

Legislative
Assembly
of Ontario



Assemblée
législative
de l'Ontario

Official Report of Debates (Hansard)

A-10

Journal des débats (Hansard)

A-10

Standing Committee on Government Agencies

Intended appointments

Comité permanent des organismes gouvernementaux

Nominations prévues

1st Session
44th Parliament

Thursday 4 December 2025

1^{re} session
44^e législature

Jeudi 4 décembre 2025

Chair: Mary-Margaret McMahon
Clerk: Vanessa Kattar

Présidente : Mary-Margaret McMahon
Greffière : Vanessa Kattar

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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

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

STANDING COMMITTEE ON
GOVERNMENT AGENCIESCOMITÉ PERMANENT DES
ORGANISMES GOUVERNEMENTAUX

Thursday 4 December 2025

Jeudi 4 décembre 2025

The committee met at 0900 in room 151.

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): Good morning, everyone. How's everyone after the frivolities last night—a little bleary-eyed?

Well, welcome to the most sensational standing committee at Queen's Park, the Standing Committee on Government Agencies. We will now come to order. As always, comments by members and witnesses should go through the Chair.

SUBCOMMITTEE REPORT

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): The first item of business will be the adoption of the subcommittee report. We have the subcommittee report dated Thursday, November 27, 2025. Could I please have a motion? MPP Smith.

Ms. Laura Smith: Good morning, Madam Chair. I move adoption of the subcommittee report on intended appointments dated Thursday, November 27, 2025, on the order-in-council certificate dated November 21, 2025.

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

INTENDED APPOINTMENTS

MS. FARZANA KANJI

Review of intended appointment, selected by official opposition party and third party: Farzana Kanji, intended appointee as member, Landlord and Tenant Board.

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): Now, we will get to the most exciting part of our day, where we will review the intended appointees.

Our first intended appointee today is Farzana Kanji, nominated as a member of the Landlord and Tenant Board.

So, Farzana, welcome to the friendliest crew you will ever meet. You will have as much time as you would like to present your story, and then whatever time you take will be removed from the government's 10 minutes. Each party has 10 minutes to question you, and then we will go to the official opposition and then the third party.

So you now have the floor.

Ms. Farzana Kanji: Thank you, Madam Chair and committee members. Good morning. I appreciate the opportunity to speak before you today. It is an honour to be considered for this role.

By way of background, I hold a bachelor of laws with honours from the University of London. I also have a BA in international marketing and a diploma in public relations. After moving to Canada, I obtained an Institute of Law Clerks of Ontario designation.

My professional experience spans 17 years, primarily in contracts management, working for four of Canada's largest banks. With respect to my position at the Bank of Montreal, my responsibilities as a lead legal analyst included handling customer legal escalations in personal and business banking and finding solutions beneficial to both clients and the bank. My career has consistently involved analyzing large amounts of information and distilling the most salient points for action.

Since 2020, I have been a director and vice-president of my condominium corporation in Toronto. As part of this role, I assist in addressing issues between the residents and the condominium corporation largely through the application of the Condominium Act and the corporation's governing documents, including its rules and policies as well as the Ontario Human Rights Code.

Sometimes conflict between residents or between residents and the board can be resolved through basic mediation and consensus seeking. I strive to ensure that all sides receive a fair hearing, and work hard at thoughtful recommendations or decisions. I believe this experience will prove beneficial in adjudicating matters between tenants and owners related to the Residential Tenancies Act.

On a personal note, I have two university-aged children who I have supported as a single parent since they were young toddlers. Volunteer work and service to the community have always been important values in my life. I am particularly excited about this opportunity to contribute to the public service. I believe my diverse background has given me a skill set to approach complex issues with creativity and fairness while working towards practical and timely solutions.

I believe I have the skills and background that would make me, if I am successful in this process, an asset to the landlord and tenant tribunal. I am fact-driven, conscientious and empathetic. I'm committed to impartial decision-making. Continuing education is an important value, and I am committed to staying informed about changing legislation and best practices.

Thank you once again for having me here today. I'm looking forward to this opportunity to work for Ontarians, and I welcome any questions you may have.

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): Thank you very much, Farzana. That was terrific.

We will now go over the government side for questioning. They have six minutes and 40 seconds. We will start with MPP Bailey.

Mr. Robert Bailey: Welcome, Ms. Kanji, to the committee this morning. You have a very extensive résumé. I had a chance to read it prior to today.

So, what in your personal background experiences do you think you would be able to bring, whether it was your volunteer work—aside from your legal career—to the Landlord and Tenant Board, and how would it help you to be a better board member when you're hearing and disputing cases?

Ms. Farzana Kanji: Well, in my current role as the vice-president of the condo corporation, I'm consistently fact-finding, findings on credibility—I'm legally trained, as you know. I work with the people. I have experience in areas that the tribunal requires. I'm very good with verbal and written communication. I've undertaken investigations in my role. I've assessed matters. I've provided recommendations for change, and I think all of that and my volunteer experience are transferable skills to my role as a landlord and tenant tribunal member.

Mr. Robert Bailey: Thank you.

Thank you, Chair.

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

Ms. Laura Smith: Thank you very much, Ms. Kanji, for being here today and presenting. You talked about your background: You're a law clerk. You're a vice-president of a condo board. Managing heavy caseloads is something that's going to be a paramount issue in this role. How do you stay on top of the work that you will be performing in delivering decisions that will be effective in processing times? Because that is quite an issue for this specific role.

Ms. Farzana Kanji: Yes. Currently, in my professional role—and with the fact that I do so much work for different committees, as well, on a voluntary basis, I have a huge workload as it is. So I'm very good at prioritizing and staying on top. I'll make to-do lists and things, but I'm very good at working in a timely manner. I understand the importance of knowing how to assess the information that's in front of me—large information, trying to assess it to find the most salient points and condense it and then find ways to make recommendations. It's something that I'm used to on a daily basis. I work very well under pressure—I thrive on pressure, actually—and so I have no issues in managing caseloads.

The fact that working for the banks—and I have so many contracts to review. I review a lot of master services agreements, outsourcing agreements, agreements that are 150, 180 pages. The bank requires a very short turnaround time, and they want their contracts immediately. So, this is something I'm well versed with. I have no issues on staying on top of my caseload. I'm quite confident I will do it well.

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

Mr. Andrew Dowie: Welcome. Thank you so much for putting your name forward for the Landlord and Tenant Board.

I had a question about your vision for what it takes to be an effective member of a tribunal and particularly for the Landlord and Tenant Board.

Ms. Farzana Kanji: To give people the opportunity to present their side of the story, that's very important. I believe it's important for all people to have equal access to justice. It's important for me as an adjudicator to hear all sides of the story and then to base my recommendations on having heard all sides of the story.

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): MPP Smith—Scott.

Hon. Laurie Scott: It's okay. It happens all the time. We shouldn't sit together.

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): You two, yes, honestly, don't sit beside each other.

Hon. Laurie Scott: Anyway, welcome. I enjoyed your presentation—a great background. I want to ask you a whole bunch of questions on your experiences, but we have a short, limited time.

I know you may have touched on this a little bit before, but some of the experiences—and the Landlord and Tenant Board is quite challenging, emotional, and we need good, qualified people on it, so thank you for applying. But I don't know if you could just share one experience that might have prepared you for the Landlord and Tenant Board, in the short time we do have.

Are you okay with that, Chair?

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): Two minutes.

0910

Ms. Farzana Kanji: I'm thinking that you're asking me to cite an example whereby I took place in some kind of dispute resolution?

Hon. Laurie Scott: Yes.

Ms. Farzana Kanji: Okay. So, in my building, we have a gymnasium, and children are not allowed in there because, it's 16 and over. We had a single father that came to us saying, "I pay the common maintenance fees. I'm a member here. I live here. I'm a resident here in this building. I cannot use the gym facilities unless I bring my son with me. I have nowhere to keep him," and he was six years old.

Now, it's a liability to bring a young child into the gymnasium. So we thought about it and I said, "Look. He has every right to use the facilities, and it's not his fault he's a single parent." We decided that we would make allowances and allow the son to come, so long as he took full responsibility for his child. His child was to keep to himself, not run around and use the equipment or anything, but we made that exception. That's one resolution.

Another example, if I may, very quickly was, the building has a limit on the weight of dogs. They cannot be more than 25 pounds. But we had a couple, and the dog was a service dog, an emotional support dog. It was over 25 pounds, but we made that exception. We said okay.

That's why I say every case is different. I look at all the facts in front of me. I look at everything, I examine in detail and then I come up with the best recommendation.

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

Hon. Laurie Scott: Thank you so much.

MPP Mohamed Firin: How much time?

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): Forty-four seconds. Make it count, MPP Firin.

MPP Mohamed Firin: Thank you for putting your name forward. You were recommended for this process following Tribunal Ontario's competitive, merit-based recruitment process. What was your impression of the process, and why do you think you're the best candidate?

Ms. Farzana Kanji: I don't think that I can really talk to the process itself as I'm not the one who is coming up with the process.

But I think I would make an excellent candidate because of all the skills that I have been saying with respect to my fact-finding, analyzing information, listening to all sides, making fair recommendations. Being part of conflict resolution is very present in my day-to-day life, whether it's negotiating contracts or whether it's working on the board. That's why I think I would make an excellent—

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

MPP Alexa Gilmour: Thank you very much. It's really great to meet you and, after such an impressive résumé, to have you in front of us, so thank you for being here today.

I'm going to ask a few questions that we ask of almost every single candidate, applicant that's here—so, some fairly simple ones. Have you ever donated to a political party?

Ms. Farzana Kanji: I have partaken in a few fundraising dinners where the invitations were obviously extended to government members, but that's the extent of it.

MPP Alexa Gilmour: Okay. And which political party was that?

Ms. Farzana Kanji: I'm thinking the Conservatives.

MPP Alexa Gilmour: Okay. Would this be accurate then? In 2023, a \$350 donation to the Barrie–Springwater–Oro-Medonte riding association is what we have listed. That's correct? Yes? And that is currently our Attorney General's riding.

Ms. Laura Smith: Point of order.

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): Sorry—point of order, MPP Smith?

Ms. Laura Smith: Thank you. Through you, Chair: If we could keep the questioning focused on the credentials of this individual and her qualifications for the role, please.

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

MPP Alexa Gilmour: I'd like to pause my time, because we keep having this question from MPP Smith, and every single time we have this question, we have ruled that these questions are, in fact, in order. So, through you to the

MPP, it's starting to feel like the MPP raises this same question every single time to disrupt my interview time as opposed to actually raising a point of order, because the point of order is always ruled to be in order. So I'm hoping that we can move on from this continual interruption every time I have an interview.

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

And MPP Smith, we have established that these are questions that have been asked historically and are allowable. So we will leave it at that, and thank you very much—

MPP Alexa Gilmour: Can you tell me how much time I have now, just because I didn't pause.

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): Eight minutes and 43 seconds. Thank you very much, MPP Gilmour.

MPP Alexa Gilmour: Thank you so much. Sorry for that.

And then, are you a member of any political party?

Ms. Farzana Kanji: No.

MPP Alexa Gilmour: Okay. Can you tell us a little bit about how this appointment came about? Did a member of the PC Party encourage you, or how did you come—

Ms. Farzana Kanji: No. I regularly check the website to see if there are any appointment vacancies. I went through the whole process and so I'm here today based on my merit and based on the process that I have gone through. I've done the interview, the written assessment, the conflict-of-interest assessment in the interview, and I'm here standing before you today because I've gone through the process in great detail.

MPP Alexa Gilmour: I appreciate that. I know that with your legal background, the conflict-of-interest piece—you fully understand that piece.

Ms. Farzana Kanji: Yes.

MPP Alexa Gilmour: I was looking at your LinkedIn profile, and there's this wonderful, warm photo of you with Attorney General Doug Downey who, of course, will hold responsibility for the Landlord and Tenant Board because that's under Tribunals Ontario and the Attorney General has the responsibility of that area. That's also the same place that you made your donation to.

I'm just wondering if you can tell us a little bit about your relationship with the Attorney General and how you might handle any conflicts of interest that arise as a result of that?

Ms. Farzana Kanji: I don't really have a relationship with the Attorney General. I meet people regularly, and so it was just another person I met. I don't look at it that I have relationships with anybody.

With respect to conflict of interest, the only place I can see would be as my role as a vice president. If there are any landlord and tenant issues that come across, then I would just recuse myself from any such matters.

MPP Alexa Gilmour: Right. That makes sense. Thank you.

In terms of the experience you've talked about, there's such an extensive background in business, in finance, in

the legal background in contracts, negotiations. What I'm not seeing particularly is experience in landlord-tenant matters other than some personal ones in the condo, which I think we can sort of agree are significantly different than people not being able to pay rent and evictions but also in adjudication itself.

I was hoping you might give us a little sense of your adjudication experience. If not—once you're appointed, if you're appointed, there will be times when you're deciding cases that really determine whether a vulnerable Ontarian gets to go home and have a roof over their head or whether they are going to be out on the street. So, how would you prepare for that, and what in your current work experience has prepared you?

Ms. Farzana Kanji: I can bring all my skills across to this role. Again, fact-finding, investigations, analyzing information—they're all transferable skills which I possess. I understand that there is training that will be provided, and I welcome that opportunity to get on board, to do the training, to roll my sleeves up and hit the ground running. I'm a very fast learner, an efficient learner, but I do learn quickly.

So, I do not see this as a challenge but, in fact, like I said, I welcome the opportunity to do the on-board training, and I think that will equip me for this role. I'm very confident that I will make an excellent, excellent adjudicator.

MPP Alexa Gilmour: That's good. That's good to know.

I'm going to move into a few of the pieces that we're seeing at the Landlord and Tenant Board—some that was prepared for us, but some of that we're seeing out in the media quite a bit. It's been plagued at the moment with very serious backlogs, with very long delays that has denied justice for both the landlords and the tenants. There have been some changes recently that we've seen and a bit of a shift towards moving faster through.

But as a member of the tribunal, I'm wondering what solutions you would bring to clear that backlog, to ensure that each case still receives a fair hearing even as you're being encouraged to help clear that backlog?

Ms. Farzana Kanji: I cannot comment currently on what is happening because I'm not a member yet, but I can say that I can talk to my caseload that would come my way if I was to be appointed, and I would work through my caseload efficiently. I would go through it in a manner that is fair to all the parties, and I would work through that.

Again, I bring it back to my points of, I'm able to do the whole analysis, to hear both sides of the story and I'm very good at coming up with recommendations in a timely manner, and that's all I would focus on. My focus is to work to find solutions, to find the best solutions, and that's what I'm going to keep my mind on.

MPP Alexa Gilmour: Thank you.

Just a few weeks ago, the government passed Bill 60—you may be aware of Bill 60. It's the Fighting Delays, Building Faster Act. Now, this was over the outcries of tenants. We had a gallery full of tenants quite concerned over the outcries of advocates across the province, and part of the reason for this is that the bill aims to reduce the

delays at the Landlord and Tenant Board by shortening tenant eviction notice periods from 14 days to one week. Like you, I've been a single parent before, and I've struggled to actually make things happen.

0920

So this speeding up of evictions for those who might be behind on their rent, or giving tenants just 15 days to request a review for those who may be under tremendous pressure—working three jobs, those kinds of things—I'm just wondering if you support these measures, if you see a better alternative that provides sort of a more fair process between the two.

Ms. Farzana Kanji: Like I said, I'm not a member of the tribunal yet, so I cannot comment. Again, what I can do is bring about the skills that I have and use that to come out with the best recommendations.

MPP Alexa Gilmour: And again, another question is around what we've been seeing from Tribunal Watch, the Ombudsman and others who have been cautioning us around some of the challenges at the Landlord and Tenant Board. One of them is this move to virtual hearings. So this digital first policy across Tribunals Ontario has been meant to sort of speed things up a bit, provide more possibilities of people coming, however, we've seen that it's a barrier to justice for many, especially those who are low income—who may not have access to Internet in the home or a computer, racialized individuals, Indigenous, people with disabilities, elderly who may not be familiar and get confused with the computer system. We're also seeing that there's not a high number of folks who actually get access to the in-person hearings, and so there's some questions around that.

I'm wondering, again, how you might handle that process where we've got individuals who are struggling to present themselves. They've got a corporate lawyer who's got lots of experience and then this digital first policy piece is part of it. What steps would you take to understand the process to ensure that there was a fair trial?

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

Ms. Farzana Kanji: I again cannot comment on the current process. What I can do is I can say that I believe in equal access to justice for everybody. What I can comment on is that I would do whatever I could to work on my caseload, to do my training and to give fair recommendations. But how the process currently is, I'm not a part of that, so I cannot comment on that.

MPP Alexa Gilmour: I appreciate that. Thank you very much.

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

Now the final round, we will go to MPP Smyth from the third party.

MPP Stephanie Smyth: Thank you for being here today. It's interesting to hear about your qualifications and your passion, and I see that you're very involved and you feel that you're actually very qualified for this job. I think that when we're talking to people, such as you candidates, it's just exploring how you got to this place, what are your

passions and why do you want to be so actively involved? I just wanted to circle back on something my colleague asked you about, and that's your connection to Doug Downey. Were you aware of his connection to the Landlord and Tenant Board and this appointment?

Ms. Farzana Kanji: No.

MPP Stephanie Smyth: Not at all?

Ms. Farzana Kanji: No, no.

MPP Stephanie Smyth: Okay—just curious. The reason why we ask this question is, we're talking about yes, your qualifications but also any political connections that could in some way have any impact on the decisions you make.

You made some comment in your opening remarks about legislation, and if you'd go back to that, I wasn't sure about what you meant, or maybe I heard it incorrectly. Can you just repeat what you said there?

Ms. Farzana Kanji: "I assist in addressing issues between the residents and the condominium corporation largely through the application of the Condominium Act and the corporation's governing documents, including its rules and policies, as well as the Ontario Human Rights Code."

MPP Stephanie Smyth: Okay. There was something about legislation I thought I heard you say.

Ms. Farzana Kanji: Yes. There's another sentence: "I believe this experience will prove beneficial in adjudicating matters between tenants and owners related to the Residential Tenancies Act."

MPP Stephanie Smyth: Okay. So nothing specific—I thought I heard "legislation."

I guess why we come to Bill 60—are you familiar with the bill?

Ms. Farzana Kanji: I've heard of it, but all I know is that the landlord and tenant tribunal is governed by the Residential Tenancies Act.

MPP Stephanie Smyth: Right. Okay.

With Bill 60, just as an example, in my riding of Toronto–St. Paul's, 61% of the residents are tenants and there is great concern over this legislation, which has passed over how it's going to impact them going forward with the affordability crisis, with evictions etc. They're very, very concerned about this, and these are real issues that they're facing.

Also, I don't know if you heard this morning, but there are new stats coming out that the cost of groceries is going to go up by \$1,000 next year for people, and there are people living on the margins. What we're concerned about here is understanding the context of the cases that come before the tribunal. I know you understand how great you would be at fact-finding, right? This is obviously something that you pride yourself on and being fair. When you look at the Landlord and Tenant Board, it's been criticized as basically an eviction factory that privileges landlord applications. And, given your role as the vice-president of the condo corporation, how are you going to ensure that there is complete impartiality, there's complete fairness there to both the tenants and the landlords, especially in

the context of what we're living in right now with affordability?

Ms. Farzana Kanji: I'm a fair person. I'm impartial, and I make decisions based on that, so I don't see that being an issue. But again, I'm not currently a member of the tribunal. I would do everything that I can in my power to hit the ground running with the training that I'll be given, and just work through that and make sure that I give efficient hearings.

MPP Stephanie Smyth: Yes, you're dealing with a really vulnerable population. We were speaking just a moment ago about access to justice and stuff. How would you ensure that tenants are aware of their rights when heading before the tribunal and this whole process, given that there could be a power imbalance that exists in the landlord-tenant relationship?

Ms. Farzana Kanji: I understand that there could be some issues, but, again, I would listen to all sides of the story and make my decisions based on that. So again, I would give equal time to everybody, listen to all sides and give that fair chance. I'd make sure that I'm listening to every fact that's put in front of me and analyzing it based on that.

MPP Stephanie Smyth: I mean, it's tough. There are 36,000 active cases right now before the Landlord and Tenant Board. So you've got to reduce delays but at the same time ensure fair decisions. That's a lot of pressure and a lot of weighing what's going on here. I know it sounds like, yes, you'll do the best that you can. But ultimately, how can you ensure fairness when you're making these decisions?

Ms. Farzana Kanji: I can continue the way I have been doing it, which is—and I believe I'm a fair person, and I will continue to work in that manner and hit the ground running. I just welcome the opportunity to learn and to hit the ground running, because I believe I have the credentials. I have the experience to be a good adjudicator.

MPP Stephanie Smyth: What do you think about the current resources there to support the Landlord and Tenant Board to manage this workload effectively? Do you think there's enough there, provided by this government?

Ms. Farzana Kanji: I'm not on the board yet, so I cannot comment on what is there or what is not there. What I can comment on is that I would welcome the opportunity to be an additional resource—an additional adjudicator—so that I can help in this process to reduce the backlog. We need more adjudicators, and that's why I'm here today.

MPP Stephanie Smyth: Often, we'll see with the LTB that there are some parties with legal representation and others without. That again speaks to an imbalance. How do you ensure that unrepresented tenants or landlords aren't disadvantaged?

Ms. Farzana Kanji: Sorry. Could you repeat the question?

MPP Stephanie Smyth: So, sometimes you will see that both landlords and tenants might not have legal representation. Some might come lawyered up; some might

not. How would you ensure that you don't see disadvantages in those hearings?

Ms. Farzana Kanji: I would talk to the parties in front of me and ensure that the public is aware of all the access to the resources that they have. I'd talk to them during the hearings and make a fair recommendation based on that.

MPP Stephanie Smyth: Sometimes, the Residential Tenancies Act is amended. So what in your background best prepares you to interpret some of the legislation and then apply it to the work that you're going to be doing?

Amendments to the Residential Tenancies Act and stuff: How would you stay on top of that? I mean, I know you're not familiar with Bill 60, but this is—I think context is what we're getting at here: understanding the context that we're living in right now, the context of the act, the changes that might come and then being able to interpret those and adjudicate.

0930

Ms. Farzana Kanji: Continuing education is an important value to me. It's very important. I would stay on top by keeping abreast of current affairs. Again, I think the training will be provided, and I look forward to that on-board training.

MPP Stephanie Smyth: Okay. Thank you very much.

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): So that is it, Farzana, for you today. You're welcome to remain in our cozy committee, observe the next interview and stay to see the results of your efforts, or you can go about your day. It's up to you. Thank you very much.

MR. JEREMY BUTLER

Review of intended appointment, selected by third party: Jeremy Butler, intended appointee as member, Human Rights Tribunal of Ontario.

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): We will now move to review the second intended appointee, Jeremy Butler. Oh, there you are. I didn't realize that was you over there. Jeremy Butler, thank you very much for coming in today and for your willingness to serve.

Jeremy Butler is nominated as a member of the Human Rights Tribunal of Ontario.

As you may have seen, Jeremy, you may make your initial statement, and then whatever time you speak for we will deduct from the government's allotment—which they're fine with; look at those happy faces—and then everyone has a round of 10 minutes of questioning.

You have the floor. Thank you very much.

Mr. Jeremy Butler: It is an honour for me to be considered for this appointment to the Human Rights Tribunal of Ontario. I appreciate the opportunity to address this committee to discuss my suitability for this position.

The HRTO is tasked with a critical role in ensuring that Ontarians have access to a fair, just and expeditious process for addressing claims of discrimination under the Human Rights Code. As I'll outline here today—or at any rate, attempt to do—my skills and experience make me well qualified to support that process in the role of a part-time member of the HRTO.

To begin, a bit about my background: I've long been interested in the moral foundations of our legal structures and institutions. This interest is part of what draws me to the HRTO since it plays a key role in upholding the moral ideal of equality that is so central to our society. This interest is also what motivated me to pursue the educational trajectory that I undertook as a student. I completed my BA in philosophy at Dalhousie University, in Halifax, and I went on to receive my master's and doctoral degrees from Queen's University, in Kingston. My research focused on moral, political and legal philosophy, and that advanced training in philosophy has equipped me with foundational skills in critical analysis, complex reasoning and clear writing that are vital in the adjudicative role for which I'm being considered.

After my PhD, I completed a post-doctoral fellowship in clinical and organizational ethics with the Centre for Clinical Ethics at Unity Health Toronto, and I went on to work as the CCE's senior ethics fellow. In those roles, I completed training in ethics consultation, policy development and research ethics, and I was fortunate to transition from that training to an independent position as an ethicist at Providence Care, in Kingston, which I still hold today.

My background as a professional ethicist has given me extensive experience in facilitation and mediation in emotionally charged and highly conflictual contexts. Ethics consultation involves supporting deliberation about high-stakes health care decisions, often with multiple parties who disagree passionately about the right course of action. I've done this work across a wide range of health care contexts, including critical care, palliative care, long-term care, community care, mental health and addictions, and rehabilitation. That experience has helped me to develop strong mediation and dispute resolution skills and an ability to maintain effective control in confrontational and stressful situations.

Through my ethics work, I also have extensive experience interpreting and applying statutory law in complex professional and institutional settings. While I'm not a lawyer, and while ethics consultation is distinct from legal advising, health care decision-making in Ontario is defined by a network of legislative standards that establish the framework within which all ethical deliberation must take place. A significant component of my work, therefore, involves interpreting and applying that framework in the complex circumstances of health care.

Further, the need to render this framework and its practical significance useful and intelligible to the people I serve, and that includes clinicians, non-clinician health care staff, patients and clients from all walks of life and many different backgrounds, and their families and loved ones, has helped me to refine my ability to communicate clearly and effectively with persons of diverse backgrounds and perspectives. This aspect of my work has also helped me to develop impartial and sound judgment in situations involving conflicting evidence, interests and viewpoints.

In addition to my role as an ethicist, I'm a professor at Queen's University. I teach primarily in the domains of

health law, policy and applied health ethics. Drawing on my background in philosophy, my teaching responsibilities have helped me to consolidate a strong understanding of the justice system, administrative and human rights law, as well as fundamental concepts of procedural fairness, natural justice and proportionality.

Further, in my own academic writing, including peer-reviewed articles on issues at the intersection of health law and ethics, I've developed strong skills in reviewing and analyzing case law while also demonstrating an ability to generate high-quality written work on tight timelines.

I also want to comment on my ability to manage a demanding workload. For the past several years of my life, a typical week for me has involved managing multiple ongoing clinical and organizational ethics consultations, completing multiple research ethics reviews, meeting daily with students to provide academic advice, all while running four undergraduate courses comprising typically over 1,000 students and overseeing a team of dozens of teaching assistants to help me run those courses. I am, in other words, well accustomed to managing a high volume of competing demands.

I thrive in my work because I'm skilled in time management, organization and priority setting. These strategies enable me to consistently meet my obligations in a timely fashion, and if I'm fortunate enough to be appointed as a member of the HRTTO, I'm confident they would serve me well in that role.

In closing, I understand that accepting the appointment for which I'm being considered would involve making a solemn commitment to serve the public interest to the best of my ability. In light of the skills and experience I've just outlined, I believe that I have the requisite abilities to analyze relevant facts in law, to make timely and well-reasoned decisions, to resolve cases consistently with the statutory mandate of the tribunal and to conduct fair proceedings.

In other words, I believe I would be an asset to the HRTTO in carrying out its mandate to resolve claims of discrimination and harassment brought under the Human Rights Code in a fair, just and timely way.

I thank you again for the invitation to appear here today, and I welcome any questions you might have for me.

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): Thank you very much, Jeremy, for your story and your wealth of experience.

We'll start with the government. The government has four minutes and 32 seconds, starting with MPP Dowie.

Mr. Andrew Dowie: Welcome, and thank you so much for putting your name forward.

In your remarks, you referenced the demanding workload that you've already been a part of, and indeed, I would surmise that you're correct in assessing that the Human Rights Tribunal has a high caseload of volume. I'm hoping you might be able to elaborate on how you manage and prioritize your work and how you would expect to apply that to cases that are destined to come under the tribunal.

Mr. Jeremy Butler: Thanks very much for the question. You know, it's interesting. Many, many different roles require really skilled time management, and everybody says they're good at time management. I don't think there's any magic to this. One develops a variety of strategies over time. For me, it's about keeping organized, keeping a high-level view of all of my commitments, all of the timelines for all my commitments, and making sure that I'm dedicating time to each commitment and getting that commitment time done within the time that I have allocated to do it. This, of course, can sometimes mean reevaluating one's priorities. Some commitments change their urgency at different points of time and you have to be able to pivot. But it's about being organized, managing your time well and setting priorities based on their actual importance.

I'll also note that I have a really significant workload as it is. I do have some flexibility, if I am fortunate enough to receive this appointment, to rejig some of my existing commitments to make room for the commitments I would take on as a part-time HRTTO member.

Mr. Andrew Dowie: Okay. Thank you.

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

Mr. Sheref Sabawy: Thank you very much for having the time to join us today to give us some idea about you and about how you can fit the position.

You have stated a wide range of expertise and different roles you have been going through in your career, and in this specific role, I understand that the human rights is like multiple parts: one of it is compassion and your own feeling about it and the law lines.

Can you share with us some of the experiences you had in your different roles which can give us some idea about your judgment on situations—different situations?

0940

Mr. Jeremy Butler: Thank you very much for the question. I think you picked out a really important concept in this context, which is compassion. In both of my main roles as an ethicist and as a professor, I often find myself privileged to interact with people who are, in different respects, at very vulnerable points in their lives and caught up in complex systems and institutions, whether that be the health care system when I'm acting in my ethicist role, or the post-secondary educational system in my teaching role. Whether one is a patient, or a family member or a loved one of a patient, or a student, you're caught in systems, the decisions of which and the outcomes of which are really significant for your life, and they're complex systems with complex rules and standards.

In my roles, I don't have a lot of scope to change the standards. I have to work with them to the best of my ability, but I view it as really important to try to meet people where they're at to communicate with them compassionately about the nature of the systems and the institutions they're working in and to try to help them understand how they can pursue their own ends within that system.

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

Mr. Jeremy Butler: When it's part of my role to do so, I apply the standards that are at play as impartially and fairly as I can.

Mr. Sheref Sabawy: Thank you.

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): MPP Firin, 37 seconds.

MPP Mohamed Firin: What do you believe it takes to be an effective member of the Human Rights Tribunal?

Mr. Jeremy Butler: I believe that I've attempted to outline some of that today. I believe it requires subject matter familiarity and an aptitude for impartial adjudication. I believe it takes compassion. I believe it takes organization, time management, priority-setting, complex reasoning and doing one's best to apply the laws as one understands them to the facts of any given case in as expeditious and fair a manner as one can. Thank you for the question.

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

Now we will go over to the official opposition. Good morning, MPP Gates. Take it away—10 minutes.

MPP Wayne Gates: Good morning, Mr. Butler. I listened to your 10-minute speech there, and it's interesting that you work for Providence Care, in Kingston. I'm the long-term-care critic, and I believe that long-term care is in crisis—still is in crisis. Then you talked about health care, and I believe health care is in crisis, when you see the number of—in my riding, anyway, where they just announced that they're going to lose 100 people out of a health care system where the emergency rooms now have 12 and 13-hour wait times. And then you talked about post-secondary education, and I believe that post-secondary education is in crisis, as you're probably seeing, with cutbacks in classes and that kind of stuff. So everything that you're involved in is—in my opinion, maybe not yours—in crisis.

But I'm going to start with a question, Mr. Butler: The Human Rights Tribunal is dealing with thousands of active cases, and some people are waiting more than two years for a hearing, which I believe is disgraceful. Given this serious backlog, what skills do you bring to help reduce delays, considering you have not served as an adjudicator before? And just to give you a little background in case you don't know, right now there's 8,446 cases outstanding. That's a pretty big number. If I put in a case today, I'm waiting 795 days. That's up even 200 more from 2023-24. So maybe you can kind of talk about those.

Mr. Jeremy Butler: Thank you for—sorry, can you just clarify the question for me? I take the point on the background context, but what was your question for me?

MPP Wayne Gates: Given the serious backlog, which I explained, what skills do you bring to help reduce delays, considering you have not served as an adjudicator before?

Mr. Jeremy Butler: Thank you for the question. That's a really good question. As I understand the role for which I'm being considered, it is as a part-time adjudicator, and as I understand the broad outlines of the responsibilities of

that role, my job would be to sort of work through the files that get assigned to me in as expeditious a manner as can be done while maintaining fairness and justice. I believe that the skills that I outlined here today do position me well to do that work. I believe I have demonstrated aptitude for impartial judgment in complex and emotionally charged and high-stakes situations. I've attempted to outline some of my time management and organizational skills such that I'm able to deliver high-quality work on tight timelines. I think what I can do to address what you outlined is I can do the work that's assigned to me in a high-quality way and in a timely fashion, and I believe that's the role for which I'm under consideration. I believe I'm well-suited to do that with the support of the board if I'm appointed.

It's my understanding, at least, that there is a significant onboarding process. I look forward to that onboarding, and I believe that that, combined with my background skills, experience and demonstrated aptitudes, do position me well to support the board.

Thank you for the question.

MPP Wayne Gates: But you've never been an adjudicator?

Mr. Jeremy Butler: I have not been an adjudicator with a tribunal before.

MPP Wayne Gates: The other thing I'd like to ask you: I said the numbers, so would you agree with me that having a backlog of 8,446 cases is too long?

Mr. Jeremy Butler: Can you say it again? I apologize; I didn't quite hear.

MPP Wayne Gates: Do you believe that having a backlog of 8,446 cases is too many?

Mr. Jeremy Butler: I apologize; I really don't believe I'm well positioned to comment on that not having worked in the board yet and not having an understanding of the kind of day-to-day operations of the board. I don't have an inside knowledge of how cases are assigned.

What I know is that, if and when I'm fortunate enough to be appointed as an adjudicator, I will do my best to tackle the cases that are assigned to me in as expeditious and as fair a manner I'm able to do, given my background and experience.

MPP Wayne Gates: You've been around a while. Although you're relatively young, you've been around a while, and I think it's a fair question. I think anybody—anybody—could say that having 8,446 cases outstanding and waiting almost a year and a half to even get heard is too long.

I'm going to ask you questions that we always ask. Have you ever done a donation to a political party?

Mr. Jeremy Butler: No.

MPP Wayne Gates: Have you ever been to a riding association?

Mr. Jeremy Butler: No.

MPP Wayne Gates: Have you ever worked on a campaign?

Mr. Jeremy Butler: No.

MPP Wayne Gates: You're not very active in the political scene?

Mr. Jeremy Butler: No.

MPP Wayne Gates: How many HRTO cases involve complex legal issues around employment law and discrimination? Your background is primarily in ethics, not law. How will you bridge that gap to make sure you're making fair, legal, sound decisions that will stand up to judicial review?

Mr. Jeremy Butler: Thank you for the question. You're right that my primary background and training is in ethics. As I attempted to outline in my statement today, it is part of the context of health care ethics in Ontario and in many jurisdictions that, really, very little of interest can be said about ethics without a quite intimate and systematic knowledge of the legislative frameworks that bind and shape ethical deliberation in the institutional context. Because of that, I have, as a professional necessity, had to become very familiar with the statutory framework governing health care in Ontario, and as a prerequisite to that, I've had to develop significant skills in reading, analyzing, interpreting and applying complex statutory frameworks.

I believe that background and those skills position me very well to, as you put it nicely, bridge the gap between my background and training and the role that I will have as an adjudicator. I will absolutely depend on, and I look forward to—again, if I'm fortunate enough to be appointed—the support of the board's training in doing that. I don't claim that I can do this without the support and onboarding of the board, but I believe that my background skills, knowledge and experience do position me well, with the support of that training, to do the job.

MPP Wayne Gates: I don't want to talk about health care in the province of Ontario.

The tribunal has struggled with recruiting and retaining adjudicators for years, which has contributed to the backlog. Do you believe that the government's approach to appointments has helped or hurt the tribunal's ability to deliver timely justice?

Mr. Jeremy Butler: Thank you for the question. I really don't have a lot of first-hand knowledge about the appointment process. I have the experience that I went through from my end as an applicant, and that gives one a pretty limited window. I kind of articulate my skills and experience as best I can in the application portal. I went through the writing assessment or exercise, and the conflict-of-interest assessment or exercise. But not having any knowledge of the background—how that's coordinated or decided—I'm really not well-positioned to comment on that system. I apologize.

MPP Wayne Gates: This next question might help you a bit too. This government has been criticized for appointing individuals who may not have the necessary background for adjudicative roles. Why should the public trust you—without any prior tribunal adjudication and experience—are the right person help fix this system already under strain?

Mr. Jeremy Butler: Thank you for the question. I have tried to outline today that I believe that my skills and experience—although they're not specifically in the tribunal

context—do demonstrate the aptitudes that are required of an adjudicator on the HRTO, as I understand them. These include, for example: subject familiarity of the legal framework at issue; an aptitude for impartial adjudication; the ability to weigh evidence, to apply the law, to engage in complex reasoning and to engage in clear writing; and to engage openly, compassionately and empathetically with people from all backgrounds.

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

MPP Wayne Gates: I've got one more question for you.

Mr. Jeremy Butler: Okay, go ahead.

MPP Wayne Gates: The Ombudsman has raised concerns that vulnerable people are waiting far too long for human rights decisions. How do you intend to assure that everyday Ontarians—especially workers, tenants and people with disabilities—will get timely access to justice under your watch?

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): Twenty-nine seconds.

Mr. Jeremy Butler: Thank you for the question. I intend to do that by bringing all of my skills, knowledge and experience, my energy and commitment to this job—which I don't have yet—to bear. As I understand my role as an adjudicator, I'll be working within my scope. I'll be responsible for what's assigned to me, and I plan to do that work in a timely fashion, in a fair way and an impartial way. I really value the opportunity to do that.

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

Last but not least, we have MPP Smyth from the third party.

MPP Stephanie Smyth: Thank you for being here today and putting yourself forward for this position. It's kind of cool to see an ethicist here. We talk about ethics, accountability and transparency all the time in government. I'd love you to sit next to me one day and watch the proceedings and get your take on it.

I think, as my colleague mentioned, the stats are around 8,000 active cases right now on the board, and some are waiting 795 days to have their cases heard—over two years. Anybody can agree that's ridiculous.

But just to see this caseload exploding—I'd love to hear your take on what's happening. Why are we seeing so many of these cases dealing with alleged discrimination and harassment under the Human Rights Code? What is your take on this explosion of cases heading to the tribunal?

Mr. Jeremy Butler: Thank you for the question. I do feel it's a really important question and a difficult question. I worry that I'm going to sound a bit like a broken record, but as currently an outsider to the tribunal, I don't feel that I'm in a good position to comment in a broad way—or to give a take, as you nicely put it—on those numbers or on that background.

Again, if I'm fortunate enough to be appointed, I look forward to getting on the tribunal, being able to make those assessments from the inside and see from an operational perspective how I can help to address that. But I'm not in a good position, and I apologize to comment in any broad way on those facts.

MPP Stephanie Smyth: I just thought it would be kind of interesting to hear your take on what's happening in society right now when it comes to ethics in the workplace that lead to all these allegations, right? I thought maybe you would have an inside understanding of what's happening on trends in life, but I'll move on from that.

Look, many of the applicants do face barriers; they have disabilities. We're talking about access for those people to justice. So how would you ensure that applicants who go before the board who need accommodations aren't disadvantaged, say, with virtual hearings? They are, in some ways, a fantastic way to have that access, but, on the other hand, they're a detriment. They can be.

Mr. Jeremy Butler: Yes—a really good question and a very important question. To start, in kind of broad terms, I believe I touched on this or on one element of this issue. In my roles both as an ethicist and in my educational role, I have occasion to interact with and support people in many different—we might say—life circumstances. And that includes many people who experience, for example, disabilities. So I'm not a stranger at all to supporting people in working through, as I said, complex institutional systems and complex systems of rules and standards. I'm no stranger to supporting and guiding people in that kind of context, and that includes people, as I say, of many different backgrounds.

I've done this in virtual contexts as well: teaching classes online, student meetings online, talking with patients and families in Zoom meetings or Teams meetings. I was working in the health system during the pandemic, when everybody first turned to doing things virtually or remotely. So I've got a lot of experience with that, and I think that I plan to do—it's my hope that I can do this by utilizing my skills and my experience, supporting people, helping people, and doing that in accordance with the standards and the scope of my role at the board, if I'm fortunate enough to be appointed.

MPP Stephanie Smyth: So do you feel—which is a more fair process, if you had to choose between virtual or in-person, especially when you're dealing with the Human Rights Tribunal, or even something like the Landlord and Tenant Board?

Mr. Jeremy Butler: Are you asking is it more fair—

MPP Stephanie Smyth: More effective or fair in terms of—

Mr. Jeremy Butler: Oh, right.

MPP Stephanie Smyth: —for people who are at and have—maybe it's always best when people gather live, together, in person. Or is it? From the experience that you've had.

Mr. Jeremy Butler: I mean, I don't think that I'm in a position to make an overall or overarching judgment about which type of interaction is more fair. I think there are all

kinds of contextual details that go into these judgments. And I think it's really—for someone, again, in my position who's currently an outsider to the board and not aware of the day-to-day operations, not having been involved in that, it's really not possible for me to speak intelligently and make judgments about what is, in any general sense, the most fair way to conduct.

MPP Stephanie Smyth: Okay. Mandatory mediation is now required for all applications filed after June 1, so how would you prevent parties, especially vulnerable applicants, from feeling pressured into settlements that might not reflect a fair outcome?

Mr. Jeremy Butler: I think that in any of these contexts—and again, I think back to my experiences working with patients, families, with students. I always think one of the most important things, again, when people are navigating complex, often intimidating institutional systems, the decisions and the processes of which have significant outcomes for people's lives—when you're privileged enough to be in a position where you're almost acting as a representative or an agent of that system in some way and in a position to explain to people the rules and try to help them understand how to navigate that system, one of the most important things, I think always, is to ensure that people are aware of what their rights are. So it's always to foreground for individuals navigating these systems what their decisions are and to try to help them know that whatever the set of decisions are, those are within their hands and they ought not to make decisions about what to accept or what to do or how to proceed on the basis of a sense of vague pressure from the system or the context or something like that.

For me, again, I'll rely on training and onboarding from the board to refine and operationalize my knowledge and skills to help people in this context, but I believe that one of the main things one can do is ensure that people are clear about their rights.

MPP Stephanie Smyth: Many complainants come forward before the tribunal after the experience, especially experiences involving discrimination, harassment or trauma. What trauma-informed practices would you apply during the hearings?

Mr. Jeremy Butler: Yes, that's a really good question. This actually harkens back, I think, to a question that was asked on the government side about compassion. I attempted there to outline my broad ethos for interacting with and supporting people in vulnerable positions when navigating complex systems.

I believe that I have the skills and experience to compassionately and supportively help people navigate complex systems. I would intend and plan to implement those skills to the best of my ability—with the support of the training of the board—to ensure that people who have experienced trauma find their interaction—at least, with me in my role, and if I'm fortunate enough to be appointed—not a retraumatizing one.

I can't remember all that was in my application package, but I do, in fact, have experience in health care contexts, in trauma-informed care and practices. Those inform,

in broad terms, my ethos when interacting with people of all backgrounds. I believe that I am well-positioned to do that well.

MPP Stephanie Smyth: Thank you very much.

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): Thank you very much, Jeremy, for your interesting story and comments. Like Farzana, you can remain, or you can go about your busy day.

Mr. Jeremy Butler: Can I ask if there's an etiquette? Should I skedaddle? What's the—

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): People often stay. It's going to take a minute or so.

Mr. Jeremy Butler: Thank you.

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

Mr. Jeremy Butler: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I appreciate it.

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): Great to meet you.

Okay. We will now consider the intended appointment of Farzana Kanji. Can I have a motion, please? MPP Smith.

Ms. Laura Smith: I move concurrence in the intended appointment of Farzana Kanji, nominated as member of the Landlord and Tenant Board.

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): Okay. Thank you very much, MPP Gates.

Are the members ready to vote?

Ayes

Bailey, Dowie, Firin, Sabawy, Laurie Scott, Laura Smith, Smyth.

Nays

Gates, Gilmour.

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

Congratulations to Farzana on your appointment.

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

Ms. Laura Smith: I move concurrence in the intended appointment of Jeremy Butler, nominated as member of the Human Rights Tribunal of Ontario.

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

MPP Wayne Gates: Recorded vote.

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): MPP Gates has asked for a recorded vote.

Are the members ready to vote?

Ayes

Bailey, Dowie, Firin, Sabawy, Laurie Scott, Laura Smith, Smyth.

Nays

Gates, Gilmour.

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

Congratulations to Jeremy Butler on your appointment and your new, busier schedule.

Thank you very much to everyone. Before we adjourn, are there any comments or questions? MPP Gates.

MPP Wayne Gates: I'd like to bring forward a motion next week that talks about—I think in the last shutdown that we had when we were gone for five months, there were 119 people that were appointed to this committee; a lot of them were PC supporters and failed candidates, including the one that I beat in Niagara Falls.

I'd like to have us sit during the break so that we get a chance to talk to the candidates for these appointments.

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): Okay. Thank you very much. We will look forward to that next week.

Thank you to everyone for attending today.

The committee now stands adjourned until December 11, 2025.

The committee adjourned at 1004.

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