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**Official Report
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(Hansard)**

A-14

**Journal
des débats
(Hansard)**

A-14

**Standing Committee on
Government Agencies**

Intended appointments

1st Session
44th Parliament

Thursday 16 April 2026

**Comité permanent des
organismes gouvernementaux**

Nominations prévues

1^{re} session
44^e législature

Jeudi 16 avril 2026

Chair: Mary-Margaret McMahon
Clerk: Vanessa Kattar

Présidente : Mary-Margaret McMahon
Greffière : Vanessa Kattar

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CONTENTS

Thursday 16 April 2026

Subcommittee report	A-141
Intended appointments.....	A-141
Mr. Alexander Baker.....	A-141
Mr. Brandon Valley	A-145

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

STANDING COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT AGENCIES

COMITÉ PERMANENT DES ORGANISMES GOUVERNEMENTAUX

Thursday 16 April 2026

Jeudi 16 avril 2026

The committee met at 0900 in room 151.

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): Good morning, everyone. Welcome to the most wonderful standing committee at Queen's Park.

The Standing Committee on Government Agencies will now come to order, and as always, all comments by members and witnesses should go through the Chair.

SUBCOMMITTEE REPORT

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): Our first item of business is adoption of subcommittee reports. We have a subcommittee report dated Thursday, April 2, 2025. Could I have a motion, please?

The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Vanessa Kattar): It's 2026.

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): It's 2026. Sorry, I'm a year behind. It's been a long week. MPP Smith?

Ms. Laura Smith: I move adoption of the subcommittee report on intended appointments, dated Thursday, April 2, 2026, on the order-in-council certificate dated March 27, 2026.

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

INTENDED APPOINTMENTS

MR. ALEXANDER BAKER

Review of intended appointment, selected by government party and third party: Alexander Baker, intended appointee as member, McMaster University board of directors.

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): Now we come to the most exciting portion of our committee, and that is to meet someone who wants to serve the public. So welcome, Alexander Baker. We're happy to have you here.

Our first intended appointee today is Alexander Baker. He is nominated as member of the McMaster University board of governors. Alexander, you may make a brief statement, share your story with us, and each party will have 10 minutes to question you. Whatever time you take comes out of the government time, which they are absolutely fine with.

The floor is all yours.

Mr. Alexander Baker: Thank you very much.

Good morning and thank you for the invitation to appear in front of this committee. I'm grateful for the opportunity to be considered for McMaster's board of governors.

My name is Alexander Baker, and I've been living in Toronto for my entire professional career. After graduating from the Schulich School of Business at York University, I worked at the company that launched the Air Miles program here in Toronto. Following that, I spent seven years consulting some of the world's largest financial services organizations before launching into a career in venture capital.

I'm currently a managing partner at Relay Ventures. This is a Toronto-based fund focused on early-stage technology investing. I've invested in and sit on a number of private company boards. These companies are based here in Ontario, across Canada and some based in the US as well. It's been in these positions that I've learned to empower leaders and organizations to manage, scale and innovate. In addition to my time spent on private boards, I also volunteer my time on charitable boards, where I focus the majority of my time as chair of both the investment committees and the endowment committees.

I have three kids, ages 20, almost 17 and 13—the oldest one, a second-year computer science student at Sir Wilfrid Laurier; the middle child in high school; and the youngest one, months away from graduation.

My wife and I have always considered a university education to be the cornerstone of the future prosperity of our country and our province regardless of the disciplines that students pursue. We're committed to making sure our kids are prepared for their post-secondary education both academically and financially, having taken advantage of the federal RESP program since the kids were little.

In addition, my wife grew up in Hamilton. She was born at the McMaster hospital. We're reminded of that each time we get off the highway at the Main Street west exit. The school and the hospital remain an important part of our family history and our connection to the city. Thank you.

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

Now we will go to the government side. You have seven minutes and 44 seconds, MPP Sabawy.

Mr. Sherif Sabawy: Thank you very much, Alexander, for showing interest to be a public servant. My question is

actually—as you know, there is always a discussion about how we bridge the gap between the education and the careers schools; how to make sure that the students who finish their education get a job—especially since you're in venture and technology and you understand how that market changes very rapidly. How can, in your mind, the change of that post-secondary—what can we do for the post-secondary education to do steps that you believe are necessary to prepare our young people for meaningful careers? Especially students attending university, which is longer, usually, than studying—in the number of years, I mean.

Mr. Alexander Baker: Thank you. It's a great question. As you mentioned, my son is in second-year university. He is studying computer science. He is preparing himself to enter the workforce. Just given the changes that we are seeing in the workforce today, I think universities have to do a wonderful job at adapting their programs to meet the needs of what the world has to bring them. I think it's done in a few different ways.

So, let's talk about the importance of co-op as an example, the importance of internships as an example. I think those types of things need to be cornerstone in all schools. I think schools in Ontario—and I've seen this. We've done this in some of our companies, where we've sponsored professors to do work on behalf of the companies and research on behalf of the companies and opening doors for some of the students to work with those professors in order to achieve their goals. Again, it gives them practical, on-the-ground experience.

I think the other thing that I have seen myself first-hand is the importance of being connected to the academic community as an investor. We've participated in university-led programs. Those would be things like Next 36; 10, 15 years ago, this program launched. It looked at the top 36 students across the country, and we invested in a couple of those businesses. We happened to do very well in an Ontario-based business that was actually focused on selling into colleges and universities.

Another one is the Digital Media Zone at TMU, where we participated and invested in companies out of that, and I've been very active; and in OCAD U, the Imagination Catalyst program. My experience from those, I think, would be very valuable at McMaster. The things that I learned there and the launching of those programs and the ability to connect—again, the future commerce with students is incredibly important.

And then, finally, we could talk about tech transfer for a long time, but I think that this is a huge gap in Canadian schools. The Canadian schools spend an awful lot of time and money building valuable research that we could do a much better job of commercializing in this province.

Mr. Sheref Sabawy: Can you give us quickly your opinion about linking industry like the manufacturing industry directly to academia, where it can be helping academia to finance projects and also the benefit of the outcome of that research?

Mr. Alexander Baker: I can give you my own practical examples. This was not an Ontario-based company;

in fact, it was a Saskatchewan-based company that I sit on the board of. While the company is not in the manufacturing space, you could see parallels to that. This company needed data models to help inform its AI models. How do you build and collect data? How do you do it efficiently, and how do you find resources to do it that are readily available? Well, one way to do it is to go find graduate students and undergraduate students through a professor, and sponsoring that professor to conduct the research on your behalf that was co-owned, by the way, between the university and the company, meaning that they had an opportunity—"they" being the school—to use that information, the techniques, the strategy, over and over and over again. That's an important way to bridge the gap.

If we look at robotics and what's happening in engineering and testing, these are all areas that I think students and universities can help in a whole lot more than they are today.

Mr. Sheref Sabawy: Thank you.

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

Ms. Laura Smith: Thank you for sharing a bit about your life, your connection to McMaster—and your being a father, I think, is very important. I, too, have a child in third-year computer science. It's very stressful. We're going to talk much longer on this subject.

These students face incredible challenges at a very young age. Preparing them for the future is probably one of the most challenging aspects of being a parent that I never thought of when I was nine months pregnant.

But I'm going to pivot. I really like the conversation about co-op connections, which is important for the kids in our program or our children's program. But navigating through tough experiences, just for that example—computer science isn't what it was even two years ago, right? So we're navigating through tough times.

0910

How would you bring your expertise to help universities navigate through a tough conversation on what we've seen in the world? We've seen the world change in certain ways, especially in that area that we just talked about. I know I've had those dining-room conversations with my kids on that specific subject.

Mr. Alexander Baker: I mean, this is timely, especially since it is April and there are a ton of unemployed students right now. Part of the problem is, we are building foundational academia for these children that doesn't necessarily match the needs of the workplace or the speeds at which the workplace has changed.

Ms. Laura Smith: So how would you use your expertise?

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

Mr. Alexander Baker: Thank you.

It's a good question. Off the top of my head, the things that I would do, which I have done before, are to introduce the chief technology officers, the chief hiring managers, into the university, and connect and bridge the gap that way. Look, it's very important for us to have local busi-

nesses for students to be able to apply and connect with. That is one way to quickly bridge the gap.

I think that they need to understand—schools need to understand; professors need to understand—how AI tools are being used in the workplace today, and how you need to have a broader understanding of the entire system rather than just a specific discipline. We could talk about this at length, honestly.

We have companies that range anywhere from 10 employees that are producing \$5 million of revenue, to ones that are doing \$75 million to \$100 million of revenue with 400 or 500 employees—

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): Thank you very much. Sorry to cut you off.

Now, we will go to the official opposition for 10 minutes. We'll start with MPP Gilmour.

MPP Alexa Gilmour: Welcome, Mr. Baker. You have a great name as an Alexander, a helper and defender of mankind. I'm glad to have you here this morning.

We're going to just start with some questions that that are very routine questions. We may experience a Groundhog Day moment when my colleague MPP Smith raises a point of order and the Chair turns her down on it, but I want to assure you that this is a question we ask.

Mr. Alexander Baker: But that'll cut into the time that we have, right? So I'll allow it to happen.

MPP Alexa Gilmour: That's right. That is exactly why it probably gets raised.

So the question simply is: Are you a member of the either federal or Ontario Conservatives, Liberals or NDP? Are you a member of any party?

Mr. Alexander Baker: I have a paid membership to the provincial Conservative Party.

MPP Alexa Gilmour: Okay. You and almost everyone that comes before us do.

Have you ever donated to the Conservative Party?

Mr. Alexander Baker: The provincial party or the federal party?

MPP Alexa Gilmour: Either one of them.

Mr. Alexander Baker: I made a donation as part of attendance of an event in 2024 to the federal Conservative Party.

MPP Alexa Gilmour: That would be the Thornhill Conservative association?

Mr. Alexander Baker: Yes.

MPP Alexa Gilmour: In terms of coming to this position, were you approached by anyone? How did you decide or make a decision to take this role?

Mr. Alexander Baker: Post her election victory, I met with MPP Cooper. We had a long discussion about my job, the type of work that I do and the boards that I sit on. She had asked me at a follow-up meeting if I'd be interested in a university board, because it seemed like I had the right level of experience from the private company boards that I was sitting on.

MPP Alexa Gilmour: Sure. It's another very familiar story.

Do you have any other roles with any of the provincial or federal Conservative parties?

Mr. Alexander Baker: No.

MPP Alexa Gilmour: Okay. Thank you so much—

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): Sorry to interrupt, MPP Gilmour.

MPP Smith.

Ms. Laura Smith: Sorry to be a broken telephone, but yes, if we could keep the line of questioning to the accreditation, the capabilities and the résumé of Mr. Baker, please.

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): Thank you very much, MPP Smith. As has been said before, this line of questioning is allowed.

MPP Gilmour.

MPP Alexa Gilmour: Thank you, Chair. Thank you, Andie MacDowell. Let's move on.

You've talked about your work in venture capital for nearly 20 years now. It's a firm that focuses on—I think the right quote is—"disrupting and creating new markets." So the metrics of success in the previous work experience would be around risk taking; they would be around profit maximization, I would assume. I'm just wondering how you anticipate changing what you do in order to responsibly steward resources at a public institution—the public's resources?

Mr. Alexander Baker: I think it's actually an excellent question. I don't think it's any different, to be honest with you, because we invest in companies and there is a limited amount of capital that they can spend. Yes, we take risks and we understand the risks associated with that could be a zero or could be a hundred-times return, right? So I don't look at this as any different, because we need to be fiscally responsible with the investment that we're making. We need to hold the executives of the company and the CEO of the company accountable for what they say they are going to deliver, and we need to make sure that we maximize the investment that we've made inside of that company. I don't see that as any different.

I take a lot of pride in the time that I spend with our executives in the focus that I help them place on the businesses that they are growing and understanding what's happening in the market around them. The biggest difference, I would say, is that universities are an institution that have been around for hundreds of years, whereas these companies are trying to disrupt markets that sometimes don't exist today.

MPP Alexa Gilmour: Thank you.

One of the things that you spoke about earlier, when you were speaking about your own children—20, 17, 13—you spoke about being able to support them through their RESPs. You also spoke—and I loved your line: that this is the cornerstone of future prosperity.

You may have learned like the rest of us that the Conservative government is planning to cut OSAP grants down to 25%. I'm just wondering—you, yourself—were you fortunate enough to be born into a family that was able to pay your university?

Mr. Alexander Baker: Thankfully, I was, and along with my parents I paid, myself, for part of my education, yes.

MPP Alexa Gilmour: And not needing to use OSAP loans?

Mr. Alexander Baker: Correct.

MPP Alexa Gilmour: One of the things I'm wondering, given your commitment to the cornerstone of future prosperity—I was just speaking to a couple of students who are no longer able to pursue their careers—one in tech, one in science—because when they map out what it's going to cost them, they simply cannot see how to make that work, given that there's a 14% youth unemployment rate right now. In Toronto, that rate goes up to 20% in some groups of marginalized communities.

I'm wondering what your level of commitment would be, given this idea that the cornerstone is there and given that we're going to lose incredible minds that would not be able to afford to continue—your commitment to making sure that there's equity in those who get to come to McMaster?

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): Thank you, MPP Gilmour. We have another point of order from MPP Smith.

Ms. Laura Smith: Point of order. Once again, if we could keep the line of questioning to the accreditation and the qualifications of Mr. Baker.

MPP Alexa Gilmour: It's 100% connected. But thank you for using up my time.

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): Thank you very much, MPP Smith. Actually, OSAP is relevant to this appointment, as it is a university; however, current legislation should not be at this point.

MPP Alexa Gilmour: Okay. So, again, given the need to ensure equity, how would you ensure equity in terms of the student population at McMaster?

Mr. Alexander Baker: This is a very complicated issue. I don't have the perfect answer for you. I think that there are other programs that the universities need to consider in order to, let's just say, build their balance sheet better. Those would be things like tech transfer—I talked about that before; more money coming in from the private sector to fund programs inside of the universities: internships, co-operatives, research and things of that nature. But as far as OSAP goes, I think it's a complicated issue that is far broader than just this province.

MPP Alexa Gilmour: Okay. Thank you for that answer.

I'm also wondering, as you look at the 2024-25 financial reports from McMaster—we found that they were able to balance their budget through some cost reductions this year, but they remain incredible vulnerable to the underfunding of higher education by the Conservative government, by the former Liberal government.

0920

According to the Council of Ontario Universities, Ontario public universities are reaching the limit of what they can do through cost reductions. I'm wondering what strategies you have—especially given that Ontario funds post-secondary; this government is the lowest funder of post-secondary of any province in Canada—to increase

revenues to encourage the government to meet its funding obligations.

Mr. Alexander Baker: I would need to spend a lot more time with the administration to give them some creative ideas on how they might want to pursue other sources of income. My job is about finding new markets and finding new opportunities, and I think that that could be an extraordinarily valuable perspective to bring to a board.

MPP Alexa Gilmour: Okay, thank you for that.

I'm thinking about this wonderful conversation you had with my colleagues here, and I'm wondering about—as a managing partner of a \$1-billion venture capital fund, and given the current interest in AI, software, tech and all of that, how will you manage the potential conflicts of interest between your private investment activities and then your role on the McMaster board?

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

Mr. Alexander Baker: I would say that that's never been an issue for me. First of all, we have an investment committee inside of the fund which would have to clear any perceived conflicts of interest and we're accountable to a limited partners group, as well, that governs our fund. So from that perspective, I've never encountered any conflicts of interest myself, and I don't anticipate encountering any.

MPP Alexa Gilmour: Okay; thank you. I'm just wondering, very briefly, around how you think McMaster should respond to the rising financial pressures right now, including those caused by housing and living costs.

Mr. Alexander Baker: I'll go back to what I said before. I think that it is much broader than simply just the university. It's much broader than the province. I think that a lot of these things start as federal issues and they eventually bleed their way down to the local issues—

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): Thank you very much. Sorry, second time cutting you off.

And now we will do the final round: last but not least, the member of the third party, MPP Smith—Smyth.

MPP Stephanie Smyth: I'm Smith today. Are you Smyth?

Interjection.

MPP Stephanie Smyth: Anyway, nice to see you here. Thank you for being here.

I wanted to ask a little bit more—my colleague was talking about OSAP. McMaster students, like all, are navigating a really tough financial reality right now. We've seen it with the demonstrations here at Queen's Park. There's real concern. There's an affordability crisis. We all know that. We've switched—the shift in OSAP towards that 75% loan-to-grant ratio.

From your seat on the board, how do you plan to navigate the tension between the university's budget constraints and the increasing pressure on students who are really struggling right now just to stay in class—and your children are so lucky to have that RESP, as you know, and many of us were lucky to be able to have the university experience that we did, but that's not the reality now.

When you are at that board table, what is your process for making sure that that student voice doesn't get lost?

Mr. Alexander Baker: Well, first of all, I think that the administration needs to understand that they have the tools available to them—or people available, tools available to them—to make sure that the student voice is heard. It's an important part of our democracy, and it's an important part of the institution. I strongly believe that. To be candid with you, I think a lot of the situation is based on witnessing what is going on inside of the board and how I can be effective myself in the mediation experience that I have and, in the experience, making sure that voices are heard.

While it's a microcosm of what you are describing, we have companies, again, with 500 to 700 people, and their voices are important to be heard, too. The lowest level of employees need to make sure that they can deliver feedback. In some cases, the board is responsible for administering that, and in some cases, the leadership of the company is—I would say that I would take a very similar approach.

MPP Stephanie Smyth: Are you aware of what the tuition is at McMaster now?

Mr. Alexander Baker: I'm aware of what the tuition is at Laurier; I imagine it's probably close to the same.

MPP Stephanie Smyth: University boards deal with everything from massive infrastructure projects to student mental health, which is another real concern. I've got four kids and it's a constant conversation.

Which of these areas do you think you can contribute most effectively to on day one?

Mr. Alexander Baker: I would say my experience is that, on day one, it's important to evaluate what other resources are around the table and where I could fit in best. If I look at my experience in those two areas—I mean, look, I'm a father. We experience the same things as you're describing. I'll certainly have a large amount of empathy for what students are going through today, but the depth of my experience is around fiduciary management, financial management, strategy—more in that area.

Infrastructure projects would not be the area that I would focus in on immediately, but rather I would try to help the university understand how to best leverage technology into the future of what their students need to deliver.

MPP Stephanie Smyth: This is a part-time appointment for the board. But at the end of the term that is ahead of you, what do you think is the one thing that you hope people will say about the impact that you had on this board?

Mr. Alexander Baker: I think that the principles and the way that I conduct myself should continue to be the cornerstone for how people view me. I think the one thing that we do not do well at all in this province is around technology transfer programs. If you're asking where I would want to have the most impact, it would be in that area.

I've got experience not only doing technology transfer from schools in Ontario, but exposure and experience to companies that have been formed in California, using

Stanford's technology and the ease at which they were able to leverage that and bring it out of the university. I can bring a lot of examples and experiences and introductions around the best practices of how that's done. That's an amazing way to (1) commercialize some of the research that's being done in the university and (2) create long-term, sustainable financial impact on the university because they will always own a piece of whatever company spins out of their technology.

MPP Stephanie Smyth: Okay. Thank you so much for your time and for putting yourself forward.

Mr. Alexander Baker: Thank you very much.

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): Thank you very much, Alexander. That completes your presentation and experience here. You are welcome to sit in the audience as we review the next candidate and then we review your appointment, or you can go about your merry way. Thank you very much for your willingness to serve.

MR. BRANDON VALLEY

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

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): We will now move on to the second intended appointee, who is unfortunately unable to make it in person, so they will be attending online. Hopefully they will show up in a minute.

Brandon Valley is nominated as a member of the Landlord and Tenant Board. He will be, as I mentioned, appearing virtually.

Hi, Brandon. How are you?

Mr. Brandon Valley: Good morning.

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): Welcome. We wish you were here in person, but at least you're here.

Mr. Brandon Valley: Me too. Unfortunately, I had to trade some hearings in to even get here today.

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): Welcome to our lovely committee. We are happy to have you, and we are thankful that people step up and are willing to help make Ontario a better place.

We're going to start with your story, your presentation, and you can speak for as long as you want. Your time will be removed from the government's time for questioning, which they're fine with, and then the official opposition and the third party have 10 minutes each.

Go ahead. You have the floor.

Mr. Brandon Valley: Perfect. Thank you. Please excuse my voice if it's a little crackly; I'm just getting over something. But good morning, everyone. I would like to thank you for the opportunity to appear before this committee, and I would like to tell you a little bit about my background and how I ended up before you today.

0930

I was born and raised in Windsor, Ontario. My professional journey has been shaped by resilience, adaptability and a strong commitment to giving my all to everything I do.

I began my career path 20-plus years ago at OLG Slots at Windsor Raceway, where I worked my way through a variety of roles before moving into management. That experience taught me how to lead by example and reinforced the importance of time management, accountability, integrity and respect. I had the opportunity to work closely with strong leaders, and those experiences helped shape me into the professional that I am today.

It was also during that time that I met my wife, and we have now been married for 11 years. I'm also proud to be part of a growing family, including two stepdaughters and a five-month-old granddaughter.

When the slots and horse-racing industry in Windsor closed, I faced a significant turning point after working there for so many years. Like many others, I was compelled to reconsider my path, and I briefly pursued a skilled trades apprenticeship but quickly realized it did not align with my strengths or long-term goals.

I then joined Caesars Windsor as a table game supervisor despite not having prior experience in table games. I applied my previous gaming experience, committed myself to learning and adapted quickly. Within a short time, I was promoted to a pit manager role, where I continued to develop strong leadership and decision-making skills in a fast-paced and high-pressure environment.

A few years later, I was faced with another major challenge when I experienced serious health issues that required four surgeries and a lengthy recovery. During that time, while undergoing physiotherapy and working toward regaining my quality of life, I reassessed my future and sought a new direction, one that would allow me to make a meaningful impact while continuing to support my family.

Those challenges ultimately led to me returning to school as a mature student. I enrolled at Westervelt College, now Anderson College, where I completed my paralegal studies program in 2022. During my studies, I was fortunate to be mentored by an instructor with extensive experience at the Landlord and Tenant Board. Through academic exposure, I developed a strong interest in this area of law.

I pursued that interest with focus and determination, seeking every opportunity to learn. I volunteered at a local paralegal office, where I was exposed to a wide range of Landlord and Tenant Board matters. I also observed hearings whenever possible, gaining practical insight into effective advocacy and common pitfalls of other representatives.

After becoming licensed, I established my own practice, Valley Legal Services, with a primary focus on Landlord and Tenant Board matters. As my practice grew, I connected with a local firm, Legacy Legal Services, and eventually became an associate paralegal for them. Through both roles, I had the opportunity to represent landlords and tenants. This dual perspective allowed me to develop a balanced and practical understanding of the challenges faced by each party and reinforced the importance of fairness, impartiality and clear communication. It also

strengthened my skills in negotiation and mediation, which I believe are critical in this field.

In June of 2025, I joined Windsor Essex Community Housing Corp. as a paralegal. This role has been exceptionally meaningful, as the organization's outlook closely aligns with that of the Landlord and Tenant Board. At Windsor Essex Community Housing, eviction is truly viewed as a last resort. Many of the tenants we serve are on rent-g geared-to-income programs and are among the most vulnerable in the community. In this role, I work closely with a dedicated team that shares a common goal of providing affordable housing to those in need to sustain tenancies whenever possible while balancing the responsibilities and interests of the housing provider.

This experience has given me a deeper appreciation for the human side of housing law. Unlike private practice, which can sometimes be more transactional, this role requires a heightened level of empathy and compassion both in understanding the challenges faced by tenants and recognizing the obligations and constraints of a landlord. It has strengthened my ability to approach matters with sensitivity, to consider broader social contexts and to seek fair and reasonable outcomes that reflect both the law and the real-life circumstances of the parties involved.

Throughout my journey, I have consistently demonstrated the ability to adapt, to learn and to approach new challenges with fairness, empathy and professionalism. I believe these experiences have prepared me well for the role of adjudicator, where balanced decision-making, procedural fairness and a strong understanding of the law are essential.

Thank you again for your time and consideration, and I look forward to answering any questions you may have.

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

Now we will go to the government side. The government has five minutes and two seconds. MPP Dowie from Windsor.

Mr. Andrew Dowie: Mr. Valley, thank you so much for putting your name forward. I have looked forward to meeting you at some point in the near future, as your CEO is someone I've known for many years.

Your bio is really the story of our community and the ups and downs, particularly with the horse racing industry and the slots at the track program. I wanted to see if you could share with the committee the kind of engagement you've had back home in Windsor-Essex. What have you learned from it, and how will it inform your work on the Landlord and Tenant Board?

Mr. Brandon Valley: Are we referring to community engagement, or related to those points you just brought up about the challenges?

Mr. Andrew Dowie: Yes, community engagement; the opportunities you've had to experience the human element that we have in the community.

Mr. Brandon Valley: At Windsor Essex Community Housing Corporation, there's a lot of community support and options for people that are dealing with all different walks of life. Again, as I explained in my opening, eviction

is considered a last resort. We have community relations workers and different programs throughout the community that can sometimes assist whenever possible.

With that being said, there always is a line where we have to uphold the landlord side of things, where if it's in relation to safety or just non-compliance or something, then we are forced to move in a direction we don't prefer, which could be eviction. If that does happen, we ensure that all supports are in place to try to find a soft landing spot for those individuals.

Mr. Andrew Dowie: Thank you very much. I'm sure my staff will be in touch on 2455 Rivard multiple times in the next couple of years, so thanks so much.

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

MPP Bailey.

Mr. Robert Bailey: I thought I'd be Uncle Bob today.

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): Not today.

Mr. Robert Bailey: Okay.

Anyway, thank you, Mr. Valley, for showing up today and for giving us a little bit of your background. It's very interesting, your background and your experiences.

I know, because you've represented both the tenants and the landlords on the board already, you'll understand what I'm going to ask you about managing your time to deliver timely decisions because of the workload that you'll have to get through. Do you think that's going to be an issue? I know you've been managing it already, but I just wanted a little more knowledge on that.

Mr. Brandon Valley: Sure. Yes, it's extremely important for time management and effectively using that time. If fortunate enough to become an adjudicator, I would be striving to go through my hearings in the most expeditious way possible, as the members currently do. That means prioritizing the ones we can get through; using adjournments as a last resort, also.

And the use of that time: When there's downtime and there's multiple matters on a docket, I would be strongly encouraging mediation, as well as having a DRO—dispute resolution officer—step in to try to, at the very least, narrow issues that may speed up the process.

Also, when it comes to writing orders, my strongest attribute is a strong sense of urgency. I don't like people waiting on me; it's just a thing. I understand what's expected of the adjudicators, and I would fully intend to be writing orders as quickly as possible, as people's lives are on hold until they're issued. That's where I'm at on that one.

Mr. Robert Bailey: Good. Thank you.

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

MPP Racinsky: one minute.

Mr. Joseph Racinsky: Thank you, Mr. Valley, for coming this morning. You were recommended for this process following Tribunals Ontario's competitive, merit-based recruitment process. I wanted to ask you what your impression was of that process, and why do you think you were the best candidate for this role?

Mr. Brandon Valley: I believe my experiences that I've had working both sides with the landlords and tenants—I've had success on both sides. I have a great understanding of the cases to be met on both sides.

The process itself—the only thing I would say in a negative fashion is not knowing when the next step will happen, but again, that's out of everyone's control. I applied for this position, I would say, quite a few months ago, and it's just leading up to that, trying to get to the next step and trying to make sure that all my ducks are in a row—

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): Thank you very much. Sorry to cut you off. I'm normally not that rude of a person, I don't think. My brothers might say something different.

0940

Over to the official opposition: 10 minutes. I think we have MPP Gates.

MPP Wayne Gates: We do. We kind of rotate every week so we don't—we get the PCs to interfere when we're talking once in a while.

I'm going to start. Thanks for being here. I'm a big fan of Windsor; I'll be honest with you. I've been to Windsor many, many times. Unfortunately, it's not as nice as Niagara Falls. I just want to get that out, right off the bat.

You heard my colleagues, if you were online, talk about—we ask these questions all the time. I really believe that it's fair and reasonable. We want the best people for all of these committees, no matter what it is.

So I'm going to ask you, have you ever belonged to a political party?

Mr. Brandon Valley: I have not.

MPP Wayne Gates: Have you ever donated to a political party?

Mr. Brandon Valley: I have not.

MPP Wayne Gates: Have you ever campaigned for a political party?

Mr. Brandon Valley: I have not.

MPP Wayne Gates: It's a good way to get exercise, by the way. I just thought I'd let you know.

Mr. Brandon Valley: I do need that.

MPP Wayne Gates: Campaign and help somebody that you like. You can come to Niagara Falls; I'll certainly take care of you.

I found your work prior to this very interesting to me. I'm a Unifor member. When you were working at the racetrack or at the casino, were you a Unifor member or CAW member, depending on your timing?

Mr. Brandon Valley: At the slots at Windsor Raceway, the union had dissolved just prior to me being hired, so I didn't have involvement in that, plus I was in a management role.

At Caesars Windsor, I was in a management role the entire time. There was a union there and we did have to follow protocol based on that, which in turn goes back to time management and fairness and whatnot. We were forced to—not “forced to”—that was the wrong term, but I would have to adapt to opening and closing tables on the fly with the early-out list and things of that sort, while

taking into account always that background of making sure it's followed by the correct procedures there.

MPP Wayne Gates: But you worked with the unions while you were there?

Mr. Brandon Valley: Yes, worked with them, but not as a part of them.

MPP Wayne Gates: Okay. I just want to establish that you were familiar with unions and you understand how important they are in society.

Mr. Brandon Valley: Yes.

MPP Wayne Gates: Okay. I just wanted to establish that.

The LTB still has over 36,000 active cases as of late 2025, despite some progress. Do you believe the board is currently delivering timely justice, yes or no? If not, what would you do if it is failing?

Mr. Brandon Valley: I believe that things are improving. I would say that. My view as a paralegal, not yet a member, working on various applications, is that things are improving and hearing times are much shorter than they previously were. Efforts such as hiring more adjudicators seem to show that we're still striving for more improvements, and with this committee's support, I would look forward to becoming a member and starting to be part of the solution.

MPP Wayne Gates: The LTB is now resolving more cases than it receives, yet timelines remain unacceptable, which you're probably aware of. What concrete changes would you push for inside the board to actually meet the 80% service-standard targets? Being a paralegal, you're certainly aware of this.

Mr. Brandon Valley: Unfortunately, not being a part of the board as of yet leaves me to not be able to give a concrete answer on that. I would strive to learn what those objectives are and try to implement—I am always one of ideas, but I just don't have the ideas without being a member just yet.

MPP Wayne Gates: Well, it's good that you have ideas. I think that's a start, for sure. I'll give you that.

One thing I also read about you which I think is very, very important is that you took a lot of cases on as a paralegal with people that couldn't afford lawyers. It's a real challenge. I always understand that: "If I can't pay my rent, how am I going to pay for a lawyer?" So a lot of people go to paralegals. Maybe you could explain your role on that and the important role paralegals can play in making sure that people have a voice when they have to go and take on a landlord or have issues around their homes.

Mr. Brandon Valley: Absolutely. Everyone has the right to be heard and to access to justice. For me in particular, with my personal experiences, it usually would start out as someone coming with a simple question, because often some law firms will not give the time to a tenant that's just seeking some standard advice. So it would start with free consultations; it would turn into what is going to be a very limited-scope retainer, maybe just the filing fee, to try to get things down the right path where they plan to do it themselves.

But it has actually been very rewarding. Some of those cases are my most successful. They turned out to provide pro bono services to quite a few individuals who just had no means to pay, but at the end of the day got a successful result based on being done wrong in their situation. So they were able to be heard and yes, I think that paralegal role is extremely important in providing that access to justice—sometimes an affordable amount or sometimes pro bono.

MPP Wayne Gates: I just want to say I respect you doing that.

You also said, during your comments, about treating people with respect and dignity. A lot of times, when you can't afford to pay your rent, through no fault of your own—it could be you lose your job; I mean, there are 700,000 people in Ontario who don't have a job today. Rents are through the roof. In my area—I don't know what Windsor is like; I haven't checked into Windsor this way—trying to get a two-bedroom apartment is \$2,500. That's very, very expensive. It's not that people don't want to pay, it's that they just can't, at the end of the day, and they fall behind and they fall behind, and then they get in this process.

I think it's good that there are paralegals who are out there doing this role. It is an important role, and to the paralegals that are out there and yourself—they kind of start a whole new career as a paralegal. We need more paralegals, to help people who can't afford lawyers that are very, very expensive. I mean, \$400 an hour is a lot of money to almost anybody, including MPPs, and they probably use lawyers more than I do. But it's important.

Bill 60 reduces the timelines and limits tenants' rights, including making for shorter eviction times. Do you believe these changes prioritize speed over fairness? If not, explain how tenants are protected under tighter timelines.

Mr. Brandon Valley: With Bill 60 not fully being into effect yet and not being a member on the board to receive the full view of the training—based on those, I wouldn't be able to give a solid answer. But from a personal perspective of a paralegal and the challenges of what I've read, I believe there will be some room, as always, for a right to be heard.

For example, the 15-day appeal process: It's always based on individual circumstances, and there are extensions of time and stuff that can be filed. So I think some of those, on their face—and this is, again, from a personal perspective—may seem a little more harsh and to-the-point than the actual circumstances, where the events and the reason for the extension of time—

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): Brandon, sorry to interrupt. MPP Smith has a point—

Ms. Laura Smith: I'm sorry. The questions are out of the scope of the accreditation and the qualifications of the individual who we are now speaking with.

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): Yes, if we can just keep the questions to the candidate's qualifications, that would be great.

Mr. Brandon Valley: If I may just touch on that again: As I said at the beginning of the statement, yes, until I am

fully apprised of all the information and the training process on those bills, I wouldn't be able to provide more than my personal thoughts.

MPP Wayne Gates: I appreciate that. They have to have a reason to be here, so that's their reason to be here.

I'm going to continue on this line of thinking. These are questions I've asked other people. Quite frankly, there's nothing new here. I'm not trying to trick you. I've read your qualifications. This is really important to make sure we get it right, who we choose here, and I think it's fair to ask these questions—and reasonable, quite frankly.

Only 17 out of 291 requests for in-person hearings were granted. Do you believe that reflects meaningful access to in-person justice or a system that is effectively closed to it?

Mr. Brandon Valley: Again, I wouldn't be able to provide an accurate answer or description as I'm not a member, currently. Once I become a member, I would be more well-informed to answer that appropriately.

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): You have 36 seconds.

MPP Wayne Gates: How many?

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): You have 36—make it last.

MPP Wayne Gates: You currently work for a social housing provider and previously represented clients at the LTB. How would you ensure you are fair and impartial when you have direct experience advocating in the same system you now would oversee?

0950

Mr. Brandon Valley: I'd approach every matter with an open mind, consider all the relevant circumstances and apply the applicable law. It's a case-by-case situation for each one, and I would do my best to always provide an opportunity to be heard—

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

MPP Wayne Gates: Thanks for being here. Go, Spits, go!

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): All right. I'm not sure if you heard that about the Spits.

Now we're going over to the third party. MPP Smyth.

MPP Stephanie Smyth: Brandon, it's nice to meet you today. Thank you for being here.

The Landlord and Tenant Board, as you know, is one of the most demanding agencies in the province—36,000 active cases right now, as my colleague mentioned. What has inspired you to step up and offer your time to help tackle these challenges?

Mr. Brandon Valley: It's been a goal of mine, actually, since very early on attending Westervelt. Again, my mentorship that I have had with a professor of the program really caught my interest, and it's been something of natural progression as to what's next.

Community housing was, in my opinion, a crucial step in getting there. It opened my eyes to many more scenarios and social issues that I really didn't have prior to this role, and I believe I'm ready to move on a natural progression to this position.

MPP Stephanie Smyth: In your role as a paralegal, you've likely seen the frustrations from both sides of the table, as we've been discussing.

Because you've watched it, what could be one change you think could make the LTB more user-friendly for the average person, more accessible—anything to make the system that much better?

Mr. Brandon Valley: I currently am not a member, so, unfortunately, I wouldn't be able to give a clear answer on that.

MPP Stephanie Smyth: But you've had experience with the LTB.

Mr. Brandon Valley: Absolutely. I would say I've been before members hundreds of times. I'm not sure of the exact number, but—

MPP Stephanie Smyth: So you have an idea of what I'm talking about, then. What do you think is a small change that could make a big difference?

Mr. Brandon Valley: I would look forward to having the full understanding before I would be able to give a concrete answer. If I'm fortunate enough to become a member, I will strive to have my input heard after knowing all the circumstances.

MPP Stephanie Smyth: We know about the backlog. We know about that need for speed, and the need to ensure everybody feels they would have a fair hearing. In the experience that you've had to date working within the system, how do you balance that to keep it fair?

Mr. Brandon Valley: I would be committed to treating all parties with dignity and respect. I am mindful of power imbalances, particularly when it comes to self-represented parties. In those situations, I would ensure each party has a full opportunity to be heard. I would clearly explain the process and be attentive to whether supports or accommodations may be available.

My goal would be to run a fair, efficient hearing where the party feels heard and decisions are grounded firmly on law, evidence and the merits of the case—and just keeping an open mind.

MPP Stephanie Smyth: As a legal practitioner, you've advocated along the way for many clients, right? How are you going to prepare yourself to move into a role where you have to be completely neutral, even when the law might be a bit grey?

Mr. Brandon Valley: Again, I would base it on the merits and the facts before us in applicable law. As long as everyone had the opportunity to be heard, I would make a sound decision based on what was presented and the facts of each case, as they would vary case by case.

MPP Stephanie Smyth: Right. Are you familiar with above-guideline rent increases?

Mr. Brandon Valley: I have some familiarity, yes.

MPP Stephanie Smyth: Have you ever worked—represented either side—in an AGI?

Mr. Brandon Valley: I have for one case.

MPP Stephanie Smyth: Was this for a tenant or a landlord?

Mr. Brandon Valley: A landlord.

MPP Stephanie Smyth: Right. What do you feel about the AGI process? And we understand they have to be part of a system in certain cases. Do you feel that there is a concern? I know in my riding, Toronto–St. Paul’s, there is a deep concern about what’s called unfair above-guideline rent increases and what is defined as unfair. How have you seen AGIs in your experience, and have you felt that the process is fair?

Mr. Brandon Valley: I’ve only had limited exposure, as explained, to the actual cases. It’s my understanding that things need to be justified through various means of proving the increase and the reason for it.

If I’m fortunate to become a member with the full scope of training, I’d be able to comment a little bit better, but at this point, my exposure is limited in that fashion.

MPP Stephanie Smyth: So you’d work to understand more about AGIs? You don’t feel that you know that much about them right at this point, as you’re about to head to the LTB?

Mr. Brandon Valley: I have an understanding of what an AGI is and the majority of the reasons you could request one, but as for an in-depth explanation, it would be difficult, without having the onboarding and training.

MPP Stephanie Smyth: As you move forward into, likely, your new role, what kind of impact do you want to have?

Mr. Brandon Valley: I just want impartial, fair decisions to everyone. I’m able to control a room. I’m able to keep people calm and explain the process to people thoroughly and make sure everyone has an understanding of what’s expected of them.

Again, back to time management, I understand the importance and the layers that go with that. I would strive to issue my orders as soon as possible, not only while the case is still fresh in my head, but to, if at all possible, beat the expectations of timelines when orders should be submitted.

MPP Stephanie Smyth: Okay. Brandon, thank you very much.

Mr. Brandon Valley: Thank you.

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): Thank you very much, Brandon. I think you can stay online, if you’d like, as we discuss both appointments—or maybe you’re gone, but thank you for coming in.

Mr. Brandon Valley: Thank you, everyone, for your time.

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): Is everyone ready? We will now consider the intended appointment of Alexander Baker. Can I have a motion, please?

Ms. Laura Smith: I move concurrence in the intended appointment of Alexander Baker, nominated as member of the McMaster University board of governors.

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

Is there any discussion? MPP Gilmour.

MPP Alexa Gilmour: I’d like to ask for a recorded vote, please, Chair.

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): A recorded vote has been requested.

Are the members ready to vote?

Ayes

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

Nays

Gates, Gilmour, Smyth.

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

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

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

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): Concurrence has been moved by MPP Smith.

Any discussion? MPP Gilmour.

MPP Alexa Gilmour: I’d like to ask for a recorded vote.

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

Ayes

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

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): Unanimous. That carries. We can do it.

MPP Wayne Gates: We did last time too.

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): Yes. Whoa, we’re on a roll. Look out.

Now we would discuss the certificate extension. The deadline to review the intended appointments selected from the March 20, 2026, certificate is set to expire on April 19, 2026. Is there unanimous consent to extend the certificate by 30 days? I heard a no.

So that concludes our business for today. The committee now stands adjourned. Happy—

Interjection.

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): Oh, sorry. MPP Gilmour?

MPP Alexa Gilmour: I just want to raise a concern. We’re seeing some candidates come through. We’ve had two unanimous over the last couple of weeks, which has been wonderful.

However, there are candidates that are quite concerning in terms of their connections. We just don’t have enough information on paper to know whether they have the experience needed, and they’re not coming before us.

This government continues to refuse to extend the certificates. By refusing to do that, we are not actually doing what’s in the best interest of the province of Ontario and we are potentially filling all of our tribunals, all of our councils with individuals who may not have the qualifications, the experience, the expertise needed to serve Ontario better.

So it is my hope that the government will reconsider this continued practice of letting these individuals slip through—many of whom, I would note, do appear to be

failed candidates of the Conservative Party, members of the Conservative Party and individuals who have donated to the Conservative parties. They do not come before this committee, but they do make it onto some of our most important decision-making bodies in the province.

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

MPP Sabawy.

Mr. Sheref Sabawy: May I ask a question? I'm just commenting on your question.

So you advise that anybody who donated to the Conservative Party, or who was a member of the Conservative Party, or associated with the Conservative Party in any shape or form, should be excluded.

MPP Alexa Gilmour: Oh, no. May I?

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

MPP Alexa Gilmour: Thank you.

No, that was not what I said at all. I was talking about the experience, the expertise and the qualifications. What we do see is that these individuals may not have those. We can't tell, because they do not come before our committee.

But what they do have, and that is very clear, is extensive connections to the government.

It is concerning given the Skills Development Fund scandal, where there were very close connections to the Premier—his dentist, to his campaign manager—that we continue to see a situation where individuals who may not have the experience and expertise, but do have links to the Conservative Party, slip through and fill very important decision-making roles in our province.

Mr. Sheref Sabawy: I would just prefer to keep it on the merit of people who have the expertise or not. I think that's the fairest thing.

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

Ms. Laura Smith: I'm just requesting that we close this meeting because we all have to get places.

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): Okay. Thank you, everyone, for your comments. If there is no further business today, the meeting now stands adjourned. Happy Earth Day next week.

The committee adjourned at 1002.

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