

Legislative
Assembly
of Ontario



Assemblée
législative
de l'Ontario

**Official Report
of Debates
(Hansard)**

A-27

**Journal
des débats
(Hansard)**

A-27

**Standing Committee on
Government Agencies**

Intended appointments

1st Session
43rd Parliament

Thursday 21 March 2024

**Comité permanent des
organismes gouvernementaux**

Nominations prévues

1^{re} session
43^e législature

Jeudi 21 mars 2024

Chair: Will Bouma
Clerk: Isaiah Thorning

Président : Will Bouma
Greffier : Isaiah Thorning

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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

CONTENTS

Thursday 21 March 2024

Subcommittee reports	A-227
Intended appointments.....	A-227
Ms. Stephanie Ball	A-227
Ms. Sonya Vellenga	A-232

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

STANDING COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT AGENCIES

COMITÉ PERMANENT DES ORGANISMES GOUVERNEMENTAUX

Thursday 21 March 2024

Jeudi 21 mars 2024

The committee met at 0900 in room 151.

The Chair (Mr. Will Bouma): Good morning, everyone. The Standing Committee on Government Agencies will now come to order. We are meeting to conduct a review of intended appointees. We are joined by staff from legislative research, Hansard and broadcast and recording.

As always, all comments by members and witnesses should go through the Chair.

SUBCOMMITTEE REPORTS

The Chair (Mr. Will Bouma): The first item of business will be the adoption of two subcommittee reports, which were distributed in advance. One, we have the subcommittee report dated Thursday, March 7, 2024. Could I please have a motion? Member Pasma.

Ms. Chandra Pasma: I move adoption of the subcommittee report on intended appointments dated Thursday, March 7, 2024, on the order-in-council certificate dated March 1, 2024.

The Chair (Mr. Will Bouma): Is there any discussion on the motion? Seeing none, are members ready to vote? Yes? Very good. All those in favour? Very good. And there are none opposed. Carried. Thank you.

Number two, we have the subcommittee report dated Thursday, March 14, 2024. Could I please have the motion? Member Pasma.

Ms. Chandra Pasma: I move adoption of the subcommittee report on intended appointments dated Thursday, March 14, 2024, on the order-in-council certificate dated March 8, 2024.

The Chair (Mr. Will Bouma): Is there any discussion on the motion? Seeing none, are members ready to vote? Yes? All those in favour? Any opposed? No, none opposed. Carried. Thank you very much.

INTENDED APPOINTMENTS

MS. STEPHANIE BALL

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

The Chair (Mr. Will Bouma): Our first intended appointee today is Stephanie Ball, nominated as member of the Landlord and Tenant Board. I understand Ms. Ball is online.

Ms. Ball, you may make an initial statement at your discretion. Following this, there will be questions from

members of the committee. With that questioning, we will start with the government, followed by the official opposition, with 15 minutes allocated to each recognized party. Any time that you take in your statement will be deducted from the time allotted to the government.

Again, thank you very much for joining us today, and you have the floor. Go ahead and make your statement.

Ms. Stephanie Ball: Okay. Well, thank you very much for the consideration of attending by Zoom this morning. I really appreciate that.

Hello, Mr. Chair, Mr. Vice-Chair and members of the Standing Committee on Government Agencies. As you noted, my name is Stephanie Ball, and I am honoured to be here today to discuss my credentials and my experience as an intended appointee to the Landlord and Tenant Board.

I want to share some of my background to give you my perspective on qualifications and experience which have prepared me to serve in this role. I recently retired from my last professional role as executive dean in a community college, and now I am semi-retired. I have devoted my professional career to two areas I'm passionate about: law and education. I graduated from law school, then went on to practise in a small private practice for about eight years in the Durham region and then became executive director at a legal clinic in the region.

I'm sure that you are all aware of the exceptional service which legal clinics provide to marginalized clients in many areas of law, including workplace safety and insurance, social assistance, a number of others and, of course, of relevance to this particular matter, the landlord and tenant area. While working at the clinic, I represented clients primarily in many of these areas. Through this experience, I became familiar with a number of tribunals, learning their mandates, legislation, rules and practices. I represented clients at WSIB right up to the WSIAT appeal level, Criminal Injuries Compensation Board, landlord and tenant, employment insurance commission, just to name a few.

While this experience is dated, it provided me with a basic knowledge of the context in which Tribunals Ontario operate and an awareness of the rules and procedures which are unique to each tribunal.

After approximately eight years at the clinic, I joined a community college, teaching law courses. While in that role, a colleague and I developed two paralegal programs, both of which are approved by the ministry and offered at

Durham College. When the Law Society of Ontario required paralegal education to be accredited, I successfully led our team through the accreditation process. The programs continue to be offered today, and within a couple of years, prior to my retirement, I participated in the development of two degree programs, one of which has started last fall and the other of which is scheduled to start as soon as it finishes the accreditation process.

As you're probably aware, paralegals need to be licensed, and the college credential is the first step in the licensing process. Paralegals are key to providing representation before tribunals such as the Landlord and Tenant Board. And I was so pleased to be able to help develop all of my paralegals to take on this much-needed responsibility.

While teaching at Durham, I had the opportunity to join administration, which I did as a dean in 2005, and I continued in this role while taking on other responsibilities until I retired in 2022 as executive dean of both the School of Justice and Emergency Services and the School of Interdisciplinary Studies. This was an extremely demanding job which I really loved. The paralegal programs remained within my portfolio, and it was exciting to monitor the changes in the legal environment as we continued to develop good paralegal candidates.

My portfolio also included police foundations, law clerk, pre-service fire, victimology, 911 emergency response, paramedic programs and administering all of the general education courses for the college. My responsibilities included hiring faculty, managing the budgets for my schools, developing programs, keeping curriculum current and dealing with student concerns. These responsibilities put me in a continual position of using tact and diplomacy in mediating challenges and resolving disputes.

I also had the privilege, in the late 1990s and early 2000s, of serving on the Alcohol and Gaming Commission, which was a dual governance and adjudication role, and the Canada Pension Plan Review Tribunal, which was solely an adjudicative tribunal. These appointments provided extensive experience in the adjudicator role, enabling me to work with other panel members, provide legal expertise, learn about other statutes and regulations, and conduct hearings fairly and impartially.

As a lifelong resident of Durham region, I have taken advantage of many opportunities to volunteer in my community. I served on the Oshawa YWCA board of directors, the Whitby Hospital Foundation and Oshawa Hospital Foundation boards, as they were named then, Big Sisters and many others. I regularly participate in community fundraising efforts like Terry Fox and the CIBC Run for the Cure and have recruited hundreds of students to participate in these charitable events.

I managed to fulfill my career goals and volunteer work while navigating a busy family life. I'm very proud of the fact that my husband and I have raised seven children in a blended family to be contributors to supporting public education in Ontario and to now contributing to the provincial economy.

Currently, I'm enjoying my first few months as an adjudicator with the SBT, Social Benefits Tribunal.

I possess well-developed writing skills, good judgment, an ethical mindset and a strong work ethic. I have compassion, knowledge and experience, and feel that I could make a valuable contribution to the Landlord and Tenant Board.

I look forward to answering your questions.

The Chair (Mr. Will Bouma): Thank you very much for your presentation. With just under nine minutes left on the clock, we will turn to the government side, first question going to member Harris. Go ahead.

Mr. Mike Harris: Thank you, Stephanie, for appearing here today. I know virtually is often a lot easier than having to get to downtown Toronto, where it can take about 45 minutes to go one kilometre.

I just wanted to quickly touch a little bit on some of the volunteering in your community that you had brought up. Did you want to elaborate a little bit more on that and how you think your experience with those groups would lend to being able to effectively adjudicate on the Landlord and Tenant Board?

Ms. Stephanie Ball: Sure. Thank you for the question. The organizations I've been involved with have shown me one thing: All volunteer roles are greatly appreciated and needed in the community. In my case, in each of them, I was dealing with different needs in the community, whether it was funding for a hospital at a very high level, funding for legal services or support for women and children in challenging situations through the YWCA, and what it has shown me is that there's a never-ending need for those of us who can step up to step up and serve those who cannot.

This was a really important message for me to pass on in any professional role I've had, and I've done that at Durham College with students, engaging them in fundraising and volunteer activities in the community right from the time I took over as dean there. For example, we've had students participate in schools that one would say were a little bit marginalized within the community, gone into volunteer, help, and what I've learned from that is that it's a very rewarding experience for students and something that they take with them and never forget.

For me, this is applicable to the role at the Landlord and Tenant Board as it has given me an opportunity to work with many people from varied backgrounds and situations, and to get an appreciation of the different challenges that members of our community face. Working with people in those situations has given me that appreciation to take forward and feel the way that—

Mr. Mike Harris: Just a quick follow-up to that: The fact that you've had such an opportunity to work with students over the years—do you think that will help prepare you better and help you understand a little bit more some of the challenges when you have students that are coming before the Landlord and Tenant Board?

0910

Ms. Stephanie Ball: Absolutely. One of my roles was to deal with any issues that arose with students, as well as

mentoring them. Students in those situations are unrepresented, as we might want to say. They're very unsophisticated with some of the procedures and rules, and it gave me an opportunity to make sure that I could see things from their perspective when they're dealing with an unknown situation. So absolutely, it has.

Mr. Mike Harris: That's great. Thank you very much. I'll pass it over to one of my colleagues, Chair.

The Chair (Mr. Will Bouma): Thank you very much. With five minutes and 35 seconds left on the clock, member Dixon, go ahead.

Ms. Jess Dixon: Good morning, Ms. Ball. We all know that the Landlord and Tenant Board has some very high caseload volumes. This is not a position where one really ever achieves a clear inbox or really even seeing a dent in the inbox. There's also, obviously, with a lot of these decisions, in the back of your mind, the human quotient and the emotional quotient, but at the same time, there are strict and targeted processing times by which you have to deliver a decision. What kind of experience do you have of doing that type of caseload, and what is your plan or your visual of how you're going to handle it if you were in this position?

Ms. Stephanie Ball: The prior job I had at Durham College was extremely demanding—a lot of timelines that had to be met regularly. More recently, however, with the work that I've been doing at the Social Benefits Tribunal, I've had a significant enough caseload to be able to see how to manage that. Those cases are quite demanding in terms of time commitment, in terms of writing the decision, after hearing the decision, getting it reviewed and getting it issued.

I continue to meet those timelines, even though I'm still on, I would say, a bit of a learning curve with that. What I try to do is to try and stay extremely organized, have really good preparation for hearings, make sure I'm well informed as to what provisions might apply to a case before me, and to be able to conduct the hearing efficiently and then write the decision right after, if possible.

I'm an extremely organized person. It's the only way I've been able to run my life, ever. I don't anticipate that being a difficulty, although I am aware that it will be quite a daunting caseload.

Ms. Jess Dixon: Thank you.

The Chair (Mr. Will Bouma): To member Sandhu with three and a half minutes left.

Mr. Amarjot Sandhu: Thank you, Ms. Ball, for your presentation this morning. My question is, what do you believe it takes to be an effective member of the Landlord and Tenant Board?

Ms. Stephanie Ball: In the role of adjudicator, I need to be able to conduct fair and impartial hearings, to be able to be sensitive to people who are appearing before me—and by that, I mean whether they're represented or they're not represented. I have experience dealing with people who have been represented by extremely capable lawyers and paralegals and those who have not. So I think being able to balance that is really important, and to have compassion when you are conducting hearings, to appreciate

that it's an unknown situation for many people coming before the board—it may be the first time they've ever been in that type of situation.

I think it's important to be able to understand both sides of the argument that's being made, which I have a lot of experience doing. The ability to listen to the evidence, to interpret it and to apply it to the case law and to communicate well. I guess what I mean by that is, when writing the decision, be able to do it using user-friendly language so that people understand what is being said. My goal always in hearings is to make sure that people feel heard and that they feel that they've had an opportunity to present their case, that I've listened and I'm hearing what they've had to say and will take it into account when I'm making my decision.

I would say that and a knowledge of the legislation, the procedures, policies and any interim practices of the board would be really key.

The Chair (Mr. Will Bouma): Very good. A minute and 40 left.

To member Gallagher Murphy. Go ahead.

M^{me} Dawn Gallagher Murphy: Thank you, Ms. Ball, for being with us today. I appreciated hearing about your background and your experiences, which are varied, and I love the fact that you're organized—and you'd have to be organized raising seven children. My goodness. So, congratulations. Hats off for you, to do that.

My question to you—and I also see that you have been now with the SBT as an adjudicator. You've got a variety of a background. My question would be, how do you see all these various experiences that you have—and I love that you've got a mix of law and education. How would you think that's preparing you to work on the Landlord and Tenant Board?

Ms. Stephanie Ball: So, for me, the Landlord and Tenant Board is another adjudicative tribunal. Tribunal work in general has a lot of commonalities between them. Whether it's with that tribunal or with another one, I think that the transferrable skills that I bring prepare me for work at that specific tribunal. So, really, it's just a matter of identifying differences in the law, differences in practices and procedures, and being able to apply those to very similar situations that I'm dealing with now—

The Chair (Mr. Will Bouma): And we'll have to pause there. Thank you. Maybe you can finish with the opposition side.

We'll turn to the opposition, and member Glover going first, with 15 minutes.

Mr. Chris Glover: Thank you, Ms. Ball, for being here today and for putting your name forward for the Landlord and Tenant Board.

Let's see: You've gone through—you've got extensive experience in this. I really appreciate the volunteer work that you do in your community and also the fact, as member Gallagher Murphy mentioned, that you've raised seven children. I only raised two, and my hair is all grey now, so maybe I needed some more organizational skills; I don't know.

Anyway, there have been a few issues that the Landlord and Tenant Board is facing. I'm going to ask you a couple of questions about that. The first one is that it's been criticized for prioritizing eviction and above-guideline rent increases. How do you feel about the current priorities as set out by the Landlord and Tenant Board?

Ms. Stephanie Ball: As you're aware, I'm not a member of the board yet. Hopefully, after today and some other steps, I will be. So I am really not in a position to comment on that because I don't know that those are their priorities.

In terms of what their priorities might be, I don't think that's going to be my role. My role will be as an adjudicator, and that role will involve hearing cases and making decisions that are assigned to me at that point. So I look forward to hearing what the priorities would be during any subsequent onboarding process. I know the onboarding process at SBT was extremely good that way. So at that point, I may be in a better position to address that.

Mr. Chris Glover: Yes, you mentioned listening to the evidence and applying the case law. Have you read through the case law?

Ms. Stephanie Ball: Very superficially.

Mr. Chris Glover: Okay. And is there a difference between—I know you're sitting on the Social Benefits Tribunal. Is there an additional list of priorities besides what is in the case law? Or as an adjudicator, is it just—and maybe this isn't the question for you, but with your experience on the tribunal, is it just the case law, or is there also a set of priorities that the tribunal adjudicators are given?

Ms. Stephanie Ball: For me, as an adjudicator with SBT, I just hear the cases that come before me. So I am not aware of any priorities that have been established. And again, that wouldn't be my role. My role is to come in, do the hearings and write good decisions and conduct the hearings. That's what I'm really striving to do well, and that's what I would do at the Landlord and Tenant Board as well.

Mr. Chris Glover: Okay. Thank you. Let's see: You mentioned—and somebody has already talked about the backlog. The Landlord and Tenant Board is one of the highest profile in backlogged tribunals in the province. A report from Ontario Ombudsman in May 2023 stated that the Landlord and Tenant Board was “fundamentally failing” to fulfill its mandate. The backlog of cases has grown up to 38,000 hearings, taking an average of seven to eight months to be scheduled, and with some people even waiting up to two years to have their cases heard. You mentioned that one of the things that you can do to try to expedite things is just being organized and being well prepared when the hearings take place. Do you have other suggestions for the Landlord and Tenant Board to reduce the caseload?

0920

Ms. Stephanie Ball: I think that would be a little presumptuous for me to say that at this point. Those are decisions that need to be made by the board. I'm sure that people who are in those positions are considering those issues and coming up with solutions that work. I know

backlogs can be addressed. They were addressed at the SBT, and very successfully, and I'm sure that those efforts are ongoing as well.

Again, my role in that, I think, would be to conduct hearings, make myself available for hearings and assist with addressing the backlog by actually trying to do the hearings as fast as I can.

Mr. Chris Glover: How were they addressed at the Social Benefits Tribunal?

Ms. Stephanie Ball: I'm not sure. I have only been on there for about six months. I do know from regular meetings we've had that the backlog is no longer an issue.

Mr. Chris Glover: Okay. Thank you. Do you own any rental properties yourself?

Ms. Stephanie Ball: No.

Mr. Chris Glover: Okay. The Landlord and Tenant Board has moved to a digital-first strategy, meaning that virtual hearings are the default hearing format, with in-person requests rarely being granted. Experts across the province have criticized this move due to the accessibility barriers it creates, especially for lower-income people who may not have regular access to the Internet.

What is your stance on whether this digital-first approach contributes to the ongoing backlog issues within the Landlord and Tenant Board?

Ms. Stephanie Ball: I don't know how it affects the Landlord and Tenant Board, but in my past few months of experience with the Social Benefits Tribunal, I can tell you that the digital hearings have gone extremely well. We have many unrepresented people who come forward using that system, and I have found that what it has done is actually increased some accessibility for people who may not otherwise have been able to appear.

For example, we deal with disability issues, and some people have disabilities that do not permit them to readily leave their homes. They're now permitted to conduct a full hearing from the comfort of their home. So that's a factor as well, as well as being geographically distant from places that they may have to attend in person.

I think it has been very effective in dealing with hearings at SBT, and that's the experience that I've had at this point.

Mr. Chris Glover: During the pandemic, we heard of a number of cases where people were trying to call in. Some people didn't have a cell phone or didn't have a computer. One person was trying to call in to a hearing on a pay phone and just kept getting cut off. Have you had experiences like that at the SBT?

Ms. Stephanie Ball: Not that weren't resolved; let me put it that way. What I think is really key to this way of doing hearings is having a really strong administrative support system in place. That's what I have found has worked really well at SBT. If there's a problem, people get on the phone and straighten it out right away. I haven't had any problems that haven't been able to be resolved to enable the hearing to go forward at this point.

Mr. Chris Glover: Okay. At SBT, are there options for people if they don't have a home computer and don't have home Internet, that the tribunal will try to set them up with access to the Internet so they can?

Ms. Stephanie Ball: Yes. My understanding is that phones have been made available to people, to enable them to join a hearing.

Mr. Chris Glover: Okay. Thank you. I'm going to pass it over to my colleague. Thank you so much for being here.

The Chair (Mr. Will Bouma): Seven minutes and 40 seconds left. We'll go to member Pasma.

Ms. Chandra Pasma: Thank you very much, Ms. Ball, for being here this morning. I know it's not always the most comfortable process to be grilled before an appointment, but it's an incredibly important part of our democratic process. It gives people the confidence that appointments are being made based on merit rather than connections to the government, and it's a process that, quite frankly, the government doesn't always allow us to practise in Ontario.

I want to continue on this issue of the digital-first strategy, because it is one of the biggest complaints that I hear from constituents in my riding of Ottawa West-Nepean, that there is a very big difference in access to these digital hearings between landlords and tenants. Landlords are far more likely to have home computers, good Internet access at home; tenants are far more likely to not have that, to be trying to call in by phone.

Community Legal Services of Ottawa has told me how confusing it is for their clients, how often they're not even sure when their case is being called, how difficult it is to follow on the phone when you can't see who's actually speaking. There's actually a group in Ontario that has taken the Landlord and Tenant Board to the Human Rights Tribunal over the digital-first approach. The Ombudsman reports in 2023 how confusing and disorganized a virtual hearing is.

In theory, under the digital-first strategy, participants are allowed to ask for an in-person hearing. The problem is that that is almost never being granted. So my question to you is, if you become a part-time member of the Landlord and Tenant Board, will you grant an in-person hearing if the tenant or the landlord is asking for that?

Ms. Stephanie Ball: I can't answer that question right now. Not being there yet, I don't know what the policies and procedures are and what the directions are with respect to when someone would be entitled to that type of hearing. That really is a policy question. My role is simply to adjudicate based on what I hear in front of me and what has been assigned to me. I look forward to hearing more about that during the onboarding process. I can tell by the fact that you and your colleague have both brought it up that it appears to be a very serious issue, so I look forward to hearing more about that when and if I'm able to join the Landlord and Tenant Board.

Ms. Chandra Pasma: Okay. But if you are making a decision based on what's in front of you, and what's in front of you is affected by the ability of one party or the other to actually participate in the hearing, do you acknowledge that that would then have a significant effect on the outcome because you might not be getting the full picture of what's actually happening in the situation?

Ms. Stephanie Ball: In conducting hearings, one of our roles is to conduct fair and impartial hearings. The fairness

part means that I would need to be able to hear from both parties as to what their side of the dispute is. I always err on the side of fairness, and that's really all I can say at this point.

Ms. Chandra Pasma: Okay. Thank you. Have you ever been a renter yourself?

Ms. Stephanie Ball: When I was in university, yes—a lifetime ago, yes.

Ms. Chandra Pasma: Okay. And when you worked at the Durham legal clinic, were you mostly representing tenants, landlords, a mix of both?

Ms. Stephanie Ball: No. Community legal clinics, at that point, and I'm sure now as well, only represented tenants.

Ms. Chandra Pasma: Okay. So you do have experience in what tenants in Ontario are actually experiencing right now and the power imbalance that they experience in the rental market?

Ms. Stephanie Ball: I'm sorry; what was the question?

Ms. Chandra Pasma: You do have experience in the situation faced by renters in Ontario and the power imbalance between renters and landlords in the current rental market?

Ms. Stephanie Ball: I'm aware of the situations of tenants through my experience and my ongoing involvement with legal clinics, yes.

Ms. Chandra Pasma: Okay. I'm going to ask some quick, uncomfortable but necessary questions. Have you ever been a member of the Progressive Conservative Party provincially?

Ms. Stephanie Ball: Yes.

Ms. Chandra Pasma: Are you currently a member?

Ms. Stephanie Ball: No.

Ms. Chandra Pasma: Okay. How long were you a member?

Ms. Stephanie Ball: I was a member back in the 1980s and 1990s continually for about 10 or 15 years.

Ms. Chandra Pasma: Okay. Have you ever been a member of the Conservative Party federally?

Ms. Stephanie Ball: Yes.

Ms. Chandra Pasma: Are you currently a member?

Ms. Stephanie Ball: I don't believe so.

Ms. Chandra Pasma: Okay. How recently were you a member?

Ms. Stephanie Ball: During the last leadership challenge. I joined at that point, and then that's it.

Ms. Chandra Pasma: Okay. Have you donated to the Conservative Party federally?

Ms. Stephanie Ball: I don't believe so.

Ms. Chandra Pasma: Okay. Have you donated to the Progressive Conservative Party provincially?

Ms. Stephanie Ball: I don't believe so, other than the cost of the membership.

Ms. Chandra Pasma: Have you volunteered on any Conservative campaigns federally or provincially?

Ms. Stephanie Ball: Yes, but many, many years ago, well over 10 years ago.

Ms. Chandra Pasma: Okay. Have you ever sat at the Premier's table at a family wedding?

0930

Ms. Stephanie Ball: No.

Ms. Chandra Pasma: Okay. And did anyone ask you to apply for this position?

Ms. Stephanie Ball: The position on the Landlord and Tenant Board?

Ms. Chandra Pasma: Yes.

Ms. Stephanie Ball: Actually, I was approached by my vice-chair at SBT, who indicated that there was some interest in cross-appointing some members and asked whether I would be interested in being one of them. I said yes, I would.

Ms. Chandra Pasma: Okay. Thank you.

I'm going to turn it back over to MPP Glover, Chair.

The Chair (Mr. Will Bouma): Member Glover, a minute and 20 seconds.

Mr. Chris Glover: You've said a couple of times that you believe the role of the tribunal is to provide fair and impartial hearings based on the case law and the evidence that's before you. That's correct, right?

Ms. Stephanie Ball: Yes.

Mr. Chris Glover: Okay, I've heard you correctly. So if you were asked if your values aligned with a government official or a minister and that was part of the reason for the appointment, would that be inappropriate?

Ms. Stephanie Ball: Okay, sorry—what was the question again?

Mr. Chris Glover: If you were asked whether your values aligned with a government minister, would that be an inappropriate means of recruiting a tribunal adjudicator?

Ms. Stephanie Ball: If my values aligned, would that mean—

Mr. Chris Glover: If you were asked, "Do your values align with a particular minister?" I'm asking this because the Attorney General has said that he is recruiting judicial appointments looking for people with similar values to his own. I'm not asking if you have been asked this, but is that an appropriate use of that authority, or does that restrict people's right to an impartial hearing?

The Chair (Mr. Will Bouma): Unfortunately, we'll never the answer to that question as we're out of time.

But, Ms. Ball, thank you very, very much for joining committee. I really appreciated hearing about your service to your profession, to education, to your family and to the people of Ontario. Thank you very much for joining us today.

We will move on. You're welcome to stay and listen, or you are now free to go. Thank you very much for joining us today.

MS. SONYA VELLENGA

Review of intended appointment, selected by government party: Sonya Vellenga, intended appointee as member, Custody Review Board.

The Chair (Mr. Will Bouma): Members, our second intended appointee today is Sonya Vellenga, nominated as member of the Custody Review Board.

You're here? Very good. You may make an initial statement at your discretion. Following this, there will be questions from members of the committee. With that questioning, we will start with the government, followed by the official opposition, with 15 minutes allocated to each recognized party. Any time you take in your statement will be deducted from the time allotted to the government.

Again, Ms. Vellenga, thank you very much for joining us today. You may make your initial statement at your discretion.

Ms. Sonya Vellenga: Good morning. Thank you. I do have a prepared statement. It's in front of me, so I will be looking down.

Good morning, Mr. Chair, Mr. Vice-Chair and honourable members of the Standing Committee on Government Agencies. My name is Sonya Vellenga, and I'm honoured to be here today to discuss my credentials and my experience as an intended appointee as a part-time member of the Custody Review Board.

I currently reside in Lindsay, where I practise my career as a social worker, holding many important and challenging portfolios over the span of my career, introducing me to many diverse and unique individuals, many who have experienced pain and suffering in their life journey.

I've recently retired from the Trillium Lakelands District School Board, where I was employed for the past five years as their district manager of mental health services. In this role, I supported educators and mental health counsellors in their work with students who identified with mental health concerns. Our time period of online school provided unique challenges for the entire education system, and mental health concerns of our students increased. I was able to help navigate and respond to these challenges.

The role also required that I inform the review and development of non-academic plans for students who were expelled from the school environment. As the mental health lead, I also liaised with School Mental Health Ontario, and most recently was able to manage the PreVenture program, which is an early-intervention CBT program for youth addressing mental health and substance use. This was a collaborative between Haliburton's youth hub, CMHA and TLDSB. As the senior manager with TLDSB, I provided consultation to the management team on policies and practices related to sex trafficking, capacity and consent, duty to report, and relevant legislation that informs these areas.

In my early history in the social services field, while completing my bachelor of social work, I've had employment in the youth justice field, the mental health field, the domestic violence field and the developmental field, and these experiences informed my decision to join child welfare, where I worked for 10 years front-line and then an additional eight years in management.

Prior to joining the management team, I completed my master's of social work at McMaster University in Hamilton in 1997. The primary objective of this thesis-based program was to provide opportunities for students to apply critical analysis of social work practices and policies. My thesis at that time focused on restorative justice for youth

in what was then known as Victoria county. This research included a thorough review of historic practices, particularly those informed by Indigenous practices, and an examination of community values and readiness for hosting a restorative approach for youth who commit crime in Victoria county.

In child welfare, I was honoured to play a role in many areas: intake, child and care, family services, kinship, family preservation. At that time, we had a child welfare response for Curve Lake and Hiawatha. I was also a provincial trainer with the Ontario association of CASs, delivering child welfare training to Kawartha-Haliburton, Durham, Hastings and Northumberland CASs in the areas of wellness, separation and loss, and alternative dispute resolution. I was afforded key senior leadership roles related to specific projects, such as accreditation, community capacity building, disclosure and quality assurance.

I was able to share my expertise at Fleming College in a part-time capacity for 10 years, and in addition to curriculum development and teaching in a number of courses, I also worked alongside the Ontario Association of CASs in their redevelopment of curriculum for new workers in the field of child protection.

My primary teaching focus has been abuse across the lifespan, and the various legislations, acts and systems that respond to abuse in Ontario society. As a professional in the community, over the course of my career, I supported many new college and university students who were completing their internships in the social service field.

In 2018, for a period of five years, I had the privilege of working in a sexual assault centre as the executive director. In that time period, I informed and managed a number of really unique projects. In 2014, I was able to share testimony with the provincial Select Committee on Sexual Violence and Harassment, and recommendations from this committee included a province-wide strategy to combat human trafficking and promote more collaborative services to help trafficked survivors.

In 2015, in my role at the centre, I was able to meet with the OHL commissioner and share with the OHL how our centre and others across Ontario could provide training for their players, and from there, the OHL Onside program was developed, and it continues to run today.

As I begin my retirement journey, I realize I have a strong desire to continue to contribute to my field, and I have been actively considering what this contribution might look like. I have long been interested in the work of tribunals, having been introduced to their role in my professional career. I've been fortunate to experience a broad range of social service systems in Ontario, and I believe this expanse of experience will serve the Custody Review Board well.

I'm an effective listener, a critical thinker and an individual who is able to communicate well with members of the public. And while I'm contributing to my community in my retirement, I also desire to contribute in a larger capacity, and this provincial appointment is well suited to my expertise and interests.

I thank you for your time this morning, and I appreciate your work in your communities and all that you do to advance our province.

The Chair (Mr. Will Bouma): Thank you so much for that presentation. We very much appreciate hearing a little bit about you.

We will now turn to the government side, with eight and a half minutes on the clock. Member Dixon, go ahead.

Ms. Jess Dixon: Thank you for coming this morning, Ms. Vellenga. I come from Waterloo region, and my background was a crown prosecutor, for eight years, so I'm really delighted to hear about your background in restorative justice. It's something important to me. I also know that you were a really big champion for the sexual assault centre of Waterloo region's curriculum program. I know that you were one of the main drivers of getting that up to Kawartha, so congratulations.

I wonder if you can talk a little bit more about how you think that that sort of background in really seeing restorative justice being done, and also being such a driver for educating kids in that kind of exploitation awareness—how do you see yourself bringing that to your potential role on the Custody Review Board?

0940

Ms. Sonya Vellenga: I think because I've have had such a broad range of experiences in a number of different systems, I have a good sense of the questions to ask in that review process. And so, I hope to bring that critical lens to my review process with the board. I also hope to learn more as I hope to begin this journey with the review board.

Ms. Jess Dixon: If I may, Chair: I am really interested in what you said about the questions, about having that expertise. Do you feel that because of this, you might be able to spot issues or things that somebody with less experience might not be as likely to catch?

Ms. Sonya Vellenga: I certainly believe that at this stage in my career, given my introduction to so many different people in situations, that will inform the questions I ask. And also, the curious questions that people might not think about asking: I do believe my experiences will help that. I'm able to look at the micro and the macro in a good, clear way, I believe.

Ms. Jess Dixon: Thank you, Ms. Vellenga. Thank you, Chair.

The Chair (Mr. Will Bouma): Thank you. To member McGregor with six minutes on the clock.

Mr. Graham McGregor: Thanks, Ms. Vellenga for putting your name forward. Looking at your resume and hearing about your experience, I'm very enthused.

I'm also very happy to see the experience you have in the Kawarthas and Haliburton. For 15 years in Ontario, a lot of people felt that the government didn't realize that the government went farther east than Scarborough, so it's been really important that we have that equitable regional representation here, which is important.

And we want to make sure that we're getting the best people for the job, which for 15 years, under the Liberal government, didn't always happen. So I'm very, very happy with the experience. Can you talk to me a bit about

your previous work at Trillium Lakelands District School Board and with the Kawartha Sexual Assault Centre—

Interjections.

Mr. Graham McGregor: Sorry, guys. I'm asking a question.

In your previous work—

Interjections.

Mr. Graham McGregor: Guys. The witness is—

The Chair (Mr. Will Bouma): Order. The member has the floor.

Mr. Graham McGregor: Sorry, Ms. Vellenga. Sorry about my colleagues.

Ms. Sonya Vellenga: That's okay.

Mr. Graham McGregor: In your previous work, you would have had to deal with heavy caseloads. Can you talk about some of the best practices that you put forward in managing busy workloads, heavy caseloads, and how that experience will help you in this new position?

Ms. Sonya Vellenga: Okay. Having not yet joined the board, I don't know what the caseload looks like with the Custody Review Board.

I do know that caseloads at a school board are very different from caseloads at a sexual assault centre. The sexual assault centre had a 24-hour crisis line, so your caseload was that you didn't turn people away; you always responded to people through the various means in which a client contacted the centre. Whereas the school board is on a different time clock, and those different time clocks affect caseloads. Similar to the CAS, it's a 24-hour operation, and so your caseloads look different there.

So I am not sure what the caseload will look like at the Custody Review Board, but I've have certainly been introduced to the diverse set of caseloads in any of those agencies.

Mr. Graham McGregor: And you feel equipped? You'll be equipped to manage it?

Ms. Sonya Vellenga: Absolutely.

Mr. Graham McGregor: Awesome.

I'll pass it on to my colleagues.

The Chair (Mr. Will Bouma): Turning to member Pang, with three minutes and 25 seconds on the clock.

Mr. Billy Pang: Thank you, Sonya, for your presentation and your experience. It is evidence that in your advocacy, you have an extensive background. So how does your work, volunteer, and academic experience assist you in being a fair and impartial adjudicator on the board?

Ms. Sonya Vellenga: My academic experience—I'll start there. As I shared, I did my master's degree at McMaster, and I chose to do a thesis on restorative justice. Restorative justice contains elements of impartiality, if you will, in that if you, for example, move forward with a restorative justice circle of community members, you'd want your members to join that circle with an open air, versus taking one side or the other.

So I would say, in my research, in my academic studies, in my understanding of who clients are and what their rights are in terms of being listened to in a fair and impartial way, not coming to judgment before they've shared what they need to share or asked what they needed to ask,

in all of my experiences, that was probably the number one trait that I needed to have, that I could welcome a client and hear them in an impartial way, regard-less of whether it was a child protection concern or a school board concern or a sexual assault. Then, as well, as a manager, that's part of my role in managing front-line people, to hear them in a fair and impartial way.

Mr. Billy Pang: Thank you for the answer.

The Chair (Mr. Will Bouma): Very good. Now, with just over a minute left, we will turn to member Gallagher Murphy.

M^{me} Dawn Gallagher Murphy: Thank you, Ms. Vellenga. Thank you very much for being here. I love your background. I can tell you are very empathetic as well as very fair in the way you approach things, so thank you for that.

Something that was mentioned here was your experience with the Northumberland CAS, and it talked about alternative dispute resolution. I'm wondering if there are any additional insights with the work you did there that you think would be beneficial for the committee to consider.

Ms. Sonya Vellenga: Well, that's a good question. I think I'll answer that question to say that I'm a strong believer in restorative justice. I'm a strong believer in alternative dispute resolution mechanisms. I also am—

The Chair (Mr. Will Bouma): And we will pause there. Thank you very much, but the time's up for the government.

We will now turn to the official opposition with 15 minutes, with member Pasma going first.

Ms. Chandra Pasma: Before I launch into my preamble, Ms. Vellenga, did you want to finish your answer to the previous question?

Ms. Sonya Vellenga: I'll just say that as an appointee to the Custody Review Board, I'd follow their process, which I'm hoping to learn about in April.

Ms. Chandra Pasma: Okay. Well, thank you very much for being here with us this morning, Ms. Vellenga, and for putting your name forward. I know it's not the most comfortable process to appear before the committee and be grilled on your experience, but it's a very important part of the democratic process so that the people of Ontario can have confidence that our public appointments are being made on the basis of merit and that people have the appropriate qualifications for the job that they're doing. It's not always a process that the government allows us to follow, but we really appreciate you being here this morning and taking the time for this.

Given your extensive experience in many different areas, I'm wondering, what would you say is your main motivation for seeking this appointment?

Ms. Sonya Vellenga: My main motivation is that I do have a lot of experience and I'm not ready to say goodbye to that. I want to continue to be involved and I want to provide a service to the province and to the tribunals, and I believe this is a really good fit for me.

Ms. Chandra Pasma: Okay. Thank you. Given your experience working with youth, what would you say, in

your opinion, is the biggest challenge facing today's generation of at-risk youth, and how would this affect your decision on the appropriate placement of young people?

0950

Ms. Sonya Vellenga: What would I say? Well, certainly, there are a lot of issues facing youth today. Certainly, I've been exposed to that in my career. How that will influence my role on the tribunal—I've yet to participate in the training, but certainly, in my understanding, I would be considering the questions and the review process within the parameters of the legislation.

Ms. Chandra Pasma: Okay. So if there's more than one big challenge facing youth, what would you say are the big challenges facing youth today?

Ms. Sonya Vellenga: If there's more than one?

Ms. Chandra Pasma: Well, you said there were several, but you didn't actually list any, so I'm just wondering what you—

Ms. Sonya Vellenga: I did say there were several. It's a really hopeful time for youth right now, and it's a really challenging time for youth right now, and I would say that youth are still regrouping post-pandemic.

Ms. Chandra Pasma: Well, one of the biggest challenges I hear about as my party's education critic is mental health challenges for youth and the lack of mental health supports. The government has announced they intend to build more jails, despite the fact we already have lengthy court backlogs and trial delays. But the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health has said that, relative to its burden on the population, mental health is underfunded by \$1.5 billion.

Now, I know it's not up to you whether we have more jails or not, but do you think there needs to be appropriate mental health programming for youth who are in custody?

Ms. Sonya Vellenga: For anyone who is in custody, it would be helpful to have appropriate mental health counselling.

Ms. Chandra Pasma: Right. So one of the conversations that I've had with the John Howard Society in Ottawa and others, including many social workers, is that the more access that someone has to programming while they are in custody, the more likely they are to succeed at reintegrating once their sentence has ended, the less likely they are to slide into recidivism and to be on a continual journey with the criminal justice system.

The Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services acknowledges that when a youth is in an open custody facility, they have access to much more community programming. So, how in your role would you prioritize access to community programming?

Ms. Sonya Vellenga: In my role? I will have to see how I do that in my role. Certainly, community programming for youth is beneficial. Sometimes you struggle in getting to community programming in terms of their own motivation. And so, how in my role—I will need to be an impartial person in the process that I am engaged with, and I'm not sure how my role will allow for increased programming.

Ms. Chandra Pasma: Okay, but given your experience in restorative justice, do you think that access to programming is an important consideration when you are reviewing the placement of a youth in custody and determining if the placement is appropriate?

Ms. Sonya Vellenga: I think access to programming is an important consideration, yes.

Ms. Chandra Pasma: Okay, thank you.

I will turn it over to MPP Glover.

The Chair (Mr. Will Bouma): Very good. Member Glover, with nine minutes.

Mr. Chris Glover: Thank you so much, Ms. Vellenga. Thank you so much for putting your name forward for this, and especially bringing your incredible experience, potentially, to this board.

I'm going to ask a fairly broad question to begin with, and if you need a moment to think about it, take that moment. How important is it that we have fair and impartial adjudicators at tribunals in this province, and why?

Ms. Sonya Vellenga: It's very important that we have impartial adjudicators. And why? Because the public depends on that. The public depends on a process and a system that is based on an impartial process rather than based on a personal process.

Mr. Chris Glover: Okay. So it's actually—I think it's section 11(d) of the charter that actually guarantees us the right to a hearing before a fair and impartial tribunal. If we do not have that, what can happen?

Ms. Sonya Vellenga: If we do not have that, what can happen? Well, I—

Mr. Chris Glover: If, for example, an adjudicator is not impartial or independent.

Ms. Sonya Vellenga: I think if an adjudicator is not impartial or independent then it has a direct negative impact on the whole system of tribunals.

Mr. Chris Glover: Okay, thank you. I raised this question because the Attorney General has actually stated that he's choosing judges, appointing judges who have values similar to his own. I won't ask you further questions about that, but I do appreciate your stand in defence of the Charter of Rights to have fair and impartial adjudicators.

Now, the other thing that you've done a lot of work on is human trafficking. This is something that I've been working on. I'm one of the co-sponsors of an all-party bill to remove fraudulent debts that are incurred by people who have been trafficked. In your experience, have you come across survivors of trafficking who have incurred debts from their trafficker? Has their trafficker taken credit cards on their names etc.?

Ms. Sonya Vellenga: I have not come across individuals who have incurred debts. Rather, the individuals that I've worked with really had nothing to start with.

Mr. Chris Glover: I see. Okay. Well, thank you for your work in support of people who are survivors of human trafficking.

I have a couple of quick, uncomfortable but necessary questions: Have you ever been a member of the Progressive Conservative Party provincially?

Ms. Sonya Vellenga: No.

Mr. Chris Glover: Have you ever been a member of the Conservative Party federally?

Ms. Sonya Vellenga: In 1997, I supported a federal Conservative candidate, and in 2015, I supported a federal NDP candidate.

Mr. Chris Glover: Okay.

Ms. Sonya Vellenga: I think I might have been a member to support them, but I—

Interjections.

The Chair (Mr. Will Bouma): Order.

Mr. Chris Glover: I will say you became more enlightened as time went on, I take it.

Okay, let's see: Have you ever donated to the Progressive Conservative Party?

Ms. Sonya Vellenga: Not to the provincial party, but I think that in 1997 I probably supported with a fee. In 2015, I don't believe I provided any financial support; I provided some campaign support.

Mr. Chris Glover: Okay. Did anyone ask you to apply for this position?

Ms. Sonya Vellenga: No.

Mr. Chris Glover: No? Okay. Thank you.

Those are all my questions. I'll pass it.

The Chair (Mr. Will Bouma): Very good.

Mr. John Fraser: How much time?

The Chair (Mr. Will Bouma): Four minutes left, if the opposition would like to give their time over. Yes. Member Fraser with four and a half minutes.

Mr. John Fraser: Thank you very much for appearing here today and having to sit through a little back and forth here between folks, which you may or may not have heard—definitely not indicative of your candidacy and your candid answers for the things that were asked of you.

Now, in terms of writing decisions as a member of a review board, will you have responsibility in this position to write decisions?

Ms. Sonya Vellenga: I believe so.

Mr. John Fraser: You believe so. Are you comfortable writing decisions?

Ms. Sonya Vellenga: Yes, I am.

Mr. John Fraser: Okay. Have you had experience before in writing decisions?

Ms. Sonya Vellenga: Not for a tribunal. This is my first.

Mr. John Fraser: Yes, okay. I'm just asking a question. It's not a prerequisite. I just wanted to ascertain that.

Ms. Sonya Vellenga: I'm a strong writer. I have confidence in my writing ability.

Mr. John Fraser: Yes, because it's the application of administrative justice. It can be—I want to say a tedious affair in the sense of trying to write very clear decisions, and that's important. I'm glad that you're comfortable with that. It sometimes takes a number of drafts to get the thing that you want to avoid the appeal, and as you said earlier, just ensuring that there is fairness there and that things appear to be fair. So I think your background will help you greatly in this, and I appreciate the fact that

you've put your name forward and come before this committee.

1000

Thank you very much, Chair.

The Chair (Mr. Will Bouma): No, thank you.

So, we will move on from there. Again, Ms. Vellenga, thank you very much for appearing before us today. All of us very much appreciate your service to your community and to the most vulnerable in your community. You can stay on the line, but otherwise, we're all set with you. Again, thank you very, very much for being here and for your willingness to serve the people of Ontario in this capacity.

Colleagues, we will now move on to concurrences. We will now consider the intended appointment of Stephanie Ball, nominated as member of the Landlord and Tenant Board. Member Harris.

Mr. Mike Harris: I move concurrence in the intended appointment of Stephanie Ball, nominated as a member of the Landlord and Tenant Board.

The Chair (Mr. Will Bouma): Concurrence in the appointment has been moved by member Harris. Is there any discussion on that motion? Seeing none, are members ready to vote? All those in favour? That is unanimous. Thank you very much. Carried.

We will now consider the intended appointment of Sonya Vellenga, nominated as member of the Custody Review Board. Member Harris has the motion.

Mr. Mike Harris: I move concurrence in the intended appointment of Sonya Vellenga, nominated as a member of the Custody Review Board.

The Chair (Mr. Will Bouma): Concurrence in the appointment has been moved by member Harris. Is there any discussion on that motion? Seeing none, are members ready to vote? All those in favour? Again, unanimous. Congratulations, and thank you for joining us today.

Okay. Members, moving on, the deadline to review the intended appointments of Don Robertson, Joshua Labbe, Barbara Proctor, Sabina Bredin and Georges Lariviere, selected from the February 23, 2024, certificate, is March 24, 2024. Is there unanimous consent to extend the deadline to consider the intended appointments to April 23, 2024? I heard a no.

Our next item on the agenda will be resuming the debate adjourned on March 7, 2024, on the motion moved by member Glover. I believe member Glover had the floor. Go ahead.

Mr. Chris Glover: At this point in the discussion, am I explaining why we need this or am I reading the motion?

The Chair (Mr. Will Bouma): I believe it's your justification for your motion.

Mr. Chris Glover: Okay. So my motion is that the committee conduct a study of the Ontario Place Corp. and meet for public hearings. This is part of the mandate of this committee, to review public agencies like the Ontario Place Corp. In light of what's happening, the redevelopment process that's happening at Ontario Place, I believe the public should have an opportunity to weigh in on the redevelopment plans and the process that got us here.

There are a number of concerns that have been raised in both the media and by the public about the redevelopment plans, including the commitment that was mentioned in the Auditor General's report for a 2,000-spot underground parking garage. The estimated cost of that parking garage to the taxpayers of Ontario is \$450 million. There's also an estimated \$200 million of infrastructure renewal that's taking place at Ontario Place, again being footed by the taxpayers, only to turn over the majority of the property to two private, for-profit corporations: one from the United States, one from Austria.

There are also concerns about the process by which these applicants were chosen. Therme, for example, was late in the process. The allotted time was extended, and one of the late applicants was Therme. We also found out just yesterday—it was released through freedom of information—that there's a phase 2 plan for Ontario Place that involves filling in a portion of the lake. This was not disclosed to the public by the government at any previous time, and we only found out about it through a freedom-of-information request.

So at no point in this process has the government been transparent. At no point did they consult with the community before decisions were made. In fact, they made decisions, announced the decisions and then organized some public consultations.

At one of the public consultations last summer, a colleague of mine was there and asked one of the staff members from Therme, "Why are you building on the island? The city has offered a site across the street at the CNE grounds." They said the staff member said, "Cheap rent." In fact, it's not just cheap rent; the estimated cost to taxpayers is \$650 million. Plus, with the additional plan to demolish or to close the current science centre and move that science centre, the Auditor General's report that came out in the fall estimated that the additional cost of doing that, rather than just refurbishing and rejuvenating the science centre where it is, is at least \$300 million. So we're up to a billion tax dollars that are being spent on this project, and there's been no proper public hearing. There's been no committee hearings on this.

So the motion that I have before this committee is to have public hearings so that the people of Ontario have an opportunity to come to this committee, to speak to this committee, to raise concerns, to ask questions and to bring some transparency to this process.

The Chair (Mr. Will Bouma): Is there any further discussion or debate or questions? Member Fraser.

Mr. John Fraser: I support this motion, and I would like to say to the members opposite that I know the dates may look a bit tight because we're going into—it's next week, right?

Interjection.

Mr. John Fraser: So, when you're considering this, I think if your inclination is to say no because of the dates, we can always do it a couple of weeks later. It's at the discretion of the Chair. We can have special sittings.

If it's right and it's good for Ontario taxpayers, why is it hidden? Why is it hidden? Why is it hard for someone to

come here before committee and tell us, now that the deal is done—why is it hidden? Now we hear about this phase 2, and no one is saying yes, no, otherwise. So it's just this culture of secrecy. I think that is disturbing. If it's good, if it's good for Toronto, if it's good for Ontario, tell us why. It's that simple. Tell us why a 99-year lease for a building that might last 40 years is a good thing, why spending \$450 million on a parking garage when 2.2 million Ontarians don't have a primary care practitioner is a good idea, or we don't have enough EAs in our schools. I think those are fair questions.

I don't anticipate that this motion is going to pass. I think that's a reasonable thing to say, just given what the government and probably how the corner office feels about something like this happening. But at some point, people have to know how you're spending their money, and then they get to make a decision about whether you're doing the right thing or not. If you don't tell them, it just gives us all reasons to be suspicious of you—not you as individuals, but suspicious of what's going on here.

Somebody asked yesterday, "Is development a bad thing?" I said, "No, but I just wish somebody would tell us what their reasons were or weren't for doing something or doing nothing." I don't think that's unreasonable.

Anyhow, thanks. I won't take up any more time.

The Chair (Mr. Will Bouma): Any further discussion, debate? Member Pasma.

Ms. Chandra Pasma: I also want to speak in support of this motion. If government members truly believe that this is the right decision for the people of Ontario and it is not benefiting a private developer at the expense of Ontarians, then certainly you would want that case to be on the record so that people could see it. And there would be nothing, certainly, that you would want to hide from the public record, so certainly no reason why you wouldn't want to allow these hearings to proceed.

Yesterday, we learned more information about the plan, including the plan to pave over part of Lake Ontario. The minister seemed to think that this had been very clear all along, that this was part of the plan and that there was nothing hidden. But if the minister genuinely believes that all the facts are already on the public record, then surely there's no reason why we can't have hearings at the committee to review these facts that are supposedly on the public record already.

As the saying goes, democracy dies in darkness. Surely government members who want to see a strong democracy, who want to see strong public confidence in their government, would want there to be as much sunshine as possible on this deal, so I urge government members to vote in favour of this motion and allow the public to see—to really see—what you think is a good decision.

The Chair (Mr. Will Bouma): Member Glover, go ahead.

Mr. Chris Glover: I'll just add a couple of things. The motion before this committee is to conduct a study of the Ontario Place Corp. and meet and have public hearings on this. Part of the reason I brought this motion forward is because of the cost.

As my colleague just said, democracy dies in darkness. This government has been boasting about this project.

They have spent two million tax dollars advertising this project, and yet we keep finding out through freedom-of-information requests that there are aspects of this project that we were not aware of, that the public was not aware of, including this phase 2 and the plan to pave over a part of the lake, part of Lake Ontario, to connect the east island to the mainland so that it's no longer an island.

There has been no environmental assessment. Ontario Place is on a bird migration route across Lake Ontario. There are 25 million birds a year that die from window collisions. The government is proposing to build a 700,000-square-foot glass dome on this migration route without an environmental assessment.

Their plan is to cut down 850 trees and the ecosystem that that includes. The ecosystem includes 129 bird species, mink, fox, beavers and other wildlife. And this is not some spot outside. This is a spot in downtown Toronto. It's a very rare ecosystem, and so there at least should be an environmental assessment or people with—the environmentalists and other community members should have an opportunity to come to this committee to have an opportunity to ask the government questions and to state their concerns about this project.

So I hope that all government members, if you believe that this project, the Ontario Place redevelopment, is in the

best interests of the people of Ontario, you will be transparent and you will support this motion so that we can have committee meetings on the plans for redevelopment with the Ontario Place Corp. Thank you.

The Chair (Mr. Will Bouma): Further debate? Discussion? Further debate? Seeing none, are members ready to vote?

Mr. John Fraser: Recorded vote.

The Chair (Mr. Will Bouma): Recorded vote being asked for.

Ayes

Fraser, Glover, Pasma.

Nays

Dixon, Gallagher Murphy, Harris, McGregor, Pang, Sandhu.

The Chair (Mr. Will Bouma): I declare the motion lost.

Thank you, members. That concludes our business for today. This committee now stands adjourned.

The committee adjourned at 1012.

STANDING COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT AGENCIES

Chair / Président

Mr. Will Bouma (Brantford–Brant PC)

Vice-Chair / Vice-Président

Mr. John Fraser (Ottawa South / Ottawa-Sud L)

Mr. Will Bouma (Brantford–Brant PC)
Mr. John Fraser (Ottawa South / Ottawa-Sud L)
M^{me} Dawn Gallagher Murphy (Newmarket–Aurora PC)
Mr. Chris Glover (Spadina–Fort York ND)
Mr. Mike Harris (Kitchener–Conestoga PC)
Mr. Kevin Holland (Thunder Bay–Atikokan PC)
Ms. Sarah Jama (Hamilton Centre / Hamilton-Centre IND)
Mr. Graham McGregor (Brampton North / Brampton-Nord PC)
Mr. Billy Pang (Markham–Unionville PC)
Ms. Chandra Pasma (Ottawa West–Nepean / Ottawa-Ouest–Nepean ND)
Mr. Amarjot Sandhu (Brampton West / Brampton-Ouest PC)

Substitutions / Membres remplaçants

Ms. Jess Dixon (Kitchener South–Hespeler / Kitchener-Sud–Hespeler PC)

Clerk / Greffier

Mr. Isaiah Thorning

Staff / Personnel

Ms. Lauren Warner, research officer,
Research Services