took two years to build the home.

To the member: I'm sorry if it's taking a little bit more time. We got through COVID. I would argue that the economic circumstances today are not great. We know that—

**The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell):** Thank you, Minister.

We'll go now to the government for seven and a half minutes. I recognize MPP Jordan.

**Mr. John Jordan:** Thank you, Minister, for the presentation.

At a time when the government is focused on reducing red tape and finding efficiencies across the ministries, I'm wondering how this bill would contribute to that and be aligned with and implemented through that lens.

**Hon. Kinga Surma:** I'm sorry; can you repeat that?

**Mr. John Jordan:** Yes. At a time when we're working on reducing red tape and building efficiencies in the system, how is this bill aligned with that—and would be implemented through that efficiency lens?

**Hon. Kinga Surma:** Although this bill does seem like one more additional step—the agency would have to seek ministerial, LGIC, cabinet approval or Ministry of Infrastructure approval. But I think it is a necessary one because I believe that it could then prevent a circumstance, prevent opportunities where a piece of real estate could be used—it could be used for a great benefit of the community.

We don't want to be in a situation where all of these various agencies are making their own real estate decisions and we don't have complete oversight and view of it. We are dealing with a housing crisis. We are dealing with a situation where we must build as many long-term-care homes as possible. We are dealing with a child care shortage in many parts of the province, which I know the Minister

of Education is doing his best to address. Should there be an opportunity where perhaps an agency doesn't require the land, does it not make sense for the province to be made aware of such an opportunity, so that it can then be used to serve another, greater purpose for the community?

**The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell):** I recognize MPP Barnes.

**Ms. Patrice Barnes:** You referred to the Auditor General's report earlier. Could you expand as to why we are now doing this, several years later?

**Hon. Kinga Surma:** That is a very fair question.

The AG did do a report in 2017. I will reference, for example, recommendation 9 in that report, where the AG recommended, "in conjunction with" MOI, "assess the current level of accessibility of government properties; and review and prioritize properties for potential and future investment to improve accessibility." That is just one of the recommendations.

Since that time, though, two separate assessments were done—one by Ernst and Young, a line-by-line review; and then in 2018 PricewaterhouseCoopers conducted an assessment as well. Then, post that period, of course, we needed to consult with our respective ministries that oversaw these agencies. COVID did occupy a lot of our time, getting the province through that, but of course we continued on with the work. In February 2023, we presented the very first bill, the Reducing Inefficiencies Act, to start the process of centralization.

Although 2017 may seem like a while ago, a lot has been done since that time. We conducted two separate assessments, we consulted with ministries, we overcame COVID together, and then, of course, we presented the very first piece of legislation.

**The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell):** I recognize MPP Martin.

**Mrs. Robin Martin:** I understand that during the process of preparing this legislation over the last several years, you've been consulting with the organizations involved. Can you tell us a little bit about that and what their feedback was?

**Hon. Kinga Surma:** I think office optimization, real estate optimization is something that everyone looks at very closely, particularly now. I think that agencies, partner ministries, particularly with Premier Ford's leadership, want to collaborate more, want to work together more. Having a centralized framework where MNRF and myself are working together on what may be a surplus property, or an agency notifying government of excess lands that it may dispose of, bringing that to our attention—we can all work together to resolve many issues that communities are facing.

**Mrs. Robin Martin:** I understand, with the ROM, for example—if this legislation passes, they're going to have to get approval to dispose of, for example, that property that everybody knows; it's an important cultural landmark here in Ontario. Right now, I guess the board of the ROM could dispose of the property without any oversight. Is that correct?

**Hon. Kinga Surma:** That's correct. Right now, agencies, in many ways, have their own real estate authority.

**Mrs. Robin Martin:** The board of the ROM isn't directly accountable to the public. It's an appointed board. Is that correct?

**Hon. Kinga Surma:** That's correct.

**Mrs. Robin Martin:** So, in a sense, by bringing this requirement in, you're requiring more accountability, as you've said. Here's an example where, if the government is disposing of this piece of property at the request of the ROM, the government will have to justify those decisions because they are publicly accountable, unlike the board of a private organization. Is that part of how we're improving taxpayer accountability?

**Hon. Kinga Surma:** It certainly is one of the reasons, yes. Thank you for pointing that out.

**Mrs. Robin Martin:** I thought that's what was up, but I wanted to make sure, because I think that's important. You wouldn't want a board without that kind of direct accountability to taxpayers to be making those decisions with public assets that are important public assets for the province and for the public. And you certainly would want whoever is making those decisions to be accountable to the public for the decisions being made. That's why I appreciate where we're going.

By centralizing or realigning the real estate authority of these entities, we're saving taxpayers money—so this is not just the accountability side; it's the money side.

How will we make sure that's happening? And what are the financial implications for the public and for the province from these changes?

**Hon. Kinga Surma:** Most certainly, one of the benefits—and this was outlined in the 2017 Auditor General report and by both Ernst and Young and PricewaterhouseCoopers—was that there was an efficiency piece to this as well. There could be cost savings realized to the taxpayer.

As stewards, as a government that is fiscally prudent, I believe it's important that we centralize and we manage our real estate as efficiently as we possibly can.

**The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell):** We'll now turn to the official opposition. I recognize MPP Gélinas.

**M<sup>me</sup> France Gélinas:** I enjoyed your opening statement, where you talked about efficiencies and you talked about making sure that real estate property becomes available.

I will remind you that in September 2020, the Premier, the Minister of Mines, the Minister of Northern Development, the Minister of the Environment—a whole bunch of ministers came to my riding for the grand opening of the Iamgold mine. While they were there, I showed them—"Look across the street, in the community of Gogama. You, the government, own 11 properties that people want to buy."

In January 2021, I wrote to your ministry, I wrote to the Premier, I wrote to the Minister of Mines, I wrote to the Minister of Natural Resources—I wrote to seven different ministers to say, "There are 1,800 workers sleeping in bunkers at the mine across the street from Gogama. You own 11 properties in Gogama that hundreds of people want to buy. Would you put them up for sale?" The answer I got back in January 2021 from your predecessor was that you had to do due diligence—"Give us a few months." A year later, I checked, and they said it would be one to two years. Two years later, I checked and I wrote to you, and

you wrote me back the exact same letter—“Give us one to two years to do due diligence.”

**0950**

If having government oversight of real estate is to improve efficiencies, taking three years—actually, we’re going into four; we are into February 2024—to sell 11 homes, and most of them are not worth more than \$200,000, is not efficiency. That’s leaving 1,800 workers to sleep in bunkers across the street from where you own properties that are beautiful, that you have paid to maintain—to cut the grass, to shovel the snow, to trim the hedges. They are beautiful. You’ve paid for all this for years.

Why don’t you put it up for sale? And how is that efficiency, four years later?

**Hon. Kinga Surma:** Thank you very much to the member opposite.

I can appreciate your frustration. Certainly, I am aware that there is a need for more housing in northern communities, given the government’s investments in mines.

The response that was provided to you in the letter is correct. As government, as owners of property and land, we are required to do certain due diligence activities before the disposition of property. That is just the reality of it. We are required to do duty-to-consult. We’re required to do archaeological work. We’re required to do heritage assessments. We’re required to do all of that before the disposition of the property in question.

But it’s noted. I will take that back to the team, and if Bruce has anything else to add, then we will communicate that with you.

**M<sup>me</sup> France Gélinas:** My colleague mentioned that Infrastructure Ontario does not directly manage real estate assets; it contracts to private providers for everything—for real estate, for maintenance, for management of the property. This is what the Auditor General’s 2017 report was all about. You say that we need this bill because of the report. But the report from the AG is not going to be addressed by what you’re saying. It’s actually going to become worse. You’re going to see more privatization of real estate management, of real estate maintenance, than we had before. How is that a step in the right direction?

**Hon. Kinga Surma:** I’m not sure how you’d draw that conclusion.

What I will say is that through Bill 69 and Bill 151, should one of the agencies that I spoke to today—either the 14 under the previous bill, or the 10-plus-one that we’re reviewing today—want to acquire or dispose of lands, there will be a process which they must follow that pertains to the—

**M<sup>me</sup> France Gélinas:** But if the process that they must follow takes the same time it takes in Gogama—we’re at three and a half years. How is this efficient? How is this making things better?

**Hon. Kinga Surma:** Respectfully, to the member: You’re speaking about two different issues here. The issue—

**M<sup>me</sup> France Gélinas:** Same ministry, same responsibility, same people.

**Hon. Kinga Surma:** The issue that you are speaking about is 11 properties in your riding.

What we are talking about today with Bill 151 is for government to have—for there to be a process when an agency wants to acquire and/or dispose of land. That is what we are talking about today.

**M<sup>me</sup> France Gélinas:** Let me give you an example. Science North in Sudbury is one of the agencies that is listed in the bill. Let’s say Science North has beautiful property close to Ramsey Lake, right in downtown Sudbury. Our community needs a supervised consumption site. Our community needs transitional housing for people who have severe mental health and addictions. Our community is facing an opioid epidemic, and every single week, two people die. So when this piece of property goes up for sale from Science North, they want it to be for the betterment of my community; they want it to be used to fight the opioid epidemic. Your government won’t support a supervised consumption site and certainly hasn’t had any inclination of paying for transitional housing. There is also a private contractor who wants this piece of property, to build very expensive units—

**The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell):** One minute.

**M<sup>me</sup> France Gélinas:** —because you have a nice view of Ramsey Lake.

If Science North made the decision, they would sell that piece of property to a not-for-profit mental health agency to help my community. If your government has a say in it, they will sell that piece of property for millions of dollars more so that they can build expensive units that look at Ramsey Lake.

How is that improving things?

**Mrs. Robin Martin:** Point of order, Chair.

**The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell):** Point of order: I recognize MPP Martin.

**Mrs. Robin Martin:** The member is imputing motive, which is against the rules. I ask the member to stick to the facts. She’s imputing motive. She’s saying what we’ll do.

**M<sup>me</sup> France Gélinas:** I’m giving you an example of what my community is afraid of—

**Mrs. Robin Martin:** A fictitious example.

**M<sup>me</sup> France Gélinas:** It is afraid of giving you control of real estate that presently my community controls and will be used for the good of my community. Once you have control of it, it will be used for rich entrepreneurs who give a lot of money to your party rather than the good of my community.

**The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell):** We’ll now go to the independent members. I recognize MPP Shamji.

**Mr. Adil Shamji:** Good morning, everyone, and welcome back from the constituency period. I hope everyone had a productive time.

Minister Surma, how many of your and the Premier’s donors will benefit from this legislation?

**Hon. Kinga Surma:** I’m not even sure how to respond to that question, to be honest with you.

**Mr. Adil Shamji:** Just tell the truth.

**Hon. Kinga Surma:** What we are here to discuss today is the fact that we’re centralizing real estate authority so that if there is a circumstance in which an agency or an entity would like to dispose of property, there will be a process

which it must follow. and government will have oversight. Again, the purpose of this is to have better—

**Mr. Adil Shamji:** Thank you. That's fine. Minister, I understand the purpose, but you're not answering my question.

**Hon. Kinga Surma:** With all due respect, I'd like to—

**Mr. Adil Shamji:** I didn't get the answer that I needed, so I would like to redirect you, since I didn't get that answer.

Will you provide a list of your stakeholders that you consulted with and your phone logs so we can compare against your donor lists?

**Hon. Kinga Surma:** We consulted with the ministries that are responsible for the agencies in question, and we consulted with the agencies that are impacted by this legislation.

**Mr. Adil Shamji:** Will you provide the information that I requested?

**Hon. Kinga Surma:** The list is in the legislation. You have the list before you.

**Mr. Adil Shamji:** May I request your phone logs, as well?

**Hon. Kinga Surma:** The list of agencies—

**The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell):** You can request it, but it's up to them to decide what they want to do.

**Mr. Adil Shamji:** Of course, and I'm curious to hear her answer, Chair.

**Hon. Kinga Surma:** The list of agencies that were consulted are included in the legislation, which is before you.

**Mr. Adil Shamji:** Minister Surma, would it, in theory, be possible for a Minister of Infrastructure to only grant one of these entities its request to dispose of land once the government has lined up a preferred buyer? I don't mean to be conspiratorial about this, but we all saw what happened with greenbelt land swaps. The government found a way to reward its friends. Could this legislation be used for that purpose?

**Hon. Kinga Surma:** The purpose of this legislation—

**Mrs. Robin Martin:** Point of order, Chair.

**The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell):** Point of order recognized.

**Mrs. Robin Martin:** This line of questioning is imputing motive. He's imputing motives to the government, which is inappropriate, according to the rules.

**Mr. Adil Shamji:** It's absolutely not, Chair. The member across is weaponizing her points of order to disrupt our questioning.

**Mrs. Robin Martin:** I am not. I just ask, Chair, that they abide by the rules and not impute motive.

**Mr. Adil Shamji:** Chair, please ask her to stop weaponizing her points of order.

**The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell):** Everyone, we have to have civility, and we have to go by the committee rules.

You can continue. I stopped your time, and I will restart it now.

**Mr. Adil Shamji:** I appreciate that very much, Chair.

Again, could this legislation be used for the purpose I described—for example, to ensure that these sales are only used once the government has lined up a preferred buyer, as we saw with the greenbelt?

**Hon. Kinga Surma:** The purpose of this legislation is to share information about real estate transactions. Should there be an entity that wants to dispose of or acquire land, there is now a process in place. They will have to seek the minister's approval, LGIC approval. This is to give the government a holistic view of real estate transactions, so that should there be a need that could be met, government can make that deliberation.

**Mr. Adil Shamji:** How will LGIC and the minister prevent any conflicts of interest, as we have seen repeatedly under this government?

**Hon. Kinga Surma:** There will be a process.

**Mr. Adil Shamji:** What is the process?

**Hon. Kinga Surma:** The process is that, should an agency want to dispose of land, they will have to seek the respective ministry's approval—and LGIC.

**Mr. Adil Shamji:** We have seen that that process has been entirely unsatisfactory under this Premier and this government. So how will the process be improved?

**Hon. Kinga Surma:** Again, should the entity in question want to acquire or dispose of land, there will now be a process in place where they will have to communicate with their respective ministry and seek LGIC or MOI approval, so that government has oversight—

**The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell):** One minute.

**Hon. Kinga Surma:**—government is aware of the transaction and, should there be an opportunity for this parcel of land to serve a greater purpose for Ontarians, government can make that deliberation.

**Mr. Adil Shamji:** What I'm hearing is that this government is introducing legislation that is entirely centralizing power, that has zero oversight or conflict-of-interest protections, and that has the great potential to continue what we have seen under this government—of repeatedly using government decisions and government power to reward friends and donors. That is entirely unsatisfactory. I'm also hearing that no thought has been given whatsoever to implement any of those protections.

So I'll ask you again: Have any safeguards been considered to oversee the executive council in order to prevent these things from happening again, or are we just going to have to wait until the next RCMP criminal investigation?

**Hon. Kinga Surma:** To the member opposite—

**The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell):** Thank you, Minister, for your time today.

The committee will now recess until 3 p.m.

*The committee recessed from 1001 to 1508.*

MS. NINA DEEB

**The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell):** Good afternoon, everyone. We will now resume consideration of public hearings on Bill 151.

I will now call on the first presenter, Nina Deeb. She's from Cambridge, where I am from, so I've met her before.

As a reminder, each presenter will have seven minutes for their presentation. After we have heard from all presenters, the remaining 39 minutes of the time slot will be for questions from members of the committee. This time

for questions will be divided into two rounds of seven and a half minutes for the government members, two rounds of seven and a half minutes for the opposition members, and two rounds of four and a half minutes for the independent members as a group.

Please state your name for the record, and you may begin.

**Ms. Nina Deeb:** Good afternoon, Chair and committee members. My name is Nina Deeb. I have been a full-time real estate broker since 1996.

The government states that Ontario's real estate portfolio is the largest in Canada. The government are the stewards of public lands and resources that are held for the public interest and benefit. The portfolio is very, very valuable; its value is in the billions of dollars. Consider the real estate value of the ROM lands located at Bloor and Queen's Park.

Regulated decision-making powers by corporations are not an improvement over the system that we use now. Infrastructure Ontario is a middleman, an agent of government. It hands out contracts and spends public dollars. It outsources property management. It is not a solution. Delegation of government duties to agencies is not in the best interests of taxpayers. The taxpayers do not elect these corporations. This is bureaucracy-building.

Public-private partnerships, known as P3s, are a tag team of government and corporations that furthers the interests of private equity. This runs counter to the interests of taxpayers. I'm going to quote the Minister of Infrastructure: "seized the opportunity to deliver Ontario's real estate portfolio more efficiently by creating a framework for centralizing certain real estate authorities and decision-making processes.... unlock and increase the value of government real estate assets." There are no benefits for taxpayers to a centralized real estate model. Enhancing business outcomes is not a responsibility of the taxpayers.

This bill proposes to restrict certain organizations from engaging in specific real estate trades. This is an excellent idea, except it should be targeting real estate investment trusts, pension funds and financial landlords.

The Ontario Science Centre must not be demolished; it has 200 years of life left in it. Our previous generational investments in public assets must be respected. Ontario should fund and invest in these public assets, not install a corporate landlord that abandons them and permits the public's buildings to fall into disrepair.

Infrastructure Ontario has proven itself as a bad landlord. We must not entrust bad actors with more public assets to manage. There is evidence that centralization will make the situation worse. This bill lays the groundwork for our government to be reduced to tenants in our own land.

The ever-changing regulatory landscape has many new arbitrating corporations at the table. These corporations do not pay taxes. The government wants more authority when it comes to real estate. The target institutions can continue to make their own decisions. The public assets are being delivered to private hands to add on their invisible value. This makes property management more expensive. This is an expensive layer of bureaucracy. The creation of systems that have no physical product does not benefit taxpayers. These are tax-exempt corporations of inflation.

Why does the government want control of these properties? Why is the government seeking to take over all of these real estate operations? Why does the government seek right of first refusal when it already has expropriation powers?

Centralization is a bad idea. We experienced centralization of Ontario property tax assessments through the creation of the Municipal Property Assessment Corp. This entity has only one client—municipalities have no choice except MPAC. Private contractors are working with public dollars to extract profits. Privatization must end.

Meaningful consultation will save the reversals of decisions made by government as it applies to real estate in Ontario. If any central intelligence exists in Ontario, it is not obvious. We must not concentrate powers in one minister or one organization. There are many things that we can be doing with our real estate assets, but I am afraid that this bill, which is very short—there's not much substance to this bill, but there's a lot of power and a lot of shifting that will go on because of this bill. We must continue with building housing, but this is not what this is doing. This doesn't build housing. There's nothing affordable in housing here for us.

The delegation to private corporations in Ontario that has been going on since 1976 is a bad idea. We literally have to roll this back to 1976, to the delegation of powers. This power should never have left government. We do not have a problem of big government; we have a problem of big corporations. We're told that our government is too big and we have to trim back our government. But that is not what's happening. Government is being paralyzed, while corporations are just increasing their profits year after year. The ground that's lost is by taxpayers, and taxpayers pay for everything. We do not have to worry about investors leaving Ontario. It's our money they're using. They're managing our assets with our money, and we're paying for this. We have a lot of intelligence here. We do not need outsiders of any kind to be managing our valuable assets for us; we can do that ourselves.

I thank you for your time, and I do look forward to answering your questions. Thank you for having me here today.

**The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell):** Thank you.

We'll start with the official opposition, for seven and a half minutes. Please make all your comments through the Chair. I recognize MPP French.

**Ms. Jennifer K. French:** Thank you very much, Ms. Deeb, for your presentation. I appreciated your passion. Obviously, this is something that you care about because you've chosen to come before committee, so we appreciate your time.

Some of the things that you talked about—one of them specifically, was that Infrastructure Ontario is a middleman, as you said; an agent of government that hands out contracts, outsources property management, and you reminded us that that is not always in the best interests of the taxpayer.

Certainly, when we're talking about the Ontario Science Centre, which has been in front of folks as an example, we know that Infrastructure Ontario has, in effect, been the landlord and has let it fall to the state of disrepair that the

government is able to point to it and suggest that it be demolished and it needs to be.

Infrastructure Ontario hands out mega-contracts to just a few of these property management firms, and millions of public dollars are going into private pockets. The Auditor General found that IO's repair and maintenance expenses are 20% higher than we would be paying otherwise. Ontarians pay more for repairs; they get less.

Because of what you have said, do you think that is the best path forward or do you think that public control—when you talk about government and you talk about responsibility, who should ultimately be responsible for doing those repairs with public dollars?

**Ms. Nina Deeb:** Thank you for the question.

Evidence says that it's actually much less expensive for us to do them in-house, so the management should be done in-house. When the corporation is installed, the corporation is notching a position for itself, and these corporations often have million-dollar leaders, CEOs. It's a very large bureaucracy. This just builds bureaucracy, which does not add value for the taxpayers; it just adds expense.

**Ms. Jennifer K. French:** You also commented about the Ontario Science Centre, and I would like to know where that opinion comes from, where that interest comes from—is that your community?

**Ms. Nina Deeb:** Actually, no. The Ontario Science Centre I consider a part of the education system. My parents paid to build this for generations to come, and my children did not even attend the Ontario Science Centre through their schools. The only reason my children went to the Ontario Science Centre is because I took them.

As far as if we were looking for more attendance at the Ontario Science Centre—that can be done through the education system. If it's in the plan to take students at a certain age, the Ontario Science Centre—that's the education system that I had. I was taken to the Ontario Science Centre on a bus from Cambridge, Ontario, twice. So I knew to take my children there because I had visited it myself. My children would not have had that experience if I had not driven them from Cambridge, Ontario, to the Ontario Science Centre for them to have that experience. These are public assets that are underused. We can't say they're underused and not be installing a system within our education system to take the students to this educational institute. That's my interest in the Ontario Science Centre—and also the auditor's report on the Ontario Science Centre. I did read that.

**Ms. Jennifer K. French:** Another comment that you made was about Infrastructure Ontario being a bad landlord and that they shouldn't have, I think you said, other assets. That's certainly something I've been talking about, as the infrastructure critic—when we can point to the Auditor General's examples of problematic property management and ways that Infrastructure Ontario could do better or ways that the ministry could do better, and we don't see the government following through on those ideas and initiatives.

As a member of the public, or drawing from your professional experience, how did you arrive at that, or what do you see if we're giving more power, centralizing more power—what do you see the problem being?

**Ms. Nina Deeb:** I'm afraid that we could be setting the stage for the sale of these properties. That's my concern, with this bill.

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**Ms. Jennifer K. French:** I think that's a fear that we've heard before. I know that we all received a submission from the nurses, who were quite concerned about public health and assets and wondering what ultimately is the goal with centralizing control and ownership. As you said, they're our assets, and having it end up more centralized—I don't see how that becomes more generally utilized.

Is there anything further that you would like to add that you didn't have a chance to in your presentation?

**Ms. Nina Deeb:** What would really be very helpful is competition. These agencies are being installed as—they're just the institution in charge of a very specific job or law or asset management. These institutions are not helpful.

We should not be delegating authority to private corporations that are unaccountable. We do not elect these corporations. We elect members of Parliament. And when we elect members of Parliament to be making the best decisions for the people of Ontario, we're expecting that you're going to do the job. We're not expecting you to delegate your jobs to corporations that remain after the members of Parliament are either retired or are no longer politicians. These corporations remain after the politicians are gone.

**The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell):** One minute remaining.

**Ms. Nina Deeb:** We're building a very huge bureaucracy in Ontario. There are over 100—I have them at around 112 corporations right now. All these corporations are not necessary. None of them are really providing any benefit to the taxpayers of Ontario. So we're adding lots of inflation, and we're permitting them to not pay taxes.

**The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell):** We'll now go to the independent member. I recognize MPP Brady.

**Ms. Bobbi Ann Brady:** Thank you, Nina, for driving in today to present before us on this and for imparting your thoughts on this piece of legislation.

I think I met you last year during pre-budget consultations, and you were way further than Toronto to make that presentation because you were very passionate about some of the things that you would have liked to have seen in the budget. I paid close attention to you, and I've been talking about you over the past year, because you were the person who warned us about the commercialization of farmland and hedge funds and equity funds gobbling up farmland in Ontario, and I am beginning to see that in my riding of Haldimand-Norfolk. So I pay close attention to what you're saying today because you were exactly right last year at this time, when it came to that issue.

This morning, we heard the minister talk about Ontario being the fastest-growing region in North America. I know that excites some folks, and it might excite real estate agents as well. But you alluded to the fact that we don't have the infrastructure to keep up with those folks who are arriving in Ontario, and my constituents are very, very upset by that fact. We have hospitals, schools, long-term-care homes all busting at the seams. I think that if this bill were to address some of those key infrastructure problems

that we see in every riding across Ontario, the bill would be better received.

You mentioned that Bill 151 is kind of a tidy, small bill. I look at it like it could be a housekeeping piece.

I just want to ask you again: Do you think that this is a bill that is the last we're going to hear of it—or is this a stepping stone bill?

**Ms. Nina Deeb:** This is step two already, and there will be more steps. Each bill brings about changes that—when you look at each change individually, you don't think that it's a big change. But when you look at all the changes from bill to bill to bill, if you keep track of what change is being made when, I've noticed that there are huge changes being made—a shift of responsibilities to taxpayers from corporations. Also, there is less accountability. I actually reported that the delegated authorities are breaking the law and, through legislation last week, they brought in a stipulation to remove being able to sue them—so you can't actually go back on them now. When the government is told, "This is a problem. This is what's going on here"—that has been years I've been saying this, and now the legislation that comes out is to protect the corporations I've complained about. To me, that says, "We've looked into it, and we agree they're breaking the law, and we're going to protect them." This is very concerning to me. It makes me just want to—nothing is going to get by me when I see something like this happening.

I come here because I'm looking for improvements. I don't come here because I don't have anything better to do with my time. I'm looking for improvements in my sector.

**Ms. Bobbi Ann Brady:** That leads me to my second question.

I wholeheartedly agree with you, with your sentiments—

**The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell):** One minute.

**Ms. Bobbi Ann Brady:** —with respect to taxpayer money. I go to a lot of high schools and I speak to a lot of high school kids, and if there's one thing that I can impart to them it's that there's no such thing as government money; it's taxpayer money.

You are one presenter today—that's it. So I wonder, are you the only person in your field who is paying attention to what is going on with this bill and other bills?

**Ms. Nina Deeb:** Quite honestly, we're a represented sector, and because we're represented, we usually expect our institutions—we have centralized institutions, we have intelligence, and we expect our organizations to step up to the plate and make sure that the changes that are being made are good for the people of Ontario, for home ownership, for having sufficient levels of housing, and that the rules are workable for the public, that we have good rules and we have good regulations that are beneficial, and not too much law—

**The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell):** Thank you for your answer.

We'll now turn to the government. I recognize MPP Barnes.

**Ms. Patrice Barnes:** Thank you, Nina, for coming in and making the drive.

This bill is putting in place a process by which the government really has an oversight on these organizations

when they sell. What you have said in your presentation is that you think that the government should have stewardship over these lands and be able to decide what is being done, as an accountability to taxpayers, because the government is elected. So, in looking at this bill, that is exactly what this bill is saying—to put in its place a process by which, if the ROM wants to sell their land, the government has an oversight in regard to that land being sold.

My question is—the objection to this bill: Is this bill not really doing the same things that you're saying need to be done?

**Ms. Nina Deeb:** Thank you for the question. It's a good question.

What the process does now is it gives the province first right of refusal. When the organizations, if they decide to sell a property, are having to come to the province, to the minister, first, that gives them first right of refusal in case the province has some other use that they think is a provincial priority for that property.

Do we get market value for a property when the government can choose, can get involved with the sale at that point to decide who that sale is going to go to? My concern with this is the Infrastructure Ontario installation, for one, and the lack of accountability. These institutions now have boards of directors, and when they sell their properties, they're done through—it's not a centralized system, but it is a market system that puts the property on the open market for offers. So market value for the properties, should they be sold—sometimes we have excess lands that must be sold. This, I agree with—like schools we are no longer using. But when the properties are being sold, it should be open market—it shouldn't be, "First we're going to check with the province and the minister to see if they want this property," if there is first right of refusal, if they have an interest for this property before it can go to market. This removes an extreme amount of power from the entities themselves.

**Ms. Patrice Barnes:** Right now, the government has no oversight, so these boards that exist—if they want to sell the property, they sell the property at market value, like you said. We have no insight and no line of view as to when the property is going to be sold or why they're selling it right now, and this is what that bill was trying to clean up. We're sort of assuming that if the government is going to take it, it's not going to be at market value. Right now, if you look at how a school property is disposed of within the education system, it's rotated through several levels of government at market price and then it's sold to whoever picks it up—so you're kind of going on this. I feel like there's a little bit of contradiction because you want the government really to have oversight, but only if we're selling the land at market value. Is that what you're saying?

1530

**Ms. Nina Deeb:** I don't think the province of Ontario should interfere at all in this situation. We already have a system that's working, and the interference, to me, looks like gentrification. I don't see another reason why the government would want to interfere at that level. It's very



concerning when I see my province look like they are actively involved in gentrification.

**The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell):** I recognize MPP Martin.

**Mrs. Robin Martin:** Thank you to the witness for driving here from Cambridge and for joining us and giving us your views.

You started off by saying that governments are stewards for the public interest. Government is democratically elected—it's elected with the majority of the votes. And this government was elected with a majority of the votes, democratically. So this government is responsible to be the steward of the public interest. Would you agree, from what you said?

**Ms. Nina Deeb:** I do agree.

**Mrs. Robin Martin:** Yes. As a result of that, this government is concerned about the disposition of real estate assets which could be disposed of, for example, by a board of the ROM or any other entity without any accountability to the people of Ontario, because it's the board that makes the decision to dispose of the asset.

Would you not agree that it's good to make the board of the ROM make a decision which would be accountable, through the government, to the people of Ontario, who have an interest in these assets? These are public assets, as you pointed out.

**Ms. Nina Deeb:** They are public assets, but the best steward is the institution itself that has its vested interest in its own institution. The institution can be turned into a tenant in its own—

**Mrs. Robin Martin:** To be fair, the institutions will still run their institutions. This is simply about disposal or acquisition of real estate. That's what this bill is about. It's not about running the institution. The institutions are well placed to run their institutions and will continue to do so after this bill. This bill is about acquiring or disposing of assets in the name of an institution, and the government is trying to make sure that we steward the public interest well by protecting those interests and by overseeing, as we pointed out, and making people accountable to the public for these decisions, as opposed to just being accountable to their board and their members. Do you not agree that that's a plus? You said the governments are the stewards for the public interest. And this is helping us make sure that we do that.

**Ms. Nina Deeb:** I do not agree with centralization anywhere it occurs. Centralization is bad for the people of Ontario. It's bad for any society. We should have multiple decision-makers. One-source decision-maker—we have opinions of sole registrars. We have the strong-mayors act—the opinion of a strong mayor.

**The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell):** One-minute mark.

**Ms. Nina Deeb:** One person should never be in a position to make such large decisions like this.

**Mrs. Robin Martin:** You will know that a parliamentary democracy like this one has a cabinet that makes decisions—it isn't one person making decisions; cabinet makes decisions in a parliamentary system of government.

Can I just ask you, do you have some expertise in governance that you're bringing to the table about this?

**Ms. Nina Deeb:** Yes, I've got experience as a corporate director. I have franchise experience. I have about 20 disciplines.

**Mrs. Robin Martin:** Did you read the Attorney General's report?

**Ms. Nina Deeb:** Yes, I did.

**Mrs. Robin Martin:** Did you read the 2018 Ernst and Young report?

**Ms. Nina Deeb:** The 2017?

**Mrs. Robin Martin:** The 2018 Ernst and Young report. Did you read—

**Ms. Nina Deeb:** I think that was 2017; I could be wrong. But yes, I did read it, because it was referenced—

**Mrs. Robin Martin:** Did you read the 2018 Price-waterhouseCoopers report?

**Ms. Nina Deeb:** I did, yes.

**Mrs. Robin Martin:** And the Deloitte report from 2019?

**Ms. Nina Deeb:** I did.

**Mrs. Robin Martin:** And the McKinsey report after that?

**The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell):** I'm going to stop you right there.

We're going to go to the official opposition for seven and a half minutes. I recognize MPP Gélinas.

**M<sup>me</sup> France Gélinas:** Thank you so much for coming here today.

I will tap into your real estate experience with my little story, so allow me to put the story out and then I would like to tap into your knowledge.

I represent a riding in northeastern Ontario. There's lots of mining. Most of the mines are in my riding. There's a new gold mine opening that's called Iamgold. They have 1,800 workers, and all of them live in bunkers. Across the street from the mine is the community of Gogama. In the community of Gogama, the province—Infrastructure Ontario—owns 11 properties. The government closed the OPP station, so the homes where the police officers used to live are now vacant, because we don't have police. There were lots of people who worked for the Ministry of Natural Resources. They also had homes there to house the workers. These were also closed by the previous government, and the houses have stood empty. The government pays to have them maintained. There's heat in there. They're on paved roads. They have hydro. They have Internet. They have sewage and water. They pay to cut the grass, to trim the hedges, to shovel the snow. They're well maintained. They're very nice.

You can imagine, for all of those workers, living in a bunker is not always that much fun. All of those workers coming into that community want to buy those homes that sit empty, that are beautiful, so they asked the government, "How could we do that?"

I wrote to the government. I wrote to seven of the ministers. The minister in charge of infrastructure answered me back and said it would take one to two years to go through due process before they put those houses up for sale. After a year, I checked, and I said, "It has been a year. Are you ready to put them up for sale?" "Not quite." After

two years, I wrote again and said, “It has been two years. Are you going to put those homes up for sale?” We had a new Minister of Infrastructure by then. The new Minister of Infrastructure sent me the exact same letter, that said that it will take between one and two years to do due process.

In your experience as a real estate person, how long does it take to do due process to put a house up for sale—a house that has been used, well maintained, and where hundreds of people want to buy it?

**Ms. Nina Deeb:** Thank you for the question.

It takes me about an hour and 15 minutes to post a home for sale on the MLS. I can sit with you right now and I can have your home posted in one hour and 15 minutes on the MLS.

**M<sup>me</sup> France Gélinas:** So why is it that it has been three years and two months since I first started to write to the minister—telling me that they were doing due process? What could take three years and two months to review a—in my part of the province, homes still go for \$200,000, \$230,000, \$250,000 because of where we live. What could take over three years to review? What is there to review?

**Ms. Nina Deeb:** There’s nothing to review. Those homes could go on the market, and they could be sold. There’s no reason; there’s nothing to review. They were already homes. They’re operating as homes. They have utilities. There’s no reason those homes can’t be sold.

**M<sup>me</sup> France Gélinas:** I fully agree with you, and everybody in Gogama and everybody who wants a home fully agree with you.

The people in my riding are really uncomfortable with the government gaining more control over more real estate because of the delay that we are facing.

Is there a chance that the exact same thing—if Science North, which is in northern Ontario, in Sudbury. It’s on the list of properties that now will have to have the government okay. Could the government be using the same, “Oh, we have to go through due process”—and three years and two months later, a piece of property that they want to sell will still be going through due process?

**Ms. Nina Deeb:** We have due process, but the due process isn’t always followed. That’s what I have found within the delegate authorities. We have laws and we have regulations and we have process, but the process itself is a delayer, a denier and an inflator. That’s how I see the process. Every process I look at—it’s actually a tribunal process, usually—they delay, deny and distract, and it makes it more expensive; it inflates.

All those years of those homes sitting empty—those are not being used. Everything is being used up in the house. The roof is being used up. The furnace is being used up. It’s just sitting there, wasting away. I don’t see that as any different than burning your crops.

1540

We should be using these assets. Those houses are sitting there vacant. We should be using every home that is sitting vacant. No home should be sitting vacant. We have a housing crisis.

**M<sup>me</sup> France Gélinas:** We also have a housing crisis in northern Ontario, and I fully agree with you.

A lot of what the Auditor General said in 2017—you read the report; so did I. A lot of the criticism from the Auditor General was directed at Infrastructure Ontario and why they subcontract a lot of the work that needs to be done for maintenance, for management of property.

Do you see a role to basically bring value to the taxpayers through some of the recommendations that the Auditor General has done?

**Ms. Nina Deeb:** I think the Auditor General’s recommendations are excellent, and I think that her recommendations should have been taken seriously, but often—

**The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell):** One-minute mark.

**Ms. Nina Deeb:** —maybe 70% to 80% of the recommendations are taken. They’re hand-picked, the ones that are liked—and the ones that aren’t liked are put to the side. But we should have taken all of her advice from that. That was a well-written report, and she made excellent points in there.

**M<sup>me</sup> France Gélinas:** I agree. It was value for money that could be acted upon.

Have you seen any of those in this piece of legislation in front of us?

**Ms. Nina Deeb:** No, I don’t see anything here.

**M<sup>me</sup> France Gélinas:** Neither do I. This is not a piece of legislation that will bring value for the taxpayers’ money, but it certainly opens the door for some people to benefit at the expense of everybody else. Would you agree?

**Ms. Nina Deeb:** Yes. It’s a very small group that will benefit. The taxpayers are on the giving side, and the beneficiaries are a very, very small group.

**M<sup>me</sup> France Gélinas:** I agree.

**The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell):** We’ll now move on to the independent member. I recognize MPP Shamji.

**Mr. Adil Shamji:** Thank you very much for taking the time to share your expertise with us.

I start from a position in which I believe that everyone is here because they want to do good. Recognizing that, I can imagine that there is a world in which well-intentioned people would say that the current system of real estate management for these public institutions needs some improvement.

What is your perspective on that? How is it working right now? Would you recommend any changes at all? And what are your thoughts about what this legislation would do in order to address any concerns that you have?

**Ms. Nina Deeb:** Thank you for the question.

I’ve actually written a report called the Generations Housing Affordability Analysis, with 14 recommendations. It has been a few years since I wrote it, but I still stand behind my 14 recommendations that I made at that time. Some of the recommendations that I made have been installed, but there are exceptions. Every time one of my recommendations is visited by government, there is also a second round of amendments to the legislation that takes the teeth out of it—whether it’s the speculation tax, the vacancy tax, or any one of these pieces of legislation that came in, both federal and provincial. There’s always a

round of amendments that takes the teeth out of what it was intended to do. I still stand behind my 14 recommendations. I haven't even added any since. The reason I wrote that report is because I was so alarmed with what I saw happening in my province. That's why I wrote it. It really took a snapshot in time of what the situation was for the people of Ontario at that moment.

**Mr. Adil Shamji:** Thank you for sharing that.

You are a prolific reader. I understand you read all of the reports, which I'm very grateful for, and of course you've taken the time to go through the legislation.

Based on your interpretation and your expertise, does the proposed system under this legislation have the potential to be abused, to support friends and donors, to reward people?

**Ms. Nina Deeb:** Thank you for the question.

Yes, I am concerned that there is a possibility that that would happen here. I do feel that the stage is set for the sale of these properties with this legislation. This is just step two, but I do think that we are setting up a sales stage. One thing that I did notice happen in British Columbia is that government properties were sold to Starlight real estate investment trust, and the government itself became the tenant of the real estate investment trust. This is what I don't want to see happening. I don't want to see my government reduced to a tenant in our own lands. That is what has already happened in British Columbia. I've got an eye out on what's happening across Canada, and I don't welcome that here.

**Mr. Adil Shamji:** We heard from the members across that there will be this layer of oversight that is nestled within the executive council, cabinet. Is that satisfactory to you?

**Ms. Nina Deeb:** No, that is not satisfactory to me—

**The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell):** One-minute mark.

**Ms. Nina Deeb:** —if we see what has happened with Ontario Place, and also if we look back to the 407. The 407—a 99-year lease—was undersold for I think it was about one third of its value at the time. It was sold for just over \$3 billion, and it was valued at over \$9 billion at the time. So I'm not satisfied with that at all. I don't think that the decision is made in the open.

Even now, I've been asking for the lease for Ontario Place. I actually came to committee to ask for it. I'm a member of the public. I'm represented by an agency. and I'm asking my agent for a copy of my contract, and my agent is not giving me a copy of my contract. I would be brought before one of these new corporations installed by the Mike Harris government if I tried to pull an act like that, if I tried to not give my client a copy of what it is that I—

**The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell):** Thank you for your answer.

We will now go to the government. I recognize MPP Martin.

**Mrs. Robin Martin:** Thank you again to the witness.

We were going through the reports, and you told me you had read Ernst and Young, Pricewaterhouse, Deloitte, McKinsey—did you read the McKinsey report, as well?

**Ms. Nina Deeb:** I think so.

**Mrs. Robin Martin:** And the Zell and Lurie report?

**Ms. Nina Deeb:** Which one?

**Mrs. Robin Martin:** The Samuel Zell and Robert Lurie real estate centre report.

**Ms. Nina Deeb:** I'm not sure about that one.

What was your question?

**Mrs. Robin Martin:** I just asked if you had read it.

**Ms. Nina Deeb:** I don't have that one here.

**Mrs. Robin Martin:** Well, all of these reports recommended centralization, and these are reports of experts on this kind of thing. It's quite a long list of people recommending centralization. I know you had indicated that you don't think centralization is ever a good idea, but obviously there are some people who feel differently about that.

One of the other things you said in response to some questions from the members opposite was that we should be using these assets, not having them sit vacant. Of course, the government is trying to make sure that we do that. That's part of what this bill and this initiative is about—making sure that we get the value out of these assets for the people of Ontario.

Again, I think we went over this: It's the government that is in the position to act on behalf of taxpayers; it is the government that has been elected to do so. Correct?

**Ms. Nina Deeb:** I don't challenge that at all.

**Mrs. Robin Martin:** This government, having been elected to do that, is bringing forward this piece of legislation, and the one that came before it—Bill 69, I think that was, and this is Bill 151—with a view to making sure that we get more out of the real estate assets that are assets of the government. That's the intention of this move. What we are trying to do is make sure that it is a government that is responsible for these things, which I think is what you started with—that the government should be the stewards of this for the public interest. So I'm not quite sure where we lost the thread here. It is this government that is trying to make sure that we do that, and we are trying to do that by bringing these assets under government oversight. I don't understand how you can say that this is not in the interest of the public—to make sure that the public interest is represented in overseeing these important assets. Can you explain?

**Ms. Nina Deeb:** Thank you for the question.

I'm basing my opinion on history and on evidence. My evidence is Ontario Place. My evidence is the 407. My evidence is the sale of the Ontario land registry system. My evidence is what has already happened; why I don't think that's a good idea—

**Mrs. Robin Martin:** Sorry; just to interrupt you there—what you're saying is, you don't like some of the decisions that the government has made historically, or other governments have made historically. So that is why you're saying this is not a good idea—because you disagree with some of the decisions the government has made about particular assets.

1550

**Ms. Nina Deeb:** I don't agree with making the same mistake over and over again, because that's the definition of insanity.

**Mrs. Robin Martin:** Yes, I know the expression.

The assets that you're talking about, like the 407—that was many, many years ago, in a different government. And the other things are—sure, you can have a different opinion, but the government is entitled to decide, because we were all elected to represent the people of Ontario, and that's how we got to be government. So we're making decisions that we think are in the public interest.

You expressed some concerns about what could happen in the future—that the government might sell these assets and not get good market value for them; that the government might do what they did in BC and sell assets to some Starlight real estate investment trust or something. That's what I wrote down. But you don't know that that's at all what the government is intending to do. You're speculating. Is that right?

**Ms. Nina Deeb:** I believe the government will continue with what they have already been doing. I believe that the government will continue in the same direction of what has already been going on.

**Mrs. Robin Martin:** That's true. The government will continue to be a Conservative government and to work hard to get the best value for taxpayers from all of the assets owned by the public and try to make sure we have oversight over government assets and these assets to make sure that they are stewarded properly. I thought that we started on the same page; that that is our responsibility and that you would accept that that is what the government should be doing—stewarding our assets in the best way possible. I understand you have some fears about that, but I don't think that your fears are justified, frankly. I think the government is going to make the best decisions it can for the people of Ontario, and that's what they elected us to do, and I think that's what we're going to continue to do.

Does anybody else have any questions?

**The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell):** You have one minute and 46 seconds left.

*Interjection.*

**Mrs. Robin Martin:** Okay.

There was some discussion with MPP Gélinas, I believe, and you said that there's a small group who will benefit, that the benefactors are a small group. I have no idea what you were referring to. Could you elaborate?

**Ms. Nina Deeb:** The benefactors are the individuals or the corporations that would be receiving the jobs that the government is sending their way—the centralization which winds up sending certain work to a handful of very large corporations.

**Mrs. Robin Martin:** Well, do you know that centralization—

**The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell):** One-minute mark.

**Mrs. Robin Martin:** —will send work to some corporations that I'm unaware of?

**Ms. Nina Deeb:** Well, sometimes it's only one corporation, like MPAC. That sends all of the assessments of Ontario to just one corporation. That's centralization.

**Mrs. Robin Martin:** So you would prefer that there be a bunch of disparate groups deciding on people's property values and not have any government oversight or control over getting one fair answer for everybody because it's from the same group—you prefer that it be from a whole bunch of different groups having different answers. That's a better system?

**Ms. Nina Deeb:** Quite honestly, we had a much better system before MPAC. It was a municipal system; it was local. This was centralization by the province to one entity that the municipalities had no choice in. They have to use MPAC. It's a monopoly.

**Mrs. Robin Martin:** So you think it's better to have that decided at a whole bunch of different local things, and you think it would be an improvement, for example, with the case of MPAC, to go back to those local decision-making—that's your view?

**Ms. Nina Deeb:** It actually is an improvement. We went backwards.

**Mrs. Robin Martin:** And do you feel that way about everything? I guess you do because you said you don't like centralization—

**The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell):** Thank you for your comments.

This concludes our business for today. Thank you again, Ms. Deeb, for coming in.

The committee will now be adjourned until 9 a.m. on Wednesday, February 21, 2024, when we will begin clause-by-clause consideration of Bill 151.

*The committee adjourned at 1555.*







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