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A-7

**Standing Committee on
Government Agencies**

Intended appointments

**Comité permanent des
organismes gouvernementaux**

Nominations prévues

1st Session
44th Parliament
Thursday 6 November 2025

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44^e législature
Jeudi 6 novembre 2025

Chair: Mary-Margaret McMahon
Clerk: Vanessa Kattar

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CONTENTS

Thursday 6 November 2025

Subcommittee report	A-59
Intended appointments.....	A-59
Ms. Julie O'Driscoll	A-59
Ms. Heather Woodside.....	A-63

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

STANDING COMMITTEE ON
GOVERNMENT AGENCIES

Thursday 6 November 2025

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

COMITÉ PERMANENT DES
ORGANISMES GOUVERNEMENTAUX

Jeudi 6 novembre 2025

The committee met at 0900 in room 151.

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): Good morning, everyone. This will be the last time we see each other for a while. We won't see each other next week, so tissues are around here somewhere. Let's get started on the best committee at the Pink Palace—at Queen's Park. We're calling the Standing Committee on Government Agencies to order, and as always, comments through the Chair, please.

SUBCOMMITTEE REPORT

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): The first order of business actually will be the adoption of the subcommittee report, dated Thursday, October 30, 2025. Could I please have a motion? MPP Smith.

Ms. Laura Smith: I move adoption of the subcommittee report on intended appointments, dated Thursday, October 30, 2025, on the order-in-council certificate dated October 24, 2025.

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

INTENDED APPOINTMENTS

MS. JULIE O'DRISCOLL

Review of intended appointment, selected by official opposition party and third party: Julie O'Driscoll, intended appointee as member, council of the College of Early Childhood Educators.

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): Now we will move to the most exciting part of the meeting. We're going to review the intended appointees. Our first intended appointee is Julie O'Driscoll. She's nominated as a member of the council of the College of Early Childhood Educators.

Welcome, Julie; we're thrilled to have you here. If you could take some time and make a statement, and then each party will interview you for 10 minutes. Whatever length of time you use in your statement will be withdrawn from the government's time, but I don't think they mind, so go ahead.

Ms. Julie O'Driscoll: Good morning, Chair and members of the committee, and thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today. My name is Julie O'Driscoll, and I'm deeply honoured to be considered for the appointment to the College of Early Childhood Educators.

I bring over 15 years of experience in communications, policy and public affairs across government, the private sector and non-profit organizations. Throughout my career, I've had the privilege of working at the intersection of public policy and community impact, ensuring that complex decisions are guided by transparency, accountability and public trust.

I began my career in federal communications, serving in several ministerial offices, including Public Safety Canada and the Office of the Prime Minister. In those roles, I managed many public and sensitive files where discretion and confidentiality were essential. That experience taught me the importance of clear, responsible communication, particularly when decisions affect people's safety, well-being and confidence in public institutions.

At the provincial level, I led communications strategies supporting major housing and municipal policy initiatives and worked to strengthen collaboration between government and local partners. And now, in my work as a consultant counselling clients in a variety of public policy challenges, it is always with a focus on integrity and the public interest.

I see strong parallels between this work and the mandate of the College of Early Childhood Educators. The college's responsibility to regulate the profession, uphold ethical and professional standards and protect the public requires balanced decision-making, thoughtful communication and a deep commitment to fairness. These are principles that have guided my work throughout my career.

On a personal note, I'm also a mother of three school-aged children, and I'm very involved in their schools and activities. Earlier in my life, I was a competitive rower in university and later coached high school rowing. Those experiences reinforced the importance of mentorship, teamwork and inclusion—values that deeply align with the mission of the college and the educators it supports.

I've seen first-hand the transformative role that early childhood educators play in building confidence, curiosity and a love of learning that carries forward through life. If appointed, I would approach this role with that dual perspective: as someone who understands governance, accountability and public policy and as a parent who recognizes the human side of those responsibilities.

I would be committed to supporting the council's work and maintaining high standards of professionalism, ensuring transparency in decision-making and promoting confi-

dence in the college's mandate to serve and protect the public interest.

Thank you again for the opportunity to speak with you today. I'd be honoured to contribute my experience and perspective to the important work of the council, and I'd be happy to answer any questions the committee may have.

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

We will now go over to the government's side, and you have seven minutes, 19 seconds. MPP Smith.

Ms. Laura Smith: I want to thank Ms. O'Driscoll for coming here today and presenting.

I was really interested in not only your professional life but also your personal life. You're a mother of three and you've been working with youth, and a competitive rower.

The role of the council of the College of Early Childhood Educators would have the responsibility of keeping childhood teaching professionals accountable in the public interest. I know you would understand that—how old are your children, if you don't mind me asking?

Ms. Julie O'Driscoll: Ten, eight and five.

Ms. Laura Smith: All right. That's good. Could you comment on your experiences with early childhood education or your relationships with early educators?

Ms. Julie O'Driscoll: Sure. Thanks for the question. As a parent, I've obviously seen first-hand the impact that educators have on kids, especially through those very critical years of COVID. Our kids were quite young at that stage and just getting into the thick of kindergarten and grade 1. That was when you really saw the stars of the education field who really went above and beyond to help kids get through that really critical time.

Then I think about just my experience working at my kids' schools. I'm a parent rep for one of my sons, actively involved with our other two, who are at a different school. I think just staying involved with the day-to-day of what they are dealing with and the teachers they have has been very important.

Ms. Laura Smith: Thank you so much. I was going to ask you a little more about being a parent and being involved. You've obviously been involved with your school's programming. I appreciate you bringing up those times a few years ago where we had to struggle. I'm a mother too, and I understand that.

Can you talk a little bit more about your relationship with educators?

Ms. Julie O'Driscoll: Yes, sure. As I said, being a parent, being dialed in on who my kids' teachers are and who is overseeing the school and very active in meeting with our teachers regularly. And I have friends who are teachers. I think that's been a really important part for me too, seeing the impact of the profession that they have on the kids in our schools. Again, through that COVID period, that was for me very real in terms of the impact that teachers had on kids.

Ms. Laura Smith: Thank you so much.

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

MPP Bailey.

Mr. Robert Bailey: Chair, through you to Ms. O'Driscoll: Could you expand a little bit about—I read your résumé—how your past experiences in education, whether in sports or that, would help you with the College of Early Childhood Educators?

Ms. Julie O'Driscoll: I think through the work that I've had just working with diverse stakeholders, whether it's through government, government agencies or municipalities in some of the roles I've had, and then in the private sector, working at a large association. I think a big part of this work is working with different voices, different perspectives. In the work that I've done to date, there's been a lot of opportunity to do that.

Mr. Robert Bailey: Okay. Thank you.

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

MPP Dowie.

Mr. Andrew Dowie: Thank you so much for being here. You come bringing a lot of experience in complex regulatory environments and having to balance a lot of stakeholder expectations. I was hoping to see if there's something that you know you'll be able to bring from your past experience into this role based on your past experience, how you can really zero in on helping the college.

Ms. Julie O'Driscoll: I think what I've found that I bring to the table is being able to find common ground among people that have different perspectives. I think the college will obviously have a range of ideas and opinions, and I think the work that I've had to do over the past 15 or so years, that's been a big part of it: finding common ground and shared perspectives, even if you may not agree on all things.

I work with a lot of people who have different views and perspectives in the firm I work with in particular. I think we've been really successful at finding that common ground for the folks that we work with.

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

MPP Sabawy.

Mr. Sheref Sabawy: Thank you very much for taking the time to join us today to give us some perspective about your past experience. Serving on the college's governing council is a significant commitment to public service—lots of work, lots of issues.

0910

I will ask the question which I think is the number one question: What motivated you to seek appointment to that specific Ontario College of Early Childhood Educators? What's unique about that role that specifically motivated you to join that?

Ms. Julie O'Driscoll: Thanks for the question. I think I'm always looking for opportunities to serve and give back. And I'm kind of in the thick of parenting right now, as I've said, so as far as early childhood educators, they're my day-to-day and who I interact with twice a day at drop-off and pick-up and parent interviews. So that's what appealed to me from a college perspective.

I think people look for opportunities to serve in different ways, whether it's putting your name on a ballot or whether it's looking for opportunities like this.

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

Ms. Julie O'Driscoll: I've always looked for opportunities to serve, and this is one where I feel like I can do that.

Mr. Sheref Sabawy: Thank you.

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

MPP Denault.

MPP Billy Denault: Thank you, Ms. O'Driscoll. I was on a—

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): You have 34 seconds.

MPP Billy Denault: Okay. Well, you know what? I'll just go right into it. How do you believe, being on the board, you would approach decision-making in a group setting where there's many differing opinions?

Ms. Julie O'Driscoll: I think actively listening, looking for common ground and shared perspectives—I think it's something I do day-to-day with the clients I work with, with my colleagues at work and in previous roles that I've had. I see this as no different in trying to find those areas of commonality that we can agree on.

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): Thank you very much. That completes the government questions.

Now we will move over to the official opposition. Who would like to go first? MPP Gilmour.

MPP Alexa Gilmour: Welcome, and thank you so much for putting your name to serve in this way. It's really great to meet you today. I really appreciated hearing about your relationship as a parent to teachers at pick-up, at drop-off, on the parent rep.

Can you tell me what the difference is between a teacher and an ECE—an early childhood educator—or an RECE?

Ms. Julie O'Driscoll: Good question. For me, I see the early childhood educators as sort of the earlier days of education in terms of preschool and kindergarten years. Those are the teachers that I'm in touch with for two of my kids' schools right now. Then, I see teachers as the next cohort of age in terms of—

MPP Alexa Gilmour: The college that you are actually being appointed to is the College of Early Childhood Educators. They deliver programs right up to 12 years of age—so not just preschool, not just early childhood daycares. Only 31% of ECEs and RECEs are actually in the schools. So I'm just wondering if you could speak a little bit more, in lieu of that, to your direct experience with early childhood educators and/or RECEs, the registered early childhood educators.

Ms. Julie O'Driscoll: The teachers that I've interacted with from when my kids started when they were 18 months—I can't say I've asked them specifically for the credential behind their name, but I would imagine that some of those individuals are ECEs. It's not a conversation at drop-off where I've asked—

MPP Alexa Gilmour: I would imagine that before you step into that board you would certainly learn what you're

getting into in terms of regulating ECEs as opposed to teachers, who are regulated through a different body.

In terms of that, I'm wondering about one thing that I noticed on your LinkedIn skills. You've got tremendous skills for communications, but "bilingual" wasn't listed. Are you bilingual?

Ms. Julie O'Driscoll: I am not.

MPP Alexa Gilmour: You're not bilingual in any other—just English is the only language you have?

Ms. Julie O'Driscoll: I can speak very remedial French, but yes—

MPP Alexa Gilmour: Okay.

Can I just pause my time for a minute, Chair and Clerk? I don't understand what the next step would be if a requirement of this appointee—and the committee who needs to decide—is that the appointee must be bilingual to ensure the college meets legislative requirements. I don't understand how we as a committee could recommend someone who does not meet a requirement that is a "must" requirement. Can you help me understand that?

Interjection.

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): Thank you very much, MPP Gilmour, for raising a point. This committee just reviews the applicants and then makes a decision. So if this committee feels the applicant does not have the requirements, it's up to the committee to vote accordingly.

MPP Alexa Gilmour: Okay. So I want it to be very clearly recorded in the record that this applicant does not have the requirements—doesn't say "could have," "is ideally suited if they have"; it says "must be bilingual"—and that this applicant has stated very clearly that they are not bilingual in French at all.

I can continue on in the questioning, but clearly we have a situation where I would say that we cannot recommend someone who does not have the requirements of the position.

In terms of some of these other pieces that I did have—I was wondering about your connections, for example, to a political party. Are you connected to a political party?

Ms. Julie O'Driscoll: I have, in the past. As I said, I've worked in the federal government and the provincial government, so—

MPP Alexa Gilmour: And what party was that?

Ms. Julie O'Driscoll: Federally, it was the Conservative Party, and provincially, the PC Party.

MPP Alexa Gilmour: Have you ever made a donation to a political party?

Ms. Julie O'Driscoll: I have.

MPP Alexa Gilmour: Do you know how much you've made over the last few years?

Ms. Julie O'Driscoll: No, not off the top of my head—the total.

Ms. Laura Smith: Point of order.

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

Ms. Laura Smith: Respectfully, I submit that the questions align with the intended appointment's qualifications.

MPP Alexa Gilmour: What I'm just trying to establish here is how someone who doesn't actually have the requirements for the job may have, in fact, become an appointee. And I do note that since 2022 the combination of all donations is \$6,208, to the Conservatives, in total—the riding associations and the PC donations.

I can withdraw that question. I wondered, though—

Mr. Robert Bailey: Good judgment.

MPP Alexa Gilmour: Well, it's on the record, but if it's not an appropriate question—

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): I would say that that line of questioning has been asked in this committee for many years.

MPP Alexa Gilmour: So then I'm going to keep that question in.

With regard to education, the Ontario Coalition for Better Child Care anti-racism working group recommends that the CECE mandate training modules on anti-racism and implement field placements to make sure that the training is more accessible.

If you were to somehow magically make it through this process without the qualifications, would you support these recommendations?

Ms. Julie O'Driscoll: If it's part of the council's recommendations, yes, I would.

MPP Alexa Gilmour: It's not part of the council's; it's part of the coalition for better child care.

Ms. Julie O'Driscoll: I'd have to look more closely at that, of course.

MPP Alexa Gilmour: Similarly, the child care sector is facing a recruitment and retention crisis right now in the province. We've got lots of advocates calling for different pieces. I'm wondering if you've had a chance to look at what they're calling for; what you think the retention and recruitment crisis is; and what your answer might be—and bring to the board—in terms of recruiting and retaining ECE teachers.

Ms. Julie O'Driscoll: I haven't done a deep dive on the retention issue, but I'd be supportive of any strategies that bring more teachers—ECEs, in particular—into the fold. I'd have to look more closely at that.

MPP Alexa Gilmour: In summary, given your confusion between an ECE and a teacher, and lack of French, are you still feeling really good about this position, and what would you be still bringing to this appointment?

0920

Ms. Julie O'Driscoll: I think I've outlined my qualifications to date. I bring a long career that I'm proud of, and I make no apologies for it. So, yes, I am still interested in pursuing—I mean, given my lack of French skills.

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

Ms. Laura Smith: Point of order: I just wanted to point out that the requirement is that some of the board members have to be bilingual, not the whole board.

MPP Alexa Gilmour: We'll have to check that. I have a document here that says appointees must be. It doesn't say "some" in my in my document that was given to us, I believe, by the Clerk here. It says, "Appointees must be

bilingual, to ensure that the college meets the legislative requirement to provide services in both official languages...."

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): Okay. Thank you very much to MPP Smith and MPP Gilmour. The fact remains, it is up to you how you vote on whether you have faith in this candidate to perform the duties of the council of the College of Early Childhood Educators.

MPP Wayne Gates: Chair?

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): Yes?

MPP Wayne Gates: Is her time stopped?

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): No—when I said that?

MPP Wayne Gates: No, now. As we're debating what she said, is her time stopped, or is it still running?

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): Typically, we don't stop. But let's keep going. There's one minute and 25 seconds left. Thank you.

MPP Alexa Gilmour: I'm a little confused as to how we as a committee have been left to make a decision about someone who's gotten this far without the qualifications. And that's something that I think we need to pick up, because I don't think it's fair to put on this committee to make a decision when it clearly says that that's a requirement. And perhaps that's something we can take back.

But I think the other thing that I was hoping maybe to touch on is also around the enforcing—well, let me just see.

You know, I think I'm going to cede the rest of my time. I feel like at this point I'm quite confused how we got an applicant to this moment and that we're being invited to review an applicant that doesn't meet the criteria.

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

Now we will move to the third party. MPP Smyth.

MPP Stephanie Smyth: Ms. O'Driscoll, thanks for being here today. We appreciate your experience and your background.

I want to zero in on sector-specific knowledge. The council manages the affairs of the college. So, what would you say is any practical experience or knowledge base that you have regarding the current challenges facing ECEs, as mentioned before—staffing shortages, curriculum issues or the requirements for issuing and renewing certificates and registration?

Ms. Julie O'Driscoll: Well, I think I bring a diverse background of experience through the work that I've done to date. And I think it's beneficial for the council to have a variety of expert-specific people and those who bring various different pieces of background that can be part the work that we're doing. I mean, I'm not an educator. I don't claim to be one or an expert in being one, but I think the experience that I bring to date is diverse enough that there's some value to the work that we would do.

MPP Stephanie Smyth: If there's a retention issue, a staffing issue with ECEs or people in this field, what would you suspect might be some of the problems?

Ms. Julie O'Driscoll: That's a good question. I think it's something that the government's likely zeroed in on

working on, and I can't say that I know what all the reasons would be for retention, but—

MPP Stephanie Smyth: I know you're a mom, and you've seen, obviously, the whole early childhood experience. I think my member beside me mentioned about ECEs that not all are in the schools, but they're at daycares; they're in all kinds of places where children are and entrusted with their care and looking after them. How do you feel about compensation for ECEs, how we value them in our society?

Ms. Julie O'Driscoll: My personal perspective: I value them very highly, and I think the work they do is critical. I think parents make decisions to put their children in different levels of care, different types of care, and I think they should be compensated adequately for the work that they're doing, considering that they're taking care of our future.

MPP Stephanie Smyth: Do you think compensation could be an issue for retention in the field?

Ms. Julie O'Driscoll: It's quite possible. I'd have to look into it, but it's quite possible.

MPP Stephanie Smyth: Are you aware of how much they're paid?

Ms. Julie O'Driscoll: Not off the top of my head.

MPP Stephanie Smyth: No? Okay.

I know that you've managed a lot of large communications across ministry projects and corporate affairs advice, communications directly. How might this transfer to, say, any regulatory duties of the college in terms of investigating complaints against members or dealing with issues like professional misconduct?

Ms. Julie O'Driscoll: I've had some board experience with a non-profit I worked with. I think just my background and being able to sort of manage really complex issues is going to be part of it, diving into issues and being able to look at things fairly, with integrity, on the issues that are brought to the college. I feel like I have a good history of doing that with the work that I've done, so I feel confident that I'd be able to do that in this role.

MPP Stephanie Smyth: You also worked, I gather, building relationships with local and cultural media and engaging with elected officials. Given that the college is a governing body, how would you work to prioritize the voices of practising ECEs and parents and children over any, say, political interests or stakeholders you've previously worked with?

Ms. Julie O'Driscoll: I've obviously had political experience—I've worked in government—but I've also had a lot of work outside of government. In those roles, I've been non-partisan, and I do that day to day with the work I do with clients, with the colleagues I have at work, who are all from different backgrounds and perspectives. I don't see an issue in being able to prioritize that with this work any differently than I have in the work that I do right now.

MPP Stephanie Smyth: Thank you for your time.

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): Thank you very much, MPP Smyth, and thank you very much, Julie, for your presentation, for coming forward today and for the willingness to serve. You are off the hot seat.

MS. HEATHER WOODSIDE

Review of intended appointment, selected by third party: Heather Woodside, intended appointee as member, Landlord and Tenant Board.

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): We will now move to the review of the second intended appointee, Heather Woodside, who is nominated as a member of the Landlord and Tenant Board.

Heather, I'm sure you saw how it works. We will be eager to hear your presentation, then we will deduct any time when you spoke from the government, and then another two rounds of 10 minutes each.

Thank you. You have the floor.

Ms. Heather Woodside: Thank you. Does the microphone activate automatically?

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): Automatically. They're magic.

Ms. Heather Woodside: Okay. Are we ready to proceed?

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

Ms. Heather Woodside: Thank you.

Madam Chair, honourable members of the Standing Committee on Government Agencies, good morning. Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today. I am pleased to be here to discuss my qualifications to serve as a full-time member of the Landlord and Tenant Board. It is my hope that following this morning's hearing, you will find that my background and skill set have equipped me to serve as a fair and effective adjudicator.

I am honoured to be considered for an appointment as a full-time member of the Landlord and Tenant Board. I bring to this role over 30 years of dedicated public service, including extensive courtroom and hearing experience as a licensed paralegal.

I was raised in Mississauga and have called Ottawa home for many years. In between, I had the opportunity to live and work in England for five years, which was the experience of a lifetime. I gained valuable cross-cultural experience and a deep appreciation for the challenges faced by individuals adapting to a new culture and life in a new country.

I am a firm believer in the value of public service. Throughout my adult life, volunteerism and lifelong learning have remained guiding principles.

I am a licensed paralegal in good standing with the Law Society of Ontario, and I hold a paralegal diploma from Algonquin College, where I was honoured to serve as valedictorian of the school of business. I also hold a bachelor of arts in sociology from the University of Toronto.

0930

Currently, I serve as a municipal prosecutor with the city of Ottawa, where I prosecute offences under the Provincial Offences Act, including municipal bylaws and the federal Contraventions Act. Prior to this, I spent five years as a provincial prosecutor with the Ministry of the Attorney General. In both roles, I have developed a strong foundation in interpreting legislation, evaluating evidence and conducting fair and impartial hearings. I apply the reasonable prospect of conviction threshold when vetting files,

engage in judicial pre-trials and conduct resolution negotiations, all while upholding the principles of procedural fairness and advancing the public interest.

In addition to my role as a full-time prosecutor, I have served as a part-time instructor at Algonquin College since 2019, teaching in the paralegal graduate certificate program. This role has strengthened my ability to communicate complex legal concepts clearly and effectively. I've also contributed to the professional development of paralegals through my volunteer work with the Law Society of Ontario and the County of Carleton Law Association.

Earlier in my career, I worked as a case coordinator in social services for both the city of Ottawa and the city of Toronto. In that role, I interpreted and applied legislation to assess eligibility for financial assistance. I conducted home visits and in-office interviews and supported clients facing social, economic and employment challenges. I worked closely with emergency shelters and community organizations, often assisting clients in crisis. That experience gave me a first-hand understanding of the barriers many Ontarians face in securing stable housing and navigating government systems. It also instilled in me a deep respect for the importance of accessible, compassionate service delivery—values that I carry with me to this day.

Throughout my career, I have worked with diverse and often vulnerable populations, including through my volunteer roles with Lanark County Interval House, the Ottawa Mission and youth mental health initiatives. I understand the importance of fair, respectful, transparent proceedings, especially for self-represented parties, and I am deeply committed to access to justice.

I am also well prepared to support the Landlord and Tenant Board's digital-first approach. I'm proficient in a wide range of legal and administrative technologies, including electronic case management systems, legal research databases and virtual hearing tools such as Zoom and Teams. I'm comfortable managing hearings independently, drafting decisions and working in a paperless environment.

I believe my experience, values and skill set align closely with the mandate of the Landlord and Tenant Board and the broader mission of Tribunals Ontario. I'm confident in my ability to contribute meaningfully to the board's work and to serve the people of Ontario with professionalism, integrity and fairness.

I thank you again for your time and consideration.

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

We will now go over to the government side. You have four minutes and 44 seconds. MPP Sabawy.

Mr. Sheref Sabawy: Thank you very much for the time and your passion to help the public, serving in the community.

It looks like you have already some engagements before in the community, like volunteering, volunteer work and in other capacity. What have you learned from it, and how can you bring these experiences you built up through other roles into this work with the Landlord and Tenant Board,

knowing that it's one of the boards which have lots of, I would say, controversy between landlords and tenants? Sometimes it's very emotional.

Ms. Heather Woodside: And "emotional" is the word. Thank you for the question.

Throughout my adult life, I've volunteered, whether it be in my children's schools—now that my children are grown, I'm able to volunteer in areas that interest me, such as the Ottawa Mission, Lanark County Interval House. What it's taught me is to listen—so, listen, hear all sides of the story. Sometimes people just want to be heard. They want to tell you their story.

What I've learned, also, is that anyone can find themselves in a difficult situation. In the Landlord and Tenant Board, it's going to be a balance between the landlord, who it's their livelihood, and the tenant, who is at risk of perhaps losing their home. These are very emotional, charged issues, and it's important to listen to determine what the issues are and to try and work towards a better outcome.

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

Mr. Andrew Dowie: Thank you for being here. I think everyone around this table has constituents who have been through the LTB and recognize the high caseload volumes and timing for decisions.

Can you tell us about your experience managing heavy workloads? I'm hoping you can share with us your strategy for staying on top of your cases and delivering your decisions within the targeted processing times.

Ms. Heather Woodside: I'm not a member of the Landlord and Tenant Board, but of course, I don't think there's any dispute that there is a backlog. I believe that the latest annual report for 2024 indicated that the Landlord and Tenant Board had received the most applications ever, so that's a challenge.

If I were to be appointed as an adjudicator, preparation is key: knowing what I'm dealing with; preparing for the day; getting all the facts—not trying to rush people but getting all the facts; making timely decisions. I believe it's smart to write a decision as soon after hearing the facts as possible, while it's still fresh in one's mind.

As far as managing caseloads, ever since I first started my career with the city of Toronto, I've managed huge caseloads, whether it be social services or, now, as a prosecutor. Even in the private sector, when I worked in the UK, I was dealing with key accounts, so sort of a caseload, in the private sense.

Preparation, organization are what's key, and those are skills that I believe I have.

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

Mr. Robert Bailey: Thank you, Ms. Woodside. Could you give us an outline, in the time remaining, of what you think it takes to be an effective member of the Landlord and Tenant Board?

Ms. Heather Woodside: As I had mentioned, preparation, organization, listening skills, listening to people. I find, in the justice system, a lot of people just want to be heard, and they want that to exercise that right to be heard.

So listening to what they say, identifying what the issue is, trying to come to a resolution that puts them in a better position—of course, applying the legislation as required, but it's a balance of applying the legislation but also being reasonable and compassionate about it.

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

Over to the official opposition: MPP Gates, are you going to take it away?

MPP Wayne Gates: I'm going to try. Thank you, Chair. I appreciate it.

Thanks for being here. Just to follow up on my colleague's question to you, we all have lots of cases with people being evicted, seniors being thrown into the street. What I didn't understand, and what he didn't mention, is that they brought in Bill 60, which they won't even have committee hearings on. That's disgraceful, quite frankly. Some of the cases, I'm sure you've heard, and cases that we've heard, bring tears to your eyes. That's how bad it is, what's going on.

When they were in opposition—because one of their members complained about our line of questioning—when they were over here, they were asking these same questions I'm going to ask you. They haven't been in government for the last 100 years; it's only been the last eight. Prior to that, they were 15 years in opposition, and they asked these questions. So I'm going to ask them again because I think it's fair. I think it's reasonable. I'm guessing before you answer, but I have a thought in my head how you're going to answer.

Have you ever donated to any political party?

Ms. Heather Woodside: Yes.

MPP Wayne Gates: What parties would they be?

Ms. Heather Woodside: The Progressive Conservative Party.

MPP Wayne Gates: Would you remember: Was it provincially or federally?

Ms. Heather Woodside: Provincially. I honestly don't remember if I donated federally—I may have.

0940

MPP Wayne Gates: Would you have any idea of the amount?

Ms. Laura Smith: Point of order.

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

Ms. Laura Smith: Point of order, Madam Chair: I respectfully submit that the questions align with the candidate's capacity to do the job and the qualifications that she's bringing forth today.

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): Thank you for sharing your opinion. As I mentioned, this line of questioning has been done for ages, before I was here, so I think we will allow it. Of course, we will always be polite to our candidates.

MPP Wayne Gates: I'm always polite—

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): I know.

MPP Wayne Gates: —but there's a reason why I ask this.

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

MPP Wayne Gates: What I'm trying to establish here—this is a very important committee, quite frankly. The LTB is very important.

I have daughters that are paying rent that they can't afford, quite frankly. And let's be honest; I think we all have friends and neighbours and family members that are struggling to pay rent. This is a very, very important position.

What I want to do is establish here that you shouldn't be getting a job, as we saw with the first person, because you donate to a certain party. I think that's wrong. I'm agreeing 100%, because I've listened to what you've said. I believe that you can do this job. But I really believe that it's fair, reasonable and should be asked what parties you are donating to, because we want to take it out of this room.

I'll give you a quick example before I get into your questions. I ran in the last election—matter of fact, I ran in the last five elections; that's why I've been here for five terms. But shortly after my election, they appointed the person that I beat to an agency. They never had to come to this committee. I think that's wrong, and I think it really hurts this committee. I take great pride in belonging in this committee. I've been on this now for about eight years, so that's why I did it.

So I'm going to ask you a couple of questions. I do appreciate your honesty.

The Landlord and Tenant Board is still in crisis. Even after hiring more adjudicators and pouring in funds, tens of thousands of cases remain and people wait months, sometimes years, for a hearing and orders. From your vantage point, what has gone so horribly wrong with the LTB and what do you plan to do about it?

Ms. Heather Woodside: Thank you for the question. Not being a member of the board yet, I'm not privy to all the ins and outs, but of course, I'm aware that there is a backlog and a high volume of cases at the Landlord and Tenant Board. My goal in applying for this position is to roll up my sleeves, jump in and do what I can do to help out with that backlog.

I'm looking forward to the onboarding process and the learning and the training, and I hope to be an effective adjudicator, and that balance, again, of listening to people but getting decisions made in a timely, effective manner.

MPP Wayne Gates: I appreciate that. We may or may not agree on my next question, but you did raise it.

Ontario's digital-first approach has raised serious access-to-justice concerns. Many vulnerable tenants, particularly seniors, low-income individuals, people with disabilities and those without reliable Internet—we see that in the north; quite frankly, we see that right in my own riding, in some parts of my riding—are struggling with technology and risk being shut out of their own hearings.

It's unacceptable for public tribunals to exclude those who need its services the most. You have a track record of community involvement, which we appreciate, so we expect you to be a voice on the board so it's equitable access. Maybe you can answer that.

Ms. Heather Woodside: Certainly. While technology is wonderful and it has increased access, made things

faster and allowed more people to participate, on the one hand, on the other hand, there are people who it's created barriers for. I am aware that the Landlord and Tenant Board does provide accommodations, so if there's going to be a prejudice or if it's going to be unfair, it's my understanding that the board does have the ability to conduct in-person hearings.

MPP Wayne Gates: Well, as a paralegal, you know that a lot of people go to paralegals because it's cheaper.

Ms. Heather Woodside: Yes.

MPP Wayne Gates: So if you're not digital-first and you can't do that, you're at a disadvantage right off the hop. You're at a disadvantage because you can't afford a lawyer, so you go to paralegal. I just think that you shouldn't be denied justice because you don't know how to run a computer or you don't have access or you can't afford a lawyer. That's what some of the issues are when you go to the LTB. That's why sometimes people are being thrown into the street. Where do they go?

Like I mentioned, when you're looking at this in this province, where rents are, in my riding—to find a place for \$2,500 if you've got a couple children, even though you know you can't afford it. Or in Toronto—I don't even know how people live here. It's \$3,500 a month for rent. If you do have a problem, where do you get the money to pay for a lawyer? That's why they come to paralegals. That's why more and more paralegals are being used in all these cases. I think you're aware of that. I think it's fair to say that.

This is something that I want to get out, because I firmly believe in this. I didn't get a chance to talk to this bill yesterday, although I wanted to because of my own personal situation with family members. Bill 60 uses the LTB massive backlog and delay crisis as an excuse to gut tenant rights, creating what critics call an express lane to homelessness. We're seeing that with a lot of seniors, by the way; seniors are really struggling. Do you really believe that tenants have too many rights and have caused all the delays?

Ms. Heather Woodside: No, I wouldn't agree with that at all.

MPP Wayne Gates: And why do you say that?

Ms. Heather Woodside: Because, based on what I've observed in the Landlord and Tenant Board, in person and online, is that everyone has the right to be heard, whether it be a landlord or a tenant. You can't have any bias that someone has more rights than others; you have to approach it without bias, be aware of any underlying bias that you may have personally and come to it with an open mind. I don't think you can say one or another party has more rights than the other.

MPP Wayne Gates: And I'm sure you did that when you were the paralegal for Ottawa and Toronto. I'm sure you saw some cases that you had to really make some really tough judgments.

Ms. Heather Woodside: Every day, yes. Just for the record, I wasn't a paralegal in Toronto; I was working at social services. I went back to school as a mature student and became a paralegal in Ottawa—just to clarify.

MPP Wayne Gates: Yes, I was a city councillor Niagara Falls for four years, and some of the things that come before us are heart-wrenching. You see the homelessness that's on the streets in all our communities, although they try to make it as just in NDP communities. But we know it's right across the province of Ontario and how sad it is to see every single day.

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

MPP Wayne Gates: How long?

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): One—under one now.

MPP Wayne Gates: One minute. Okay. I'll go over this quick. I've got another 14 questions; I might not get to them. I apologize; I talk too much sometimes.

I'll say this, like you do—I firmly believe this, because I kind of picked that up from you: that you care, that you want to take this job because you want to make things better, you want to make this system better. Paralegals, I feel—I have lots of friends who are paralegals—that's what they want to do, and I think that's so important.

I just want to say that when you get there, please work as hard as you can to be fair to everybody.

Ms. Heather Woodside: I plan to.

MPP Wayne Gates: I know there are bad tenants; I know there's bad landlords. We know this government has put in a bill that allows new builds to charge whatever the hell they want on rents, which has not helped the situation across the province of Ontario.

I just want to say, I know you'll get elected; that's just how it works here. I really think that maybe you'll come and make a difference for everybody, because I think you mentioned fairness about six times in your seven minutes. I appreciate that, so thanks for being here today.

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

Now over to the third party: MPP Smyth.

MPP Stephanie Smyth: Thank you for being here. I represent a riding, Toronto—St. Paul's, where over 60% of the constituents are tenants, so this is a huge issue for the riding. Many of them are seniors—accessibility issues as well.

I just wanted to go back on the digital-first model and wanted to question you again. Do you really believe there are still situations where in-person hearings are essential to protecting procedural fairness? And how would you ensure that would happen?

Ms. Heather Woodside: It's my understanding that the board does ensure that, that if there is going to be a prejudice or if it's unfair—if someone doesn't have a computer or if they don't have access to the Internet—that there are accommodations that can be made for that.

0950

MPP Stephanie Smyth: Okay. In Bill 60, which was mentioned by my colleague, the act would require tenants to provide advance written notice of what they plan to raise at the Landlord and Tenant Board hearing. This would prevent them from bringing any new issues to the hearing without prior warning.

You've talked about fairness. You've talked about listening. Do you believe that tenants should be able to bring new issues to the board on the day of and not be restricted to just issues that have been submitted prior?

Ms. Heather Woodside: Something that I did notice when I was observing was that tenants would bring up issues, and it does delay the proceeding. Hopefully with the steps that are in place with dispute resolution and speaking to someone outside of the hearing, the issues can be narrowed. Then, once it comes to the hearing, the issues are narrowed and everyone knows exactly what's going to be addressed.

MPP Stephanie Smyth: So you weren't sure of the reason for all the delays, but you believe this is one of them, with the huge backlog?

Ms. Heather Woodside: I'm not part of the board. I don't know the exact reasons for the delays other than what I've read, that they have had the most applications—

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): Sorry. MPP Smith has a point of order.

Ms. Laura Smith: Madam Chair, this is conversation that needs to be discussions about the individual's qualifications, not a proposed bill. It should be aligned with what she can bring to the qualifications of the job.

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

MPP Smyth, if you can make it relevant, that would be terrific.

MPP Stephanie Smyth: I think it just spoke to the knowledge of what's going on at the board.

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

MPP Stephanie Smyth: We talk about the credibility of the Landlord and Tenant Board. It depends a lot on the integrity, obviously, and the independence of the adjudicator.

If you were ever put in a position, directly or indirectly, where you felt any pressure from government officials on how you might prioritize certain cases or outcomes, how would you respond? Can you speak to how you'd maintain impartiality when operating in a politically appointed system?

Ms. Heather Woodside: Impartiality is important. Integrity is important. As a member in good standing at the law society, I'm an officer of the court, and I do have very high standards of integrity.

As far as impartiality goes, I've had that situation. In the courthouse, anyone can find themselves in Provincial Offences Court. It might be a neighbour. It might be someone I've met, my child's soccer coach—anyone. I have to recuse myself from that.

MPP Stephanie Smyth: How familiar are you with the issue of AGIs, or above-guideline rent increases?

Ms. Heather Woodside: As familiar as anyone who's done some research.

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): Heather? Sorry, Heather. Do you mind speaking a little closer to the mike?

Ms. Heather Woodside: I'm sorry. I'm facing MPP Smyth there.

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

Ms. Heather Woodside: As far as above-guideline rent increases, I'd have to rely on any training I'm going to get as far as the Residential Tenancies Act goes and any onboarding that I would get.

MPP Stephanie Smyth: Just so you know, they're a huge issue for tenants in this province and one that we deal with constantly in our riding.

I wanted to ask you about the work that you've done with Lanark County Interval House etc. If I'm right, that is an organization that supports women and children escaping domestic violence.

Ms. Heather Woodside: Correct, yes.

MPP Stephanie Smyth: How would you say that experience has shaped your understanding of vulnerability and access to justice and fairness, and how could it inform you in your approach going forward, hearing cases involving tenants facing housing insecurity or any kind of personal crisis?

Ms. Heather Woodside: Prior to volunteering with the Lanark County Interval House, even back when I was working for social services, I was appointed to be the liaison between the shelters and the social services office. It's given me a very deep understanding of vulnerable populations. We have the law, and of course the law has to be applied, but there has to be reasonableness and compassion as well when dealing with the vulnerable populations.

MPP Stephanie Smyth: How concerned are you about the cost of rent right now?

Ms. Heather Woodside: It's scary. As MPP Gates mentioned, I have kids who are paying rent too. It's very tough—even to have a good income—yes, maybe you may be able to make the rent, but there are other pressures as well. So it's an issue. It's in the media, it's a federal issue, it's a provincial issue about the cost of rent and the lack of housing.

MPP Stephanie Smyth: Do you know what the average cost of rent is in Toronto right now, would you say?

Ms. Heather Woodside: In Toronto, I believe it's about \$3,000. I know in Ottawa it's, I think, \$2,500.

MPP Stephanie Smyth: It's a full-time position. Will you be on any other boards or any other work? I'm basically getting at your focus and commitment to this job and to dealing with an incredible backlog.

Ms. Heather Woodside: This feels like the right time to have applied for this role professionally, because I have the legal foundation, I have the communication skills. I believe I could make a positive contribution to the board. Personally, as I think I mentioned, my kids are grown and out of the house, so I can dedicate 110% to this role, which I hope to do—

MPP Stephanie Smyth: How about 200%?

Ms. Heather Woodside: Okay, 200%.

And as far as my volunteer work, I did have a conflict check, and I think I would have to give some or all of that up, but—

MPP Stephanie Smyth: What kind of volunteer work was that?

Ms. Heather Woodside: With Lanark County Interval House; I'm on a board—the Scottish Society of Ottawa. I'm on the County of Carleton Law Association committee. I believe I would have to give those up.

MPP Stephanie Smyth: Okay. Thank you very much.

Ms. Heather Woodside: Thank you.

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): Thank you very much. So that completes our line of questioning—oh. MPP Smith?

Ms. Laura Smith: Thank you so much, Chair. I just wanted to bring up some significant information that was brought to my attention. Earlier, MPP Gilmour discussed the French requirement, and I'm going to read into the record the actual requirement for the early childhood educators, if we're done with this individual.

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

I'll just thank Heather for your time and your desire to help build a better Ontario. So then you can go on your merry way or stay and hear the outcome.

Ms. Heather Woodside: Thank you.

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): You're welcome.

MPP Smith.

Ms. Laura Smith: Earlier, MPP Gilmour provided information about a requirement for bilingual appointees, but such is not the case.

“(2) The council shall be composed of,

“(a) 14 early childhood educators who are members of the college and who are elected by the members of the college in accordance with the by-laws to represent such geographic areas of the province as may be determined by regulation;

“(b) 10 persons who are not members of the college and who are appointed by the Lieutenant Governor in Council to represent such sectors of Ontario society as may be prescribed by a regulation made under subsection 45(1).” And that's 2007.

I just wanted to ensure that that was read into the record.

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): All right, thank you very much; duly noted.

MPP Gilmour?

MPP Alexa Gilmour: Point of order there—thank you.

Right underneath that piece that MPP Smith has read, it says:

“Qualifications

“—bilingual appointees, to ensure the college meets its legislative requirement to provide services in both official languages.”

And the document that we were given as committee members states on page 1, the introduction, that position requirements—and this was written for us and given to us. And here's where it says, “Appointees must be bilingual....” So I want to ensure that that's read into the record, as well. Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): Thank you very much, and I'll just say, none of these are points of order. So if we want, we can bring them into the discussion when we bring up the voting on the intended applicants.

Okay, so we will now consider the intended appointment of Julie O'Driscoll, nominated as member of the council of the College of Early Childhood Educators.

Ms. Laura Smith: I move concurrence in the intended appointment of Julie O'Driscoll, nominated as member of the council of the College of Early Childhood Educators.

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

MPP Wayne Gates: I just want to make sure it's a recorded vote.

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): Recorded vote.

MPP Gilmour?

MPP Alexa Gilmour: I want to make sure that this committee is aware that the definitions here say the requirements are “must be bilingual” and that we have a situation where our applicant is highly qualified in a number of areas but didn't know or understand the difference between a teacher or an ECE and RECE. When asked the definition, she provided an incorrect definition of the council of the college of ECEs that she is being appointed to. And then she also didn't speak to and understand the key issues around recruitment, retention, compensation, pay equity in the ECE field.

I have grave concerns and hope that, should this vote pass, the appointee avails herself of the information out there to learn about the issues for ECEs, who are among some of the lowest-paid, hardest-working—it's a female-dominated sector. It's a very, very important role that she's being appointed to, and I hope she will avail herself to learning more about that should she be appointed.

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

Is there any further debate? Are the members ready to vote? It's a recorded vote.

Ayes

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

Nays

Gates, Gilmour, Smyth.

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): That carries, and the member is appointed. Congratulations, Julie O'Driscoll, on your appointment.

We will now consider the intended appointment of Heather Woodside, nominated as member of the Landlord and Tenant Board. MPP Smith.

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

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

MPP Wayne Gates: Recorded vote.

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): A recorded vote has been requested. Are the members ready to vote?

Ayes

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

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): All those opposed? Unanimous—wow. Carried on a unanimous vote.

Congratulations to Heather Woodside on your appointment to the Landlord and Tenant Board. Congratulations to the committee.

Oh, MPP Gates?

MPP Wayne Gates: Yes, I've just got one other thing to say today: I know we have a lot of really good maintenance workers that work here. They do a fabulous job. Can we just get the clock fixed?

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): I know, I know. Honest to God—

MPP Wayne Gates: It's driving me nuts.

Ms. Laura Smith: I second that.

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): I third that, but I will tell you that I think the ghosts are at play in this building with the clocks, because I don't have a clock that works in my office. But we will get this one working. Thank you for that point.

Meeting adjourned. Thank you very much.

The committee adjourned at 1003.

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