

Legislative
Assembly
of Ontario



Assemblée
législative
de l'Ontario

**Official Report
of Debates
(Hansard)**

A-9

**Journal
des débats
(Hansard)**

A-9

**Standing Committee on
Government Agencies**

Intended appointments

**Comité permanent des
organismes gouvernementaux**

Nominations prévues

1st Session
44th Parliament

Thursday 27 November 2025

1^{re} session
44^e législature

Jeudi 27 novembre 2025

Chair: Mary-Margaret McMahon
Clerk: Vanessa Kattar

Présidente : Mary-Margaret McMahon
Greffière : Vanessa Kattar

Hansard on the Internet

Hansard and other documents of the Legislative Assembly can be on your personal computer within hours after each sitting. The address is:

Le Journal des débats sur Internet

L'adresse pour faire paraître sur votre ordinateur personnel le Journal et d'autres documents de l'Assemblée législative en quelques heures seulement après la séance est :

<https://www.ola.org/>

Index inquiries

Reference to a cumulative index of previous issues may be obtained by calling the Hansard Reporting Service indexing staff at 416-325-7400.

Renseignements sur l'index

Adressez vos questions portant sur des numéros précédents du Journal des débats au personnel de l'index, qui vous fourniront des références aux pages dans l'index cumulatif, en composant le 416-325-7400.

Hansard 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



Journal des débats et services linguistiques
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 1180-4335

CONTENTS

Thursday 27 November 2025

Subcommittee reportA-83

Intended appointments.....A-83

 Ms. Susy Guadron.....A-83

 Ms. Deborah Sall.....A-87

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

STANDING COMMITTEE ON
GOVERNMENT AGENCIES

Thursday 27 November 2025

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

COMITÉ PERMANENT DES
ORGANISMES GOUVERNEMENTAUX

Jeudi 27 novembre 2025

The committee met at 0900 in room 151.

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): Good morning, everyone. Welcome, welcome to the most spectacular standing committee at Queen's Park. I don't think anyone disagrees with that.

Interjections: No.

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): They better not. I'll rule them out of order.

MPP Wayne Gates: Again?

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): Get used to it.

It's a great day, and I'm happy to see everyone. Welcome to the Standing Committee on Government Agencies. We will now come to order. As always, all comments by members and witnesses should go through the Chair.

SUBCOMMITTEE REPORT

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): First, we're going to start with the adoption of subcommittee reports. We have the subcommittee report dated Thursday, November 20, 2025. Could I please have a motion? MPP Smith.

Ms. Laura Smith: I move adoption of subcommittee report on attended appointments dated Thursday November 20, 2025, on the order-in-council certificate dated November 14, 2025.

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): Terrific. Any discussion? MPP Gates.

MPP Wayne Gates: Just a question: When you report to the House, we just say that it's been passed. But should we not say that it wasn't unanimous so that people understand that we're not all agreeing with some of the candidates that are coming here, particularly ones that are friends of the Conservatives, who are donors or past candidates?

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): It's by majority, so—

MPP Wayne Gates: That wasn't my question. I understand that, but can you not say it wasn't unanimous? I used to do that when I was president of a local union so people would know that there were people that didn't agree with—

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): When you presented it in the House?

MPP Wayne Gates: Yes.

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): So, there's just one report as a majority. Thank you for your idea.

MPP Wayne Gates: Okay.

MPP Alexa Gilmour: Chair?

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): MPP Gilmour.

MPP Alexa Gilmour: Are there options for a dissenting report to be filed at the same time?

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): We can look into that, MPP Gilmour. It's usually—the standing orders say whether the report—we all concur or not, but we will look into that for you.

MPP Alexa Gilmour: Thank you for that, Chair.

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): Okay. Anything else? All right. Are the members ready to vote? All those in favour? All those opposed? That carries.

INTENDED APPOINTMENTS

MS. SUSY GUADRON

Review of intended appointment, selected by third party: Susy Guadron, intended appointee as vice-chair, Office for Victims of Crime.

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): All right. Now, we have the most exciting part of our committee. We will meet the intended appointees.

The first intended appointee today is Susy Guadron. I hope I said that right, Susy. Come on up. Welcome.

Susy Guadron is nominated as vice-chair of the Office for Victims of Crime. Welcome, Susy. You may make an initial statement at your discretion. Following this, there will be questions from the members of the committee. They're around 10 minutes each, and whatever you use to speak will be deducted from the government, which is fine. They're okay with that, because we want to hear your story. And then, we will go around to the official opposition, 10 minutes, and the third party, 10 minutes.

You have the floor. Go ahead.

Ms. Susy Guadron: Good morning, members of the standing committee. My name is Susy Guadron. I thank you for the opportunity to speak today about my qualifications to be the vice-chair for the Office for Victims of Crime.

I was born in El Salvador and immigrated to Canada at the age of four. My family left during a civil war, marked by armed conflict, widespread fear and daily instability. Yet the violence we fled did not disappear. Within our home, I witnessed and personally endured physical, emotional and psychological abuse at the hands of my father.

I watched my mother suffer intimate partner violence, and I along with my siblings were subject to harm that silenced us through fear and cultural expectations to present an image of a harmonious family.

These early experiences left me voiceless as a child, but they also marked the beginning of a long healing journey and the deliberate effort to break the cycle of violence in my own life. Attending post-secondary school was a profound act of endurance for me. Years of victimization had left lasting emotional scars, resulting in depression, which weighed heavily on my ability to focus on school and build relationships.

Yet I pushed forward. I earned my diploma in court and tribunal administration from Seneca College while working part-time to support my young daughter, determined that she would know stability even when I felt unsteady inside. For nearly 20 years, I have worked as a law clerk supporting legal counsel in private practice and in-house legal departments, concentrating on labour and employment law.

Raising my daughter became a turning point in my own healing. Nurturing her allowed me to mend parts of my inner child and strengthen my resolve to end the cycle of violence. Through that journey, I reclaimed my voice and committed myself to standing with those affected by intimate partner violence and domestic abuse, ensuring that they are seen, heard and supported.

Over the past several years, I have dedicated myself to volunteering with several organizations that support marginalized communities, particularly Spanish-speaking residents in the city of Toronto. I am an active member of the Spanish-Speaking Communities Advisory Committee with the Toronto Catholic District School Board, where I work to address systematic barriers affecting students' educational success. I sit on the board of directors with Willowdale Community Legal Services, a legal clinic that provides free legal services to low-income residents in my community.

I also serve on the board of directors for the Centre for Spanish Speaking Peoples. The mission of CSSP is close to my heart, that being to enhance the quality of life for our community through the delivery of services to advance the social and economic integration of our community into the broader Canadian society.

In 2023, I became a member of the OVC, a position that I hold with great honour, as it has allowed me to amplify the voices of victims from the Spanish-speaking community and to highlight the barriers faced by immigrant victims of intimate partner violence and domestic abuse. During my time with the OVC, I have heard from many grassroots organizations the critical importance of providing trauma-informed, culturally responsive and linguistically accessible services that are vital to preventing further victimization and enabling survivors to safely rebuild their lives.

Given the opportunity to be vice-chair, I will be committed to ensuring that principles of the Victims' Bill of Rights are respected. I will also continue to educate myself about the treatment of victims and ways to prevent further victimization. Thank you for your consideration.

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): Thank you very much, Susy. Thank you for your courage in sharing your story with us.

There are now five minutes and 11 seconds left for the government. MPP Smith, you have the floor.

Ms. Laura Smith: I want to begin by saying thank you for sharing your story and your journey. It's difficult, and we really appreciate everything that you're bringing to the table right now, so thank you.

You have a wide range of experiences. You have talked about being on the OVC since 2023 and a law clerk. Could you share how what you've done in your professional capacity will prepare you for work in the OVC?

Ms. Susy Guadron: Working as a law clerk with a speciality in labour and employment law, we also focus on human rights, so I have a clear understanding of the Human Rights Code, and I'm able to also have understanding of other legislation, which will help me ensure that when we provide advice to the Attorney General it comes from an educated place.

0910

Ms. Laura Smith: You went to school. Where did you get your—

Ms. Susy Guadron: Seneca.

Ms. Laura Smith: Seneca College—it's a good program.

I'm going to pass the time over to my colleagues.

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): All right. After MPP Smith, MPP Dowie.

Mr. Andrew Dowie: Thank you, Susy, so much for putting your name forward. I'm curious as to what kind of engagement that you've had in your community—certainly acknowledging all the experiences, the traumatic experiences you've mentioned in your opening statement—but I know you're very active in the community, your volunteer work.

I'm wondering if you could share with us some of what you've learned from your experiences that will help to inform your work in the position of vice-chair of the OVC.

Ms. Susy Guadron: I have learned that a lot of the barriers that my family faced are still faced today by immigrants who are victims of crime, intimate partner violence and domestic abuse, which breaks my heart but is something that I would like to be able to slowly change.

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): Thank you very much, MPP Dowie.

MPP Bailey.

Mr. Robert Bailey: Thank you, Susy, for appearing today here with us. One of the questions I had—I appreciate your experience—is, what method would you use going forward, if you are successful here today, to keep abreast of all of the issues as far as victims of violence in Ontario?

Ms. Susy Guadron: Part of our mandate with the OVC is to continue to engage with grassroots organizations and learn from them and understand what our front-line workers are seeing. I'm committed to continue to work with various grassroots organizations to understand how we can help victims.

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): Thank you, MPP Bailey.

MPP Rosenberg.

MPP Bill Rosenberg: Thank you, Susy, for your story. I understand, from that story, what would motivate you to serve at the Office for Victims of Crime. Could you give us some further information on what unique perspective or expertise you would bring to the role of vice-chair?

Ms. Susy Guadron: My life experiences have really shaped the way I view the world, and I understand that childhood trauma is carried on into adulthood and it can create further barriers for individuals to be able to break out of the cycle of violence. I believe this understanding helps me connect with victims, helps me understand perspectives and the needs of those that need services to help them rebuild their lives.

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): Thank you, MPP Rosenberg.

MPP Firin.

MPP Mohamed Firin: How much time do I have?

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): One minute and five seconds.

MPP Mohamed Firin: Susy, I just want to thank you for having the courage to share your story with us today. Thank you for putting your name forward. Is there anything you haven't been asked that you think would be useful for the committee to know?

Ms. Susy Guadron: No.

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): Thank you.

MPP Sabawy.

Mr. Sherif Sabawy: Thank you very much, Susy, for telling the story, and I think people who have personal experiences—it makes them more compassionate to the cause. I would like to ask you if any of your previous work experiences or even personal experiences could help you in serving as vice-chair for the OVC.

Ms. Susy Guadron: In my previous professional experience, I have always tried to see the point of view from individuals. Though the majority of my work has been representing employers, I do sort of try to make sure that the little voice is heard. Understanding how the Human Rights Tribunal works and how we are always trying to make sure that people's rights are protected is something that I hold really close.

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): Thank you very much.

Over to the official opposition: You have the floor. Who's going to go first? MPP Gates, take it away.

MPP Wayne Gates: Thanks for being here today and telling your story. CHCH just did a story about the Niagara region. I'm from Niagara Falls, and in the Niagara region, on the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, police have seen a spike in domestic violence calls. They have more calls so far this year than all of 2024, and obviously they put up the purple flag. It's a 31% jump since 2019 to 2024, the sergeant said.

On September 23, Niagara region, along with 47 other municipalities, declared gender-based violence and intim-

ate partner violence an epidemic. Do you agree with that statement?

Ms. Susy Guadron: I'm here to speak about my qualifications that support my suitability for the role of vice-chair for the OVC. I have no further comment.

MPP Wayne Gates: What are some of the challenges that you have found in your life and with your job on why somebody would stay in a relationship that has a fair amount of violence, whether that's physical or verbal?

Ms. Susy Guadron: With all due respect, again, I'm here to speak about my qualifications that support my suitability for the role of vice-chair for the OVC. I cannot go into details on why victims stay in relationships.

MPP Wayne Gates: I'll say it: A lot of times, in particular—it could be a man, but most of the time it's women. A lot of times they're staying in those types of relationships is because they can't leave because of financial situations. It's extremely hard on not only themselves—because they want to leave, but they just can't because of finances.

Kind of where I'm going—I don't know what you're going to say, but I guess, at the end of the day, it affects the children for the rest of their lives—what they go through every single day seeing that type of abuse by a partner.

I'll say that some of the reasons why they stay are financial, but it's so hurtful to watch what happens to kids and their moms or their dads, depending on it—but like I said, most of the time it's women.

I'm going to ask the question again. We know a major issue currently facing the OVC is intimate partner violence—

Interjection.

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): Sorry. Point of order?

Ms. Laura Smith: I was just going to direct that we should ask the applicant questions about her qualifications and keep the questioning aligned to that.

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): Thank you.

MPP Gates.

MPP Wayne Gates: I guess what I'm going to say to that is I think it's important to know exactly where we're going to go with intimate partner violence. I believe it's an epidemic. I believe that I'm going to support the Niagara region, which means every municipality that was at the flag raising. I'm going to support CHCH, who feels it's newsworthy.

I also believe that no woman or man should have to face any kind of violence in a household, and I believe these questions are very, very important to be asked. The individual who wants to get on the committee can respond any way they want, but these are questions that I think are fair, reasonable and, quite frankly, have to be asked at this committee. That's my opinion.

I will ask the question. You can rule me out of order if you like, but I'm going to ask the question anyway.

I don't know if anybody can tell; I'm very emotional about this issue, for family reasons.

I'll ask the questions, and you can answer them the way you see fit, and I'm fine with that. But I think it's fair to ask the questions.

We know a major issue facing the OVC is intimate partner violence. Many municipalities and police services across the province have declared intimate partner violence an epidemic. The minister recently refused to declare IPV a province-wide epidemic. Do you agree or disagree that IPV is an epidemic in the province of Ontario?

0920

Ms. Susy Guadron: I am here to speak about my qualifications that support my suitability for the role of vice-chair of the OVC and have no further comment.

MPP Wayne Gates: I appreciate your response.

The current chair of the OVC told a legislative committee that intimate partner violence and sexual violence are rising, even as other violent crimes fall, and highlighted a lack of ongoing counselling and long-term support for survivors. If appointed vice-chair, what recommendations would you push for to ensure survivors aren't left on a long wait-list or cut off from support after a short-term program ends?

Ms. Susy Guadron: Again, I am here to speak about my qualifications to support my suitability for the role of vice-chair of the OVC, and at this time, I have no further comment.

MPP Wayne Gates: You did hear that the chair of the OVC told a legislative committee—you heard that part of it? It's coming from the committee chair.

Witnesses before the committee have called for better data on intimate partner and sexual violence, not just on reporting crimes but on prevention. What key indicators would you want the OVC and the province to start collecting and publishing? How would you use that data to hold the system accountable for actually improving outcomes for victims?

Ms. Susy Guadron: Again, with all due respect, I am here to speak about my qualifications that support my suitability for the role of vice-chair of the OVC and have no further comment.

MPP Wayne Gates: I appreciate your response. I'm still going to ask my questions, and I certainly feel they're relevant to be on the committee.

We've heard that intimate partner violence impacts every part of a person's life—housing, income, health, children's well-being—yet government responses often stay siloed within one ministry. How would you, as vice-chair, use the OVC advisory role to press for genuine cross-ministry holistic responses, rather than a patchwork of disconnected programs?

Ms. Susy Guadron: I am here to speak about my qualifications that support the suitability for the role of vice-chair of the OVC and have no further comment.

MPP Alexa Gilmour: I don't know if there's a point of order—

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): MPP Gilmour.

MPP Alexa Gilmour: It feels to me like the questions that my colleague is asking are directly related to the role.

I'm not sure how we assess the qualifications that support the suitability without some of those answers. I'm unclear about the direction or guidance that our candidate has been given about answering the questions that the government has offered and then refusing to answer the questions that are directly related to how a vice-chair would operate in the space. It's a decision-making role.

You spoke so beautifully, so powerfully, to the experience in El Salvador, a place that I have been. I felt deep resonance with part of what you spoke of, and so I feel like you have lots to offer in that space.

I'm confused about how we might further prompt the candidate to speak to these pieces that are directly related to the role of vice-chair.

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): Thank you, MPP Gilmour. You can continue to ask questions, and the candidate will choose to answer as they please.

MPP Wayne Gates: What do I have?

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): Forty-three seconds.

MPP Wayne Gates: That's not a lot of seconds.

I'll just say that I believe that the questions that I have been asking are very, very relevant for the appointment, and I'll leave it at that. I don't have time for another question.

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): Thank you very much, MPP Gates.

Ms. Susy Guadron: If I may?

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): Sure.

Ms. Susy Guadron: I would like to emphasize that I am committed to work with my chair and take her lead on the issues that are important to OVC.

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): Thank you very much, Susy.

And now, a final round is with MPP Smyth from the third party.

MPP Stephanie Smyth: Thank you, Ms. Guadron, for being here today and telling your story. What we learned about your background in El Salvador, having lived and experienced and witnessed all kinds of domestic violence—it's tragic, and I think you bring a perspective that is so valid and important for the committee that you're appointed to as vice-chair, the Office for Victims of Crime.

I think the vein that our colleagues in the other party are getting at is the deep understanding of the situation with intimate partner or domestic violence in the province of Ontario and everywhere, for that matter, and it seems there are some questions to answer or commit to your feeling on the matter. I would think you'd have very many emotions on how this portion of your life, or your life, rather, has been impacted by it.

It seems like you're here with a prepared statement on something you're afraid to speak out on for some reason. I just hope you haven't felt any pressure on how to answer questions about intimate partner or domestic violence heading into this committee.

Ms. Susy Guadron: I believe my personal feelings in this role do play a role, but I am also very committed to ensuring that, as the vice-chair of OVC, I'm upholding the Victims' Bill of Rights and ensuring that the Attorney

General is receiving the appropriate advice from our board with the lead of our chair.

MPP Stephanie Smyth: Thank you for that answer.

Let's talk about your past experience with the OVC. Can you tell us a bit about what you've learned and what role you carried out specifically prior to being a candidate for this position?

Ms. Susy Guadron: One of the duties that I held with OVC was to reach out to various grassroots organizations and have them come and present to us so that we understand the barriers and challenges that are faced by these small grassroots organizations who are helping the most needy victims in our society.

MPP Stephanie Smyth: What would be your vision for improving victim services in Ontario? I know that's a very broad question, but you have had some vast lived experience; you've seen this. What's missing here, and how can you make a contribution to helping victims of crime?

Ms. Susy Guadron: I stand firmly behind the Victims' Bill of Rights, and I would like to ensure that all victims understand their rights to information, their rights to protection and their rights to court support. I would like to make sure that that is upheld through the OVC and that our mission continues to uphold the Victims' Bill of Rights.

MPP Stephanie Smyth: How would you do that? How would you ensure the principles of the Victims' Bill of Rights are upheld and respected across the province specifically?

Ms. Susy Guadron: Working with my chair, I am committed to ensuring that briefing notes are informative and provide a clear understanding to the Attorney General and are given when requested.

MPP Stephanie Smyth: What are some gaps or omissions you see right now, having had some experience with this agency, that raise alarm bells for you, if any?

Ms. Susy Guadron: I am here again today to present and explain my qualifications that support my suitability, and I have no comment on that.

MPP Stephanie Smyth: I think I'm done. Thank you very much.

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): Thank you very much, MPP Smyth.

Thank you very much, Susy, for coming in today, for sharing your story and taking the time and having the desire to serve. I appreciate that. You can either take off, or you can stay here and observe the next round for the next candidate and our vote. Okay? Thank you so much.

0930

MS. DEBORAH SALL

Review of intended appointment, selected by third party: Deborah Sall, intended appointee as member, Social Benefits Tribunal.

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): We will move to the review of the second intended appointee, Deborah Sall—I hope I'm saying that right. Deborah Sall is nominated as a member of the Social Benefits Tribunal.

Just before we welcome Deborah, I'd like to welcome a beautiful Beaches–East Yorker: Priya Vithani has just moved here to Canada for the first time. She's here to observe our committee. Welcome, Priya.

Deborah, you have your water? You're all set up? Welcome to the friendliest committee in Queen's Park—and funnest. Everyone is allocated 10 minutes to ask you questions. You're going to share your story, as you may have seen already with the first candidate. Whatever time you take for that will be removed from the government side, and they do not mind it. You have the floor. Thank you so much.

M^{me} Deborah Sall: Bonjour, madame la Présidente. Je suis Deborah Sall, et je suis très heureuse d'être ici avec vous.

Good morning. My name is Deborah Sall, and it is an honour and a privilege to appear before this committee regarding my potential appointment as a member of the Social Benefits Tribunal of Ontario. I will describe my relevant skills and experience that make me a good candidate for this position. I hope that at the end of my appearance, you will see that I am well qualified to take on the position as a member.

I am an Ontario lawyer who began my career working for the top UK crown agencies in London, England, as a UK solicitor. These crown agencies are quasi-judicial agencies that adjudicate complaints and investigations, either in specific sectors of the economy or in all sectors of the economy. They operate in a way that is very similar to an Ontario tribunal.

From these agencies, I have four years of solid experience impartially adjudicating matters in a timely manner. I made clear, concise decisions in plain language. I reviewed complex cases, analyzed and applied legislation and regulation. I regularly dealt with unrepresented parties, explaining the process in plain language and respecting the diversity of all parties. When adjudicating matters, I analyzed and interpreted the evidence from both sides of the matter and ensured that procedural fairness and administrative law were followed in all the steps of the proceedings. I drafted effective and defensible decisions with reasons. I handled a heavy caseload with strict timelines and met all my deadlines.

As a result, I am proud to put forward my top adjudication experience from what are considered to be the top quasi-judicial agencies in Europe. I also worked in Europe for industry and law firms. Throughout my professional career, my excellent organizational skills helped me successfully manage heavy workloads.

When I returned to Canada, I used my adjudication experience out in BC at the BC Ministry of Finance. At the tax appeals and litigation branch, I impartially adjudicated property tax appeals and wrote clear, concise decisions in plain English. I carefully assessed all the evidence and was responsible for the delivery of quality and timely decisions. I dealt with unrepresented parties, clearly explaining the process and the type of evidence that could ensure fair resolutions to the matters. I firmly believe that procedural fairness is the hallmark of adjudication, and this is part of the skill set that I offer to the Social Benefits Tribunal.

I later worked for a BC crown agency, the BC Financial Services Authority. In a paperless environment, I was the second level of review for consumer complaints in the financial services sectors. I also handled a complex insurance investigation, gathered and assessed the evidence and drafted a concise report on my findings, with reasons, in a tight time frame. I applied administrative law and procedural fairness in these matters. This BC experience gives me an additional two years of experience in impartially adjudicating matters in the public sector. This administrative law experience provides me with one of the necessary tools to adjudicate matters in the public sector.

I also worked for the mineral, oil and gas revenue branch of the BC Ministry of Finance, where I adjudicated appeals, mediated matters and took a number of courses on Indigenous history, which is an important part of an adjudicator's education.

I moved back to Ontario to join Ontario's electricity regulator, the Independent Electricity System Operator, or the IESO. At the IESO, I handled Indigenous energy grants, giving me experience with Indigenous communities.

My community involvement with Ontario charities goes back to the late 1980s, before I started law school. I am currently a director at the Toronto charity the Centennial Infant and Child Centre Foundation, which supports the health care of children with disabilities. With this charity, I am supporting some of the most vulnerable children in Ontario.

If I am fortunate to be appointed to the tribunal, I will use my strong skills in impartial adjudication to help some of the most vulnerable people in Ontario get access to justice.

I would be pleased to answer questions that you may have. Thank you and merci.

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): Thank you very much, Deborah. That was terrific. We learned a lot.

Now we have four minutes, 47 seconds. Over to the government, with MPP Firin kicking it off.

MPP Mohamed Firin: Thank you, Deborah. You had a wide range of professional experience in your career, from what you've told us. Could you please share how they've prepared you to work with the SBT?

Ms. Deborah Sall: One of the things that I've learned in my great experience with adjudication in many different bodies is procedural fairness. Some of the points that procedural fairness includes is allowing the self-represented individual to know about the tribunal's process, the deadlines, the evidence from the other side and the ability to draft a decision with clear reasons.

I also have legal training, which is quite important in terms of finding the facts, weighing the evidence, assessing credibility.

And I've also worked with the public. Particularly when working on complex tax appeals, I dealt with very angry self-represented parties. You quickly develop a thick skin, and you are able to deal with them in a professional manner despite them screaming over the phone to you.

These are all the skills that have prepared me to deal with the issues that come before the tribunal. They deal

with the life experience of people that are going through a tough time. So I will be able to be sympathetic to their concerns while at the same time being impartial and being able to weigh the evidence from both sides.

MPP Mohamed Firin: Thank you.

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): MPP Bailey.

Mr. Robert Bailey: Thank you, Ms. Sall, for coming in today. I listened to your professional résumé and read it as well. I'm very impressed.

Could you explain how your volunteer work will prepare you to be involved with the Social Benefits Tribunal? What do you see that you'll bring to the table?

Ms. Deborah Sall: With my current position at the charity, dealing with the health care of children with disabilities, I understand some of the challenges that face people with disabilities, and that will prepare me to deal with the subject matter of the tribunal. People come before the tribunal to get access to justice with respect to decisions affecting their status as a person with a disability; their assistance, whether it's been denied, refused or reduced; also if there's been a change in the status of their file. I will be able to understand the appellants' side of things, which would help me impartially adjudicate the matters.

Mr. Robert Bailey: Thank you.

0940

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): MPP Rosenberg.

MPP Bill Rosenberg: Thank you, Deborah. Your experiences that you shared here today speak volumes on your experience.

My question is that some parties appearing before the SBT don't always have legal representation, and this can create some challenges. How will you work with them to ensure they have a fair hearing, even if they can't understand the procedural minutiae?

Ms. Deborah Sall: I think there is a wonderful opportunity with a pre-hearing conference, and that is the opportunity for the self-represented party to come before the decision-maker. It's an opportunity, also, to clarify legal issues, which can probably be the biggest stumbling block for self-represented parties. There's also a chance to educate the self-represented individual on the actual process: "This is how it starts and then this is what you do" etc.

That's what I really did out in BC with the property tax appeals. The first call was to the appellant to say, "Thank you for filing the appeal, and let me just take you through the process. Let me also discuss the type of evidence that you might want to bring forward so we can resolve the matter." It's an educational opportunity, and there's also communication. If I was fortunate enough to become a member, I would make sure that my communication is in plain language. Although I'm a lawyer, I do not speak in legalese. I haven't, probably, since I started my career in the UK.

It's an opportunity to educate them, and then during the hearing itself, if there is some difficulty with something that the self-represented party can do, then I think, as the adjudicator, I could offer some steps while—

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): Thank you very much.

Now we will go over to the official opposition. MPP Gilmour, you have the floor.

MPP Alexa Gilmour: It's wonderful to have you here. I really appreciated hearing the fulsome work that you've done, the commitments—both the charity side—across the country in the Indigenous sector, the energy sector.

Really, I'm just looking to go a little deeper into, more specifically, around the social services piece—to wonder a little bit in terms of that, because the experiences in the social services—I'm just trying to unpack a little of that. I'm wondering what you hope to contribute as a member of the tribunal and what is drawing you at this time to social services work.

Ms. Deborah Sall: My work at the children's charity has made me sympathetic to the point of view of people with disabilities. The work of the tribunal is basically to allow individuals to have access to justice where they feel a decision has been wrongly made that affects their social assistance, their ability to live.

I think it's a really important way to use my legal skills to attempt to resolve a matter for an individual, although at the same time being impartial. Although I can understand their point of view, it would not make me biased towards them. I would be, as I always have been when I adjudicate, guided by the evidence, which is an important principle of administrative law.

MPP Alexa Gilmour: I am wondering, from your experience either in the charity or from the research that you have started to do, what kind of obstacles do you imagine claimants might encounter in the process of seeking a hearing?

Ms. Deborah Sall: I've been to the website of the tribunal. It's very good. It's in plain language. The forms are very clear. The steps of the tribunal process are set out very clearly, which helps. I hope that it is something that people can get their mind around, although I have seen other tribunals, such as some out in BC, which go even a step further in terms of explaining things. Perhaps that is something that may happen in time, although it might be just the nature of that particular tribunal out in BC that has gone a step further in helping self-represented parties.

For example, they have done a summary of legal decisions. They would have the name of the case and the main point. That's very helpful for a self-represented party, because reading the cases as a non-lawyer is, first of all, not very fun, and it's difficult to grasp the main points and understand how you would translate that into a submission for a tribunal. So that might be something that would be worthwhile.

MPP Alexa Gilmour: Thank you for that.

Since the pandemic, the Social Benefits Tribunal has moved hearings to a virtual format—this digital-first policy. I'm just wondering, in your view, how does this policy affect processes, and would you support maintaining the policy as it is now?

Ms. Deborah Sall: I think it's easy to attend virtually if you have a laptop or a computer, and I understand that,

if you are scheduled for a hearing at the tribunal, you can ask for access to a computer.

I understand that it tends to be a struggle if people are attending a virtual hearing over their smart phone, so it's good to see that computers are available.

There is some flexibility in allowing hearings to happen virtually in the sense that people do not have to travel from across the province. So there are some benefits, but I think it can be done effectively through the virtual format.

MPP Alexa Gilmour: I'm wondering about this piece around the Ombudsman of Ontario, who has indicated that they're reviewing complaints and that all the requests, every single one, for accommodations under the mobile access terminal service—that idea that if you can't access Internet because you're on a remote space rurally, or if you don't have Internet because of poverty issues—the mobile access terminal service, as you said, was supposed to even pay for a taxi for you to go somewhere to access the Internet, maybe in a private room, in a quiet space etc. But the Ombudsman of Ontario has indicated that all requests for accommodations under the mobile access terminal service have been denied.

I'm wondering, as a tribunal member, how you might ensure that all claimants have access to that private space, that computer, that Internet, in order to have access to justice, to the virtual hearings that they were promised.

Ms. Deborah Sall: I'm currently not a member of the tribunal, so I can't comment on whether or not it hasn't been available in any of the proceedings that I've been working on, but—

MPP Alexa Gilmour: This is from the Ombudsman.

Ms. Deborah Sall: I can't comment on that. All I can say is that if I'm fortunate enough to become a member, I will try to make sure that access to justice is available in the virtual format and within the limits of my role as a potential member.

MPP Alexa Gilmour: If it were possible, would you support the return of in-person hearings around the province for those who, for reasons of disability, find it much harder to present themselves digitally?

Ms. Deborah Sall: I really don't have an opinion on that, I'm afraid.

MPP Alexa Gilmour: That's okay.

I have another question that I'm just wondering about. You've spoken quite powerfully and importantly around impartiality. So, one of the things that we've seen—a review of decisions from the Auditor General's report found, in 2018-19, this massive variation, really high variation, in tribunal members' decisions. For example, one member overturned 28% of the ministry's decisions and found that the person was not disabled, while another member overturned 93% of the ministry's decisions. So the Auditor General is putting forth some recommendations around education and other things that might help tribunal members.

I'm wondering, if you were to receive this position, what sort of self-education, self-reflection would you do to ensure that any internal biases that might lead you to be at 28% or 93% are evened out in the work? This is understanding that each and every one of us comes to a role with

the experiences that we have—life experiences, skills. So I'm really looking for what you might be thinking about committing to in terms of truly understanding how to get to deep impartiality.

Ms. Deborah Sall: It's true that we all come to the table with individual, often hidden biases, and I think you have to try to be alive to it. If you get a case, the first thing to do would be to scrutinize whether or not there's a potential conflict of interest, and if there is, raise that immediately with senior management.

0950

In terms of being impartial, it's, again, going back to the evidence. I can read a case and I might have an idea, but that idea doesn't mean anything unless it's grounded in the evidence. As a lawyer, I always go back to the evidence, because if you want to get into trouble in terms of bias and also not creating a decision based on administrative law, which would be invalid, you ignore the evidence. So I would always go back to the evidence. I might have an idea about the case and then I go back to the evidence and read and consider. Only when I was sure that I could ground a decision within the four corners of the evidence would I proceed to draft it.

MPP Alexa Gilmour: Thank you for that.

May I check my time?

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): Fifty-five seconds.

MPP Alexa Gilmour: We have a few rapid-fire questions that we always tend to ask: Are you a member of a political party?

Ms. Deborah Sall: No.

MPP Alexa Gilmour: And have you ever donated to an Ontario provincial party at all?

Ms. Deborah Sall: No.

MPP Alexa Gilmour: Okay, great. That's all my questions for you. Thank you very much for spending some time with us.

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): Now, over to the third party. MPP Smyth, you have the floor.

MPP Stephanie Smyth: Nice to meet you. Thank you for being here today and for your desire to serve on this tribunal.

I think the first thing I would want to ask you is how your experience in tax and regulatory law really would translate into this really unique and human-centred nature of poverty and disability. I know that you've had that experience working with children with disabilities. But just shifting that focus to the weight of the kinds of decisions that you're going to have to make on this tribunal.

Ms. Deborah Sall: Well, I think if you take all of my experience, I brought the same skill set to whatever the subject matter happens to be. So it's looking at the evidence, finding the facts, using my legal training to assess the credibility and, of course, an understanding of the subject matter in the legislation.

Although these are social issues that the tribunal deals with, I think they demand the same rigour of the legal process and adjudication as a tax appeal. A tax appeal may be complex, maybe even considered by some to be a little boring. But nevertheless, the same process will be used.

Once you master the issue, it is time to look at the legislation, look at the evidence and weigh the evidence up against the legislation.

I think I've done a lot of more formal, less social-type of adjudication positions, but that doesn't mean that my skills are not solid enough to apply to someone with disabilities whose assistance has been reduced. I mean, I can understand their point of view. But as an adjudicator, I have to be guided by the evidence.

MPP Stephanie Smyth: Looking at the activities of the agency, those decisions are going to be, as you mentioned, refusal to grant a benefit, suspension or cancellation of a benefit, reduction of a benefit or the amount of the benefit.

These are some pretty dire times that we're living in—an affordability crisis. How would you balance that with a vulnerable population that you might often be dealing with, right? You're talking about individuals relying on Ontario Works and ODSP. This could be a very life-altering decision; it's not about taxes, if you know what I mean.

Ms. Deborah Sall: Yes, but even in the property tax world, to be hit by a huge property tax bill when you buy a new home is not, also, something that people welcome.

I can feel sympathy for them. I can say that it's unfortunate that they lose their benefits, but the evidence has to be there. We have to ground everything in the evidence. Otherwise, the tribunal will not be operating properly under administrative law.

People can challenge a tribunal's decision on a point of law to the Divisional Court. I think the last thing the tribunal would want is a challenge to be successful because someone felt sympathetic to an appellant while ignoring the evidence. Unfortunately—we can have sympathy, but the bottom line is evidence has to be followed to ensure that the tribunal operates according to administrative law and functions in a proper way that will create robust decisions that can withstand an appeal to the Divisional Court.

MPP Stephanie Smyth: I'm curious how you would look at people who are before you at the tribunal and dealing with one who has representation—being able to have legal representation—and one who is self-represented. How would you balance what you're hearing and how effective their arguments would be?

Ms. Deborah Sall: Well, of course, for the lawyer, there might be smooth arguments coming forward, but I think if the person is self-represented and they are making their own submissions, it might carry more weight because they themselves are saying, "Look, my assistance was cut off, and this is what I had to deal with, and these are my circumstances." It might be a more emotional appeal in that way. In some tribunals in the UK, they actually want the actual applicant to speak because they don't want to have the formal wording of a lawyer or solicitor presenting the matter.

I would also take it with a grain of salt, knowing that they are self-represented and they might not have the same knowledge or equality of arms that another party does who has a lawyer to assist them. I wouldn't mark them down because they're self-represented, because, in fact, most of

the people who deal with and interact with tribunals are self-represented.

I've done that with tax appeals. I've spent long conversations on the phone with appellants, explaining the evidence and explaining the decision and the legislation. So I'm kind of used to that, and I would certainly not mark them down because their submission wasn't very polished; in fact, it might be able to be seen as more credible than something coming from a lawyer.

MPP Stephanie Smyth: We talked about backlogs—you mentioned them. We're all well aware of backlogs with the SBT and significant delays; again, some life-changing consequences for people—they can be. I know you talked about how you were able to get cases together in a timely manner and effectively. How do you balance the rush to judgment and fairness over time? You want to be efficient. We understand. We all want to see that in the tribunals, and timely justice, right? How would you balance the pressures to speed things up yet make the most, I guess, compassionate and lawful decision?

Ms. Deborah Sall: I understand there's a rigorous training period that new members go through.

MPP Stephanie Smyth: Not for old members, though.

Ms. Deborah Sall: Well, I think they will have taken that training on board at an early stage, and so once I get to know the process, there are certain efficiencies that can be built into the system of decision writing. For example, when I was working on tax appeals and I started to read the evidence, I would also create a summary of that evidence that I could put into the final decision at the same time. That's kind of saving time. Instead of having to go and the next day write something about the summary of evidence, it's usually good to do it while it's fresh in my mind.

In terms of meeting the timelines and deadlines, it is really something that you have to master, and I'm confident that I can do that. I've worked with tight time frames not only in adjudication but in other matters, so I'm confident that I would be able to master that.

MPP Stephanie Smyth: Thank you. I wanted to ask you about accessibility, which is a huge issue for a lot of people. Even online, we think it's the be-all and end-all for everything but clearly, it's not. There are affordability issues etc. Would you ever be open to a hybrid model of the tribunal?

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): One minute.

Ms. Deborah Sall: I think that would be a decision for senior management. So I would be happy to go with whatever senior management decides, if I'm fortunate to become a member.

MPP Stephanie Smyth: Thank you very much.

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): Thank you very much, MPP Smyth.

Thank you so much, Deborah, for coming in and giving us your time and your thoughts and your desire to serve. We really appreciate that. If you would like to remain in our cozy quarters and listen to us determine your fate on the committee, you're welcome to do so, or if you would like to go about your day, you are able to do that as well.

We will now consider the intended appointment of Susy Guadron. Can I have a motion, please? MPP Smith.

Ms. Laura Smith: I move concurrence in the intended appointment of Susy Guadron, nominated as vice-chair of the Office for Victims of Crime.

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): Concurrence in the appointment has been moved by MPP Smith. Any discussion? MPP Gates.

MPP Wayne Gates: Recorded vote, please.

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): All right—and I will say, if you wanted a hard copy of that motion because it's not on the screen, we have it available for you.

Are the members ready to vote?

Ayes

Bailey, Dowie, Firin, Rosenberg, Sabawy, Laura Smith.

Nays

Gates, Gilmour, Smyth.

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): That carries.

Thank you very much, and congratulations to Susy.

We will now consider the intended appointment of Deborah Sall. Can I have a motion, please?

Ms. Laura Smith: I move concurrence in the intended appointment of Deborah Sall, nominated as member of the Social Benefits Tribunal.

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): Concurrence in the appointment has been moved by MPP Smith. Any discussion? MPP Gates.

MPP Wayne Gates: Recorded vote.

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): Are the members ready to vote?

Ayes

Bailey, Dowie, Firin, Gates, Gilmour, Rosenberg, Sabawy, Laura Smith, Smyth.

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): All those opposed? It's unanimous. That carries.

Thank you. Congratulations, Deborah.

The last order of business is the extension of a certificate. The deadline to review the intended appointments selected from the October 31, 2025, certificate is said to expire on November 30, 2025. Is there unanimous consent to extend the certificate by 30 days? I heard a no. That does not pass.

Thank you everyone for attending today's meeting. The committee now stands adjourned until next Thursday, December 4, same time, same station.

Thank you. Have a good day. Meeting adjourned.

The committee adjourned at 1004.

STANDING COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT AGENCIES

Chair / Présidente

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon (Beaches–East York L)

First Vice-Chair / Premier Vice-Président

Mr. Robert Bailey (Sarnia–Lambton PC)

Second Vice-Chair / Deuxième Vice-Président

MPP Wayne Gates (Niagara Falls ND)

Mr. Robert Bailey (Sarnia–Lambton PC)

MPP Billy Denault (Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke PC)

Mr. Andrew Dowie (Windsor–Tecumseh PC)

MPP Mohamed Firin (York South–Weston / York-Sud–Weston PC)

MPP Wayne Gates (Niagara Falls ND)

MPP Alexa Gilmour (Parkdale–High Park ND)

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon (Beaches–East York L)

Mr. Matthew Rae (Perth–Wellington PC)

Mr. Sheref Sabawy (Mississauga–Erin Mills PC)

Ms. Laura Smith (Thornhill PC)

MPP Stephanie Smyth (Toronto–St. Paul's L)

Substitutions / Membres remplaçants

MPP Bill Rosenberg (Algoma–Manitoulin PC)

Clerk / Greffière

Ms. Vanessa Kattar

Staff / Personnel

Ms. Lauren Warner, research officer,
Research Services