

Legislative
Assembly
of Ontario



Assemblée
législative
de l'Ontario

Official Report of Debates (Hansard)

A-22

Journal des débats (Hansard)

A-22

Standing Committee on Government Agencies

Intended appointments

Comité permanent des organismes gouvernementaux

Nominations prévues

1st Session
44th Parliament
Thursday 9 July 2026

1^{re} session
44^e législature
Jeudi 9 juillet 2026

Chair: Mary-Margaret McMahon
Clerk: Vanessa Kattar

Présidente : Mary-Margaret McMahon
Greffière : Vanessa Kattar

Hansard on the Internet

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

Le Journal des débats sur Internet

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

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

Index inquiries

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

Renseignements sur l'index

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

Hansard Publications and Language Services
Room 500, West Wing, Legislative Building
111 Wellesley Street West, Queen's Park
Toronto ON M7A 1A2
Telephone 416-325-7400
Published by the Legislative Assembly of Ontario



Journal des débats et services linguistiques
Salle 500, aile ouest, Édifice du Parlement
111, rue Wellesley ouest, Queen's Park
Toronto ON M7A 1A2
Téléphone, 416-325-7400
Publié par l'Assemblée législative de l'Ontario

ISSN 1180-4335

CONTENTS

Thursday 9 July 2026

Subcommittee reports	A-223
Intended appointments / Nominations prévues.....	A-223
Mr. Hugh Mai	A-223
Dr. Armand La Barge.....	A-227
Mr. Matthew Létourneau	A-232
Dr. Mary-Agnes Wilson.....	A-237
Ms. Sarah Colman.....	A-244

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

STANDING COMMITTEE ON
GOVERNMENT AGENCIESCOMITÉ PERMANENT DES
ORGANISMES GOUVERNEMENTAUX

Thursday 9 July 2026

Jeudi 9 juillet 2026

The committee met at 0911 in room 151.

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): Good morning, everyone. It's a gorgeous summer morning. Thank you for coming in.

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

SUBCOMMITTEE REPORTS

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): Our first item of business is the adoption of the subcommittee reports.

We have the first subcommittee report, dated Thursday, June 25, 2026. Could I please have a motion? MPP Smith.

Ms. Laura Smith: I move adoption of the subcommittee report on intended appointments dated Thursday, June 25, 2026, on the order-in-council certificate dated June 19, 2026.

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): Is there any discussion? Are the members ready to vote? All in favour? Opposed? That carries.

We have a subcommittee report dated Thursday, July 2, 2026. Could I please have a motion? MPP Smith.

Ms. Laura Smith: I move adoption of the subcommittee report on intended appointments dated Thursday, July 2, 2026, on the order-in-council certificate dated June 26, 2026.

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

INTENDED APPOINTMENTS

NOMINATIONS PRÉVUES

MR. HUGH MAI

Review of intended appointment, selected by third party: Hugh Mai, intended appointee as member, Council of the College of Dental Technologists of Ontario.

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): Now to the most scintillating portion of the meeting: We will review our intended appointees. Our first intended appointee today is Hugh Mai.

Thank you so much for coming, Hugh.

Hugh is nominated as member of the Council of the College of Dental Technologists of Ontario.

Hugh, welcome to a friendly committee at Queen's Park. We're happy to hear from you. You can take some time to describe yourself and your skills that apply to this position you're looking for. Your time will be deducted from the government's time—and they are fine with that—and then the other parties, the official opposition and the third party, will have 10 minutes of questioning. The floor is yours.

Mr. Hugh Mai: Thank you, Madam Chair. Thank you, honourable members.

First of all, I'd like to start off by apologizing for being late. I am from out of town. I planned to be here an hour early, but Toronto traffic had other ideas. I learned that the hard way. Again, I apologize.

My name is Hugh Mai. I am from London, Ontario. I am the proud father of two wonderful daughters aged 23 and 20. And I am happily married to a wonderful woman named Eleni, without whom, I assure you, I probably would not have been here today. I owe her a lot of gratitude for her sacrifices for me.

I am a graduate of the University of Western Ontario, with a BA in political science. I am continuing on in that direction. I'm, by my count, about one and a half credits shy of my honours specialization. I believe in education, continuing education. I think it's very important.

I am also a graduate of the paralegal program from Fanshawe College. I have a postgrad certificate in paralegal studies. I completed that aspect in October 2020. This was during COVID; it was right in between the first wave and the second wave. I successfully wrote the test in February 2021 and became licensed as a paralegal in May 2021. Of course, it was during COVID that I became licensed by the Law Society of Ontario. There wasn't a lot of people hiring—so I wasn't able to acquire any sort of experience at that time. I decided to take it upon myself, and I started a small paralegal firm, Hugh Mai Paralegal Services, in London, Ontario, so that I could take it upon myself to gain experience, where the opportunities weren't around. So I did that for a few years, and I'm still doing that, obviously.

Then, an opportunity came. A friend of mine, who was also in my graduating class at the paralegal school at Fanshawe, said that there were opportunities for teaching positions at Fanshawe College. So I threw my hat in the ring and decided to apply, and I was successful.

I've been teaching part-time at Fanshawe since, more or less, February 2024.

More recently, I was also made aware by the same person that the Landlord and Tenant Board might be hiring. I thought that might be a good career move, so I went onto the government portal and put in my information. I had an initial interview with them, but it didn't go further than that, unfortunately. But my name was still in the portal, and that is where I was found by somebody within this establishment—that my credentials might allow me to perhaps be an interesting addition as a member to the college of dental technicians. So I thought, “Yes, that sounds like an excellent opportunity. It's nothing I'm really aware of, but it's something that I would love to sink my teeth into.”

Laughter.

Mr. Hugh Mai: I actually didn't mean that. That's funny. That was a happy accident.

Anyway, here I am. I was asked to appear before you today in this regard, and I look forward to answering any of your questions. I just want to say that I am absolutely humbled and proud to be in front of all of you distinguished people. Thank you.

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

We have five minutes and 28 seconds for the government side. Any questions?

Mr. Sheref Sabawy: Thank you very much, Mr. Mai, for sharing all the different contributions you did and initiatives you started.

You shared that you're simply a registered paralegal, which is another role that requires registration, with regulation and an oversight body. Going through that process of registration and dealing with the situations—deeper work and all this; interviews and stuff—what do you hope to bring to this board, given your proficient background and this perspective?

Mr. Hugh Mai: Well, what I would like to bring to it, from what I understand, is that I could offer up a unique perspective regarding everything. I am governed by the Law Society of Ontario, so I am familiar with self-regulating bodies. I was also assured that my credentials would be on top of my legal background—it would also be my academic background in political science and also myself being a small, sole proprietor of my own paralegal firm. All of that put together would allow me, perhaps, the ability to view things through a lens that other people might not be able to see, and I think that I could offer up unique matters towards hopefully resolving any issues that arise.

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

Mr. Robert Bailey: Welcome, Hugh. I love your sense of humour. I won't ask you if you ever represented Dr. Yank-and-Pull—I had to work that in there.

Anyway, can you give us an example of some of your legal background in your legal career, where you think that would be of service in this new role—bringing that kind of governance rules from your legal career into this board?

0920

Mr. Hugh Mai: I would say that in regard to that specifically, there is the legislation involved with this—I believe there are, specifically, the three pieces of legislation that are relevant to this. I can't quite remember them off the top of my head; if you gave me a minute, I am sure I could, but time is pending. I am well versed in being able to go over the various pieces of legislation and becoming highly competent in that in due time. That kind of skill would allow me to fit right in, and very shortly, as soon as necessary.

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

MPP Billy Denault: Thank you, Mr. Mai, for coming in and for sharing your experience. I do note that as a professor teaching business law at Fanshawe College—it's kind of an interesting intersection with that and your profession, as a paralegal.

Do you think your duties when it comes to teaching students and grading work will add value to your role on the board?

Mr. Hugh Mai: I think it could add value, in that as a professor, you have to take the information and evaluate issues. Students, for example, may be having problems. You have to assess what problems they have and come up with creative solutions by which to resolve those problems.

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

Mr. Andrew Dowie: Thank you, Mr. Mai, for being here. As a paralegal, you are part of a self-regulated profession, and now you're going to join the council of another self-regulated profession. You have definitely got an awareness of how they work, with the complaints, the discipline committees, and some of the governance issues. So I'm hoping to find out—

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

Mr. Andrew Dowie: Thank you.

How do you see yourself contributing to the council's objectives in regulating this profession and ensuring that the practitioners are well-qualified?

Mr. Hugh Mai: Well, I'm a fan of all the good things like truth, justice, transparency, openness to the public, fairness to the people we will be dealing with and measuring that against the interests of the public. I'm really happy about this potential opportunity because servicing the public is a great opportunity, I think. That is a bit of a segue there—but, yes, that's what I feel about that.

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): Over to the official opposition: MPP Gates, please.

MPP Wayne Gates: Good morning, sir. It's nice to see you here. I only wish that everybody who applies for committees would show up. Even if they show up late, at least they're showing up. So I congratulate you on being here today.

I'm going to ask you familiar questions to this committee, asked of everybody who comes before the committee, who I question.

Do you belong to a party?

Mr. Hugh Mai: I do belong to the Conservative Party of Canada. I have no affiliations within the provincial realm. That is not to say that I am an ideologue by any sense.

I have supported the NDP in the past, federally, anyway. I think that Jack Layton would have been a great Prime Minister if he'd had the opportunity.

As I said, I'm not an ideologue. I just go with where I think is the best—

MPP Wayne Gates: But you have belonged to the PC Party. Did you ever make any—

Mr. Hugh Mai: The PC Party? No, that's not correct. The Conservative Party of Canada. I've never been a member of the Ontario party. I have no affiliations provincially.

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

Mr. Hugh Mai: Yes.

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

Mr. Hugh Mai: No.

MPP Wayne Gates: You've never gone door to door?

Mr. Hugh Mai: No.

MPP Wayne Gates: You mentioned that you were approached to apply for this. Who approached you or asked you?

Mr. Hugh Mai: Joseph—I forgot his last name. Cananza? I could look that up. Do you know who I'm talking about?

MPP Wayne Gates: I don't.

Mr. Hugh Mai: It was the gentleman who just brought me into the room.

MPP Wayne Gates: Okay, that's fair.

With your background in law, how will your skills benefit the College of Dental Technologists of Ontario, and what will your role be on that council?

Mr. Hugh Mai: I'm not exactly sure I can speak to what my role would be as of yet because, well, this is my first attempt at anything in this regard. Obviously, there is legislation that has to be done, and I would uphold the law as much as possible, trying to factor in the human factor as well, obviously. But I'm sure that the legislation and the rules of the college only give me so much leeway with that. To properly answer that, I would definitely have to understand everything much more than just the surface level of what I understand right now.

MPP Wayne Gates: How familiar are you with the work of a dental technologist and the state of dentistry across Ontario?

Mr. Hugh Mai: I don't have a lot in that. I intend to learn that fast. As a paralegal—and all legal professionals in general, where they may not be up to par where they're supposed to be, they are trained to be able to catch up on that within due time. I assure you that I've done that many times in the past, and I will do that as well in the future.

There was another part of that question; I don't think I answered that.

MPP Wayne Gates: No, that's fine. I'll give you another one that will maybe make it easier for you.

Would it be fair to say that you really don't have any experience in this field?

Mr. Hugh Mai: My experience is that an old friend of mine became a dental technologist back about 30 years ago.

Outside of the legislation that I've read over regarding this matter, I do not have a lot of experience involved in this, no.

MPP Wayne Gates: So if we say that you don't have any, that would be fair?

Mr. Hugh Mai: Yes, I think so.

MPP Wayne Gates: I think so, too.

I'm going to ask you this question—you might not be able to answer this one either: What's the most important issue you hope to address during your term?

Mr. Hugh Mai: The most important issue that is my priority is serving the public as they deserve in truth, honesty and transparency.

MPP Wayne Gates: I think it's fair to say, again, that you really don't know the issues. Even in your own submission, you're saying that you're willing to learn, you're a quick learner, all that kind of stuff, but it's fair to say that you don't have any.

I'm going to ask you another question, because I think—

Mr. Hugh Mai: Well, self-regulating bodies—I do have experience with how the Law Society of Ontario works. It's a similar situation, and I'm sure that my knowledge in that regard is easily transferable to this particular college.

MPP Wayne Gates: It may be.

Mr. Hugh Mai: I would think so.

MPP Wayne Gates: Through your work with the Ark Aid Mission, I understand you work with a lot of people in need. A lack of dental care is a common issue for people living in poverty. I think we all, around this table, know that.

Can you speak to what you would like to see from the CDTO to expand access to care for people who need dentistry, who really can't afford it?

Mr. Hugh Mai: I do subscribe that there should be help for people who are unable to provide for themselves. There's no question about that. We may not exactly agree on how that is, but I think you and I both have the same idea that when people are in need, there needs to be help involved in that, particularly with young children and seniors.

I've also been made aware that there is already some help that can be provided to people who are in need, but I'm guessing that, as with just about everything else, there probably isn't quite enough.

MPP Wayne Gates: Well, you don't have to guess in that. We know it's not enough. And you've hit on two really important groups. People living in poverty—young children and seniors—are really struggling with dental as well.

How would you help ensure that the reviews and complaints are considered fairly for all parties?

Mr. Hugh Mai: Well, for that, I believe that I would have to defer to the proper legislation. I would also probably look into if there's any sort of past case law in regard to that treatment. I imagine that, when working with the other members, there would be discussions on how to better facilitate that sort of a public benefit.

0930

MPP Wayne Gates: What steps can the province take to make sure we have adequate dentistry staff across Ontario?

After the government cut OSAP this year, the association of dental technologists said that they expect these changes to worsen Ontario's severe shortage of dental workers.

Can you speak to the importance of a fully staffed workforce in Ontario dentistry?

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

MPP Smith, on a point of order?

Ms. Laura Smith: If we could keep on the questions that relate to the applicant's qualifications, please.

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

MPP Gates.

MPP Wayne Gates: I appreciate it. Thank you.

Could you answer the question, please?

Mr. Hugh Mai: I think that the situation of being improperly funded is a travesty. I'm not sure that you and I would agree on what that means. But like I said, I think that we can both agree that we want what's best for the public.

Again, I don't have any partisan leanings here in the province of Ontario. I have kept my mind open to that. If you are trying to find out if I have any kind of like for the current Premier and his policies, I'm not going to admit or deny that.

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

MPP Wayne Gates: I think we can agree on one thing: that the cuts have not helped the dentistry—and it's certainly not helping the staffing that we need in the dentistry profession. I think we can agree on that.

Mr. Hugh Mai: I would agree on that, yes.

MPP Wayne Gates: That's not political. That's saying a fact: that the cuts are not helping, and it's hurting the dentistry—

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

MPP Smith, with a point of order again.

Ms. Laura Smith: Once again, the questions should pertain around the applicant's qualifications.

MPP Wayne Gates: I appreciate that.

I have no further questions.

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): On to the third party: MPP Smyth.

MPP Stephanie Smyth: Thank you, Mr. Mai, for being here today. I know some of these questions can be uncomfortable, but I think we're just trying to examine appointees to the various agencies of this government and see how suitable or not they might be.

You did mention in your remarks that initially you were applying to the LTB, Landlord and Tenant Board, which you saw as a professional opportunity.

Do you see this appointment to this Council of the College of Dental Technologists of Ontario as a step in your career rather than, maybe, public service?

Mr. Hugh Mai: Can't it be both?

MPP Stephanie Smyth: I don't know. Can it?

Mr. Hugh Mai: I'm doing it mainly for public service, but I'm not going to deny that this would probably look good on a résumé. But that's not to say that I would step away. The terms for this are unlimited, if I read the legislation right—well, the number of terms, anyway. I believe it's three-year terms, but unlimited—with the LTB, I think it was a maximum of three terms, where here, it's not.

If things work out well here, I see no point in leaving if I can contribute to the public service. And that is my highest intention here because, well, the remuneration isn't that great, if I read that right, which is fine by me, because I'm not doing it for the money. I'm not going to lie; a little bit of credit might be okay. Who knows, maybe one day I'll want to consider running for a seat in the provincial Parliament, like most of you have. It seems like a rewarding career.

MPP Stephanie Smyth: Oh. Which party?

Mr. Hugh Mai: I haven't decided yet. Like I said, I have my leanings federally. I have no leanings provincially at this time.

MPP Stephanie Smyth: When you mentioned that you were thinking about the Landlord and Tenant Board, I thought that that makes sense. We need experienced paralegals there. It definitely fits.

When I saw the council of the College of Dental Technologists of Ontario, I found it hard to square that circle—or whatever the expression is. Your admitted lack of experience in this field, in health care or the dental setting—do you see that as a potential barrier to being able to do the best possible public service that you intend to do?

Mr. Hugh Mai: No, I think I can do a great job in this. There's already the legislation—I will catch up on that really fast, obviously.

My mother was a nurse. My brother's ex-wife was a nurse. There are a lot of health care matters in the family in that—not that I have any personal experience in that myself.

Also, in the discussion online, when I was going over everything, it said that having a great knowledge in that to begin with—it is not necessarily a hindrance to being able to do a good job, initially, anyway. It was, again, suggested that my credentials—that being a political science academic, my legal experience, my business experience as a sole proprietor of my little firm, and my teaching at Fanshawe College in business, would provide me with valuable insights which I can bring to the table, and come up with novel solutions, fair solutions.

I'd like to reiterate that I am bound by higher standards of ethics as a legal representative, a member of the Law Society of Ontario. I think that, in the aspect of the public members who are not associated—as with some of the other members who are of the profession, I am more than convinced I can bring fresh ideas, honest ideas, honest conclusions, a high standard of ethics. I don't like lies, so transparency would be very high on my list.

MPP Stephanie Smyth: And when you considered applying to this board, the council for the college of dental technologists, I am assuming you did a lot of research to make sure you were a good fit. To that point, what is the

major issue that you would want to deal with, that you would hope to effect change in, in the public interest, with this appointment?

Mr. Hugh Mai: Again, I'm not going to lie; I have to admit I would have to spend some time speaking with other members, going over and being fully versed in the legislation to see what those contributions would be. But they would be there, and they would be of value.

MPP Stephanie Smyth: The council has a really big role in oversight of professional conduct or misconduct of dental technicians. How do you think your experience will help you with what could be potentially really serious matters?

Mr. Hugh Mai: Well, I have to look at each matter on an individual basis; judge the facts and rule accordingly, taking in mind legislation case law if there is any; be fair and honest; and, as always, look into making sure that it is the protection of the public that is of the highest importance.

MPP Stephanie Smyth: We obviously investigate appointees to these agencies and tribunals across the province.

Just looking at your footprint, your public social media activity includes sharing posts from federal political leaders about cutting institutional bureaucracy.

Under Ontario's provincial directives, where do you actually see unnecessary red tape within the dental regulatory body that can be cut without risking the safety of patient medical devices?

0940

Mr. Hugh Mai: First, I would like to say that some of my Facebook posts are meant to rib fellow graduates from the social science program that we all graduated together. We all have different ideas. One of my closest friends is a Marxist, but—

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

MPP Smith, on a point of order.

Ms. Laura Smith: Sorry. Madam Chair, if we could once again focus on qualifications of the applicant.

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

MPP Smyth—just to link strongly to the qualifications.

MPP Stephanie Smyth: Okay. Hopefully, this will pass the test.

You've been a professor at Fanshawe's school of business, and you know how critical it is, I assume, to get grads into the workforce.

Given the health care labour shortages right now, how would you evaluate if the college's entry exams are creating unfair administrative barriers for, say, foreign-trained dental technologists?

Mr. Hugh Mai: Well, if that is the case, then we definitely have to look into this.

I am rather aware of how admissions that are prejudicial and inappropriate can hold you back.

I did write the LSAT a few years ago—quite a few years ago now—and I had problems with the logic games. Several years ago, some students who were sight-impaired sued, actually, the LSAC, because they felt that it was prejudicial because the method of solving them required great amounts of visual help. So they sued and won.

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

Mr. Hugh Mai: The LSAC even concluded, as I did after writing that test, that the logic games in themselves had no bearing on how well somebody would do in law school or as a lawyer. So, obviously, I have a really nasty grudge against false barriers to success.

MPP Stephanie Smyth: Thank you very much, Mr. Mai. We appreciate you coming before us today.

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): Thank you very much for coming in and taking the time to do so, Hugh, and sharing your story. Sometimes coming to this committee is a little bit like going to the dentist. So we thank you for your time.

Mr. Hugh Mai: Thank you very much. I had a wonderful time. I appreciate everyone's questions. It was great.

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): You're welcome to stay. We do have quite a few people to interview today. You're welcome to stay and observe, or you're welcome to go on your merry way and find out about the results later. Thank you very much.

Mr. Hugh Mai: I would love to stay, but I do have to go because I have to teach a class at 3. With this traffic, I better get going as soon as possible.

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

Mr. Hugh Mai: Thank you very much. I had a great time.

DR. ARMAND LA BARGE

Review of intended appointment, selected by third party: Armand La Barge, intended appointee as chair, Postsecondary Education Quality Assessment Board.

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): We will now move to review the second intended appointee, Armand La Barge, who is nominated as chair of the Postsecondary—

Interjection.

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): Oh, yes, and this one will be virtual—nominated as chair of the Postsecondary Education Quality Assessment Board.

Welcome, Armand. Welcome to our cozy committee. You may make an initial statement as—I'm not sure if you observed the previous intended appointee, but you can share your story and your experience with us, and then the government, the official opposition and the third party will have 10 minutes of questioning for you. Whatever time you take will be deducted from the government side, and they are okay with that. So take your time. The floor is yours.

Dr. Armand La Barge: Thank you, Chair. Good morning, everyone. My name is Dr. Armand La Barge. I'm honoured to present my candidacy for the chair of the Postsecondary Education Quality Assessment Board, or PEQAB for short.

As you know, PEQAB serves as a critical advisory agency through the Ontario Ministry of Colleges, Universities, Research Excellence and Security, ensuring that degree-granting institutions across the province meet the

highest standards of quality, integrity and accountability. For the past 26 years, PEQAB has upheld the principles set out in the Post-secondary Education Choice and Excellence Act, 2000, safeguarding the excellence of Ontario's post-secondary education landscape.

I believe I am very well prepared to assume the responsibilities of chair of this agency. For the past three years, I have served as a member of PEQAB, and during that time I have been an active and engaged member who has never missed a meeting. I have also had the privilege of serving as the acting chair during the absence of the current vice-chair, Alexandre Laurin.

In parallel, I've also served as a member for three years on the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario, or HEQCO for short. During the past year, I have taken on the added responsibility of acting chair for HEQCO. As I'm sure many of you are aware, HEQCO is being wound down, so I'm now overseeing the dissolution of that agency with care, transparency and respect for its statutory obligations.

These roles have afforded me extensive experience working directly with Minister Quinn, Deputy Minister Wai, Assistant Deputy Minister Zoë Kroeker, and the other dedicated members of the MCURES staff. That experience has provided me with a keen understanding of the ministry's priorities, expectations and operational culture, and has enabled me to build a strong, respectful working relationship that will serve PEQAB well.

Academically, my background reflects a lifelong commitment to learning. My fields of interest academically are Canadian and Indigenous studies, criminal justice and public safety, and, more recently, law. My commitment to higher education is demonstrated by the fact that I have been continuously involved in post-secondary education as a student, guest lecturer, PhD adviser, and a governance member since my first management course at Seneca College back in 1983.

Over the past 43 years, I've earned a PhD and a master of philosophy degree in criminal justice, a master of arts degree in Canadian and Indigenous studies, and a bachelor of arts honours and ordinary degree in Canadian studies. I'm also proud of the fact that I was York University's first graduate of its certificate in multiculturalism studies program, back in 1991. I'm proud of the fact that I'm nearing completion of my honours bachelor of laws, or LLB, degree, with only two modules remaining for my law degree.

In recognition of my academic and community contributions, I was awarded a doctor of laws honoris causa by the University of Guelph in 2012.

And in 2022, I was invested into the Order of Ontario for my lifelong commitment to diversity, inclusion, social justice and community service.

My educational journey has also included diploma and certificate studies at Seneca College and Durham College, University of Virginia, Scotland's University of St Andrews, University of Alberta, University of London, Queen's University, and Yale, Penn and Harvard law schools, just to name but a few.

My wife and I are both retired police officers, and we are proud of the fact that we support students through a

graduate scholarship in multiculturalism at York University and a policing and community well-being bursary at Trent University.

As far as my leadership goes, leadership has been a defining thread throughout my career. I've chaired numerous organizations, including Special Olympics Ontario, Ontario's St. John Ambulance, the Ontario Association of Chiefs of Police, the Seneca College alumni council, the Trent University board of governors, and the Uxbridge Public Library.

I've also served on the boards of York University, Sacred Heart College, the GTA YMCA, the Rotary Club of London, and several national organizations, including the Canadian Association for Community Living foundation, the Herbert H. Carnegie Future Aces Foundation, and the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police.

My experience extends beyond post-secondary education and certainly beyond the province of Ontario.

In 2017 and 2018, I served as a strategic adviser to Justice Michael Tulloch on the Independent Police Oversight Review and the Independent Street Checks Review.

I also worked with Justice Tulloch as a strategic adviser on a justice undertaking for social transformation program in Jamaica. Our team travelled to Jamaica and trained peace officers, prosecutors, court officials and members of the judiciary on criminal justice reform and modernization.

Finally, I am confident in saying that I bring a lifelong commitment to diversity, inclusion and community services to the position of PEQAB chair. I've championed initiatives supporting vulnerable populations in Canada and abroad, including working with the homeless and unhoused here in Ontario and in the Caribbean. I've served as a chair of the Association of Progressive Muslims of Canada community advisory board for the past 20 years, where I help organize and emcee annual Eid celebrations at Queen's Park and on Parliament Hill. I serve as a member of the national board of advisers with the Abraham Global Peace Initiative, an ambassador with the Universal Peace Federation, and an adviser with the Intercultural Dialogue Institute GTA.

All of my academic, professional, governance and community experiences have helped shape my belief in the transformational power of education and the importance of safeguarding its quality.

0950

As a dedicated member of PEQAB for the past three years, I can attest to the fact that the work we do in quality assurance matters. What we do at PEQAB protects students. It strengthens institutions and upholds public trust. As I have demonstrated throughout my personal, professional and academic life, I'm ready to lead the work with diligence, fairness and unwavering commitment.

Ontario students deserve excellence. Ontario's post-secondary education system deserves clarity. And PEQAB deserves a chair who brings experience, integrity and a lifelong dedication of learning to that position. In closing, I stand ready to take on that responsibility.

Thank you. Merci. Chi-meegwetch. Niá:wen.

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): Wow. Thank you for that, Armand. That's quite the portfolio.

There are three minutes and 20 seconds left for the government side. MPP Firin.

MPP Mohamed Firin: Thank you, Mr. La Barge, for putting your name forward. From what you have shared, you have a very impressive background, with extensive experience in higher education.

I think you mentioned that you've probably taken some sort of certificate or diploma from almost every university in Ontario—and board of governance—a quality that is ideal for this position.

My question to you is, what do you hope to bring to the chair role for the post-secondary education quality council of Ontario?

Dr. Armand La Barge: Thank you for that question.

In stepping into the chair's role at PEQAB, what I hope to bring is a balanced blend of higher-education expertise that I've outlined and disciplined board governance. I'm confident in saying my academic background will allow me to govern the process of assessing programs with rigour and empathy, understanding how curriculum, pedagogy and institutional realities intersect. That's from my experience working as a governor and chair in Ontario's universities. I'm also confident in saying that my governance experience will strengthen PEQAB's commitment to fairness and the important quality of transparency and principled decision-making.

Together, all of these perspectives will enable me to guide the board's deliberations thoughtfully, uphold the public interest, and support Ontario's PSE sector in delivering high-quality, credible and very future-ready programs.

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

MPP Billy Denault: Thank you, Mr. La Barge, for coming here and sharing your experience.

How will you leverage that career experience as well as your part-time PEQAB board membership to ensure the agency continues to meet its organizational goals?

Dr. Armand La Barge: My experience as a PSE board chair along with that three-year membership on PEQAB—and on HEQCO, I might add—has provided me with a very clear understanding of how post-secondary institutions in Ontario work, how they design programs, how they manage quality and respond to regulatory expectations, all of which I am confident in saying will help me oversee the process of reviewing submissions to PEQAB.

In addition to that, my four decades of being a student at post-secondary institutions here in Ontario and around the world will equip me to uphold PEQAB's standards with both rigour and realism. I'll bring a disciplined approach and evidence-based—

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

Dr. Armand La Barge:—evaluation of the submissions.

Having served on PEQAB and HEQCO for the past three years, I understand how higher-education processes

work and the culture and expectations of PEQAB and MCURES.

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): MPP Bailey: 36 seconds.

Mr. Robert Bailey: Thank you for coming in today.

I really appreciate your outline of your career and everything, and I'm sure you will bring great knowledge to this position, should you be appointed.

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): Good question.

Over to the official opposition: You have 10 minutes. MPP Bell.

Ms. Jessica Bell: Thank you so much for coming here, Mr. La Barge. I was very impressed, listening to your extensive credentials, and I was also impressed, reading about your extensive career.

Dr. Armand La Barge: Thank you.

Ms. Jessica Bell: You already sit on PEQAB and have served as acting chair in the absence of the chair, as you mentioned.

What have you learned from your time on the board that would help shape how you lead the agency, as the chair?

Dr. Armand La Barge: I've learned how processes work—I've learned, certainly, not just the culture of PEQAB, but the culture of the ministry, which I think are important qualities and attributes to bring to the chair's position. I've also learned how important board dynamics are. Certainly, as a previous board chair in both post-secondary education and volunteer organizations, my goal is always to enhance board dynamics, enhance the consensus-making process that's so critical to the work that we do at PEQAB. So those are some of the types of qualities that I would bring to that position, as chair.

Ms. Jessica Bell: PEQAB makes recommendations to the minister on whether institutions should be allowed to offer degree programs or call themselves a university.

How do you understand the chair's responsibility to protect academic quality and student interests?

Dr. Armand La Barge: Well, obviously, as the chair, I have to safeguard the standards that we have established. We have established extremely transparent and high standards for any degree-granting program in Ontario. We have a group of over 70 subject matter experts who analyze any degree program that comes before us in a variety of different categories, and we rely very heavily on those individuals to make recommendations to us. The board does an extremely important job in assessing those recommendations to ensure that the students are getting the best quality of program and degree program that they can. As chair, I oversee that process. I oversee the dialogue that takes place between the members, ensuring that all members have a voice, and ensuring that members are given the opportunity to raise, in an unbiased fashion, their thoughts on the applications before us. We call that not putting our thumbs on the scale. Obviously, there's politics in virtually every aspect of life, and we want to ensure that when we do an assessment, it's based on the standards that we've set and on the findings of our subject matter experts, as opposed to any of the political noise that

might be happening at the time. As chair, I'm responsible in ensuring that happens.

Ms. Jessica Bell: I also sit on the committee for public accounts, where we review the Auditor General's work. A recent issue came up with private career colleges, around the training of large commercial truck drivers. What they found was that there are some private career colleges that are training truck drivers and they are accrediting them; however, these truck drivers—some of them—are clearly not qualified to be on the road. There were examples of truck driver applicants not even being able to understand how to properly reverse a large commercial truck. What we heard is that—

Interjection.

Ms. Jessica Bell: I've got a point here.

What we heard is that these are big trucks, and if you get into a collision with a large truck, unfortunately, the chances of you surviving that accident are a lot less than it would if you hit a smaller car—so they need to be safe, is what I'm trying to say.

What the Auditor General found is that there's a real need to make sure that these private career colleges are providing students with the kind of learning that they need, to ensure we have appropriate safety standards in Ontario.

So my question is this: Given your expertise already on this accrediting agency, what steps do you think should be done to address already-approved career colleges that are pretty clearly not meeting adequate standards?

Dr. Armand La Barge: That's an important question.

I've been reading the stories about that particular situation.

I have, as you can appreciate, a 37-year career in policing—

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

Ms. Laura Smith: Sorry. Thank you—if we could keep the questions to the credentials of the individual being questioned.

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): Yes, I think that that was mentioned in the question—that there was going to be a connection. Thank you.

Ms. Jessica Bell: Thank you, MPP Smith. The reason I'm asking this question is because it directly relates to Mr. La Barge's experience approving private career colleges and also assessing their quality. While it isn't an academic credential, it does relate to the knowledge that he would bring to his role as chair. And I would be very interested in hearing the answer.

1000

Mr. La Barge, would you like to finish your answer?

Dr. Armand La Barge: Yes.

As a 37-year veteran of policing, I have real-world experience, obviously, with issues in dealing with tractor-trailers and collisions on our roadways, as well, and seeing some of the harm that those types of situations cause.

PEQAB only approves degree processes that come before us. We will, obviously, have to deal, I think, in the future with career colleges wanting to do degrees. But so far, that's not the situation that we're dealing with. If, in

fact, we do deal with those types of situations, I can assure you that we would apply the same rigorous standards that we apply to public colleges wanting to do degree programs, and out-of-province and private universities and other institutions doing degree-granting programs as well. That's just the standard that we set at PEQAB. We don't leave any stone unturned in assessing the qualifications of the organization and the faculty and the readiness to actually make sure that students learn something that's worthwhile and meaningful from a labour market perspective, going forward.

Ms. Jessica Bell: Thank you for the answer to that question.

My final question is, what would you say is the biggest challenge facing PEQAB right now, and what would you do, as chair, to address it?

Dr. Armand La Barge: We have a small secretariat of about eight members at PEQAB, who have been led by an incredible individual, Dr. James Brown, since 2013. Obviously, the concern is always, if and when that individual decides to retire, the replacement of that individual. That's not something that is a significant challenge. I have been involved, as a board member, in the replacement of a CEO or president of an agency. In fact, most recently, I was involved in the hiring of a new president and CEO for HEQCO. It's something that takes some time and effort. It's also something that can disrupt the organization, especially the secretariat—whom our six or seven members work with very closely as well.

Beyond that, the other challenges are credibility—obviously, we rely very closely and carefully on the work that our subject matter experts do. We ensure that only the best are recruited for those particular positions. We want to safeguard our credibility as PEQAB, in ensuring that, whenever they're assigned to an inspection or review, they don't have conflicts of interest, that they're doing it in an unbiased fashion or manner so that it doesn't impact negatively the reputation of PEQAB and the reputation of the reviewers, going forward.

I have to acknowledge that Dr. Brown has done a tremendous job, certainly in the three years that I've been on there, and in interactions with post-secondary education presidents and deans and vice-presidents. He is held in extremely high regard.

Ms. Jessica Bell: That's the extent of my questions. Thank you so much for coming in today.

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): Over to the third party: MPP Smyth.

MPP Stephanie Smyth: Thank you, Chief, for being here. Can I still call you Chief after all these years?

Dr. Armand La Barge: Everybody does, despite the fact I've been retired for 16 years. Yes.

MPP Stephanie Smyth: I don't think I've talked to you in years, since your capacity as chief. It's a pleasure to see you here today.

Dr. Armand La Barge: Thank you very much.

MPP Stephanie Smyth: I am so impressed by the work that has happened beyond and throughout your career since—I guess you left YRP in, what, 2012? No, it was—

wrong page here. There are so many pages, Chief. It's hard to keep it straight.

Dr. Armand La Barge: In 2010.

MPP Stephanie Smyth: Yes, 2010.

Anyway, congratulations on the amazing work you've been doing since your time as chief and through that time as well.

We know that you had a great career in law enforcement, dealing with that strict compliance, chain of command, how that matters most, and you even alluded to that—discipline at the board governance level is important to you.

Higher education, which you are completely involved in and invested in, does rely heavily on academic freedom and institutional autonomy.

How do you see your background in public safety all these years influencing the work you are now doing to regulate academic degrees?

Dr. Armand La Barge: I may have spoken about evidence-based assessments. Evidence-based decision-making is so critical and important to what we do at PEQAB, but it's also important to what you do as elected officials. There are so many voices being heard in regard to issues that it's sometimes difficult to separate fact from fiction and separate loud voices from insightful voices as well.

My background in public safety, obviously, 37 years, and my wife—35 years as well—have given me the opportunity to make decisions and assess information based on evidence, not based on hysteria or not based on rhetoric and whatever have you as well. I think I will bring that quality and skill, if I am fortunate enough to be appointed as the chair for PEQAB, to the table as well. It also gives me an opportunity—as a member of York Regional Police, I had a number of community partners. It's so important, obviously, to give an opportunity to individuals to raise their voice—not just on the board, but within our stakeholder community as well—about the work that we in PEQAB do.

During my travels across the province interacting with post-secondary education presidents and vice-presidents and deans, I'm often asked about the work that we do at PEQAB and about the level of quality assurance that we impose on our standards and on our reviews and inspections. I'm always satisfied in saying that it's the highest level—at the level of a university quality assurance program or a college quality assurance program as well.

So I think all of those attributes that I bring in from my public safety career will make me a good candidate for the position of chair.

MPP Stephanie Smyth: I know that the position you're looking at, as chair, is part-time.

We're all amazed by your résumé and all that you do.

We do know that the post-secondary sector in Ontario is dealing with some really major structural and financial shifts.

So, given all your community and public board commitments, how do you think you're going to handle this heavy caseload without maybe having to deal with contributing, potentially, to delays or backlogs? I say that, Chief, with all due respect, knowing you've managed

many things at one time throughout your life, including a police service.

Dr. Armand La Barge: Thank you. I think I have excellent time management skills. I've always been able to juggle a lot of balls in the air, and I tend to not get overwhelmed by competing interests. I tend to be on an orderly schedule every day. I sit in my office and I look at my calendar on the wall—what I have today, what I have tomorrow, and what I have in the next week as well. I've always had very disciplined time management skills.

I also have a very understanding wife. She is a big supporter of my work in the community service and my work in volunteer post-secondary education.

So I'm confident in saying that if I was successful in getting the chair's position at PEQAB, I would be able to handle the workload very adequately. And of course, with HEQCO winding down, that's one less obligation that I'll have on my plate as well.

MPP Stephanie Smyth: And about that, which is being wound down by Bill 101—can you speak to the work that you did on HEQCO? Was it a valuable, independent contributor to higher education?

Dr. Armand La Barge: Most assuredly. We've been around for 21 years, and certainly, I think we've made a significant contribution to the province's and Canada's understanding of post-secondary education—studies in regard to work-integrated learning, studies in regard to where international students reside after they've graduated etc. I think it has made a valuable contribution to the post-secondary landscape. But I also have to point out that we don't do it in isolation, that we do it in partnership with other post-secondary education institutions and think tanks. I'm confident in saying that with the dissolution of HEQCO, that work will carry on—not so much under the tutelage or the direction of HEQCO. Nonetheless, it will carry on because it's important work, and it's important that PSEs continue to do that type of research.

MPP Stephanie Smyth: You've been on the board of governors for Trent, York University, Sacred Heart College—president of the alumni council for Seneca.

Do you think, is there any kind of inclination, bias, maybe, toward universities—or how would you reconcile that, to put it in a fair way?

Dr. Armand La Barge: That's an excellent question.

I certainly don't have a bias, having started my post-secondary education journey at a community college, Seneca College, and having attended and completed certificate programs at Durham College as well, and other colleges across the province and across the country.

1010

But I can tell you that within the post-secondary landscape there tends to be a bias towards universities versus colleges; however, that's changing. Young people I talk to now tend to look at the trades more so than a university education. In fact, my grandnephew just recently secured a position from a work-integrated learning opportunity he had while attending a community college. So I see that there's a shift in that.

Certainly, on PEQAB, we have as many representatives from the college sector as we do from the university sector. So there's balance there in regard to any bias one way or the another.

From my perspective, I know I wouldn't be where I am academically if it wasn't for the foundation or the grounding that I got in community college.

When I was going to college, it wasn't unusual to find university graduates within the seats at community college, because they had a four-year degree but they needed that two-year certificate or diploma program at college to get the job that they wanted to get.

So I think there's a real intersectionality between the two types of post-secondary education in Ontario.

MPP Stephanie Smyth: The last thing I want to ask you is, your work, obviously with the universities—Trent, York. What steps would you take to ensure that private, out-of-town and out-of-province applicants are held to the same standards as our public institutions?

Dr. Armand La Barge: We do that now. We apply the same rigour and the same dedication to reviewing any applications that they make for degree-granting privileges in Ontario.

I can tell you that when I attend convocations at different universities, I get asked about that very question, especially by deans. I think they feel there's so much competition within the post-secondary education sector, that the fact that colleges are now doing three- and four-year bachelor's degrees, and now applied master's degrees—that there's an increase in the number of out-of-province or private sector universities—

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

Dr. Armand La Barge: —now doing degrees as well. They look to me and ask, “Are we really ensuring that we're applying the same standards?”

All we're doing is making a recommendation. Ultimately, it's the minister's decision as to whether he or she—he, in this case—wants to actually approve the course that we are reviewing.

MPP Stephanie Smyth: Chief La Barge, it's great to see you today. Thank you for the work that you do. We appreciate it.

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): Thank you very much, Armand, for coming in and sharing your story and your heavy-duty résumé, I would say. And thank you for your years and years of service.

That concludes your presentation portion and questioning. You're welcome to stay, possibly online, if you want—we have quite a few people to interview today—or you can go about your busy day and find out the results later.

Dr. Armand La Barge: Thank you, Chair. I think I will leave. I have other appointments.

I just want to say thank you for giving me the opportunity to make this presentation and thank you for the incredibly insightful questions that you all have asked. I appreciate that.

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): Thank you kindly. We will see you again.

Dr. Armand La Barge: Merci and meegwetch.

MR. MATTHEW LÉTOURNEAU

Review of intended appointment, selected by official opposition party and third party: Matthew Létourneau, intended appointee as vice-chair, Licence Appeal Tribunal.

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): We will now move to review the next intended appointee. The next appointee will be presenting in French, for those of you who would like to get your earpieces out. It will be virtual as well.

Matthew Létourneau is nominated as the vice-chair of the Licence Appeal Tribunal.

Welcome, Matthew. We are happy that you are here and you're willing to serve. We are keen to hear your story and all your experience, and then the government will ask you questions, as will the official opposition and the third party. Everyone will have 10 minutes to ask you questions. Your time will be deducted from the government's time, but they don't mind, so feel free to take your time and share your story. Merci.

M. Matthew Létourneau: Bonjour. Merci beaucoup, madame la Présidente. Mesdames et messieurs, les membres du comité, je m'appelle Matthew Létourneau et je vous remercie de m'accorder ce grand privilège de comparer devant vous aujourd'hui. J'ai l'honneur d'être considéré pour une nomination en tant que vice-président à temps plein du Tribunal d'appel en matière de permis—le « LAT » en anglais; je vais dire le « TAMP » en français.

Je crois qu'en vertu de mon parcours professionnel, mes qualifications, j'espère pouvoir apporter une contribution positive en desservant le public dans ce rôle. Je prends très au sérieux chaque occasion qui m'a été accordée dans les dernières années pour livrer les services en tant que décideur de tribunal—ça, c'est mon rôle principal, si vous voulez—et cela de façon juste, impartiale et efficace. Je crois que j'ai l'expérience et les habiletés nécessaires pour être imputable dans ce rôle.

J'occupe actuellement le rôle de vice-président au Tribunal des droits de la personne de l'Ontario—ça, c'est à temps plein—depuis novembre 2024. Dans ce rôle, j'entends beaucoup d'audiences, je rédige beaucoup de décisions procédurales mais aussi substantives, je résous aussi des requêtes en médiation et j'aide aussi avec la gestion du tribunal, avec les autres gestionnaires.

Là, je compte faire une transition vers le Tribunal d'appel en matière de permis en tant que vice-président avec ces qualifications, mais je tiens à noter que c'est un tribunal pour lequel je travaille déjà en tant que membre. Membre, c'est juste un niveau, peut-être, en dessous de la vice-présidence, si vous voulez. J'ai commencé là en 2018. Je n'ai jamais été vice-président à ce Tribunal d'appel en matière de permis avant. Je travaille là depuis tellement longtemps et j'aimerais faire preuve de mon évolution comme décideur mais aussi de gestionnaire avec cette nomination.

Comme vous le savez sûrement, le TAMP, en termes des appels de permis octroyés selon nos lois provinciales en Ontario ainsi que des demandes d'indemnisation, par exemple, lorsqu'on a un accident de véhicule, la construction de nouvelle maison—j'ai travaillé avec le Service d'aide relative aux indemnités d'accident automobile, les « AABSs » en anglais, ainsi que les services généraux comme membre; plusieurs audiences en français, par exemple, pour des appels de permis, entre autres.

Également, au sein des tribunaux décisionnels—comme membre à temps partiel à quelques autres tribunaux—j'aide avec des dossiers, surtout en français, à la Commission d'étude des soins aux animaux, « ACRB »; la Commission de la sécurité-incendie, « Fire Safety Commission »; la Commission ontarienne des libérations conditionnelles, « l'OPB »; et ce, aussi depuis 2018 jusqu'à aujourd'hui. J'ai ces rôles-là aussi.

Et en tant que Franco-Ontarien d'adoption—je viens de l'Alberta, mais ici depuis 2008—je tiens à mentionner que j'aide le leadership avec les services en français. Par exemple, j'ai aidé avec le développement et l'implémentation de notre politique sur les services en français des Tribunaux décisionnels Ontario. La Loi sur les services en français est très importante en Ontario pour réglementer ces services, desservir le public, donner l'accès à la justice en français. Il y a un règlement aussi sur l'offre active, donc j'aide à expliquer à nos membres c'est quoi l'offre active, et je donne la formation. J'aide à planifier comment améliorer nos services en français, développer des ressources, s'assurer que toutes nos communications sont en français. Je donne des rapports au leadership des tribunaux, au ministère du Procureur général et le public concernant le développement de nos services en français.

Ça, c'est un peu mon expérience comme décideur depuis 2018, mais je suis aussi un avocat appelé au Barreau de l'Ontario depuis 2012. J'ai exercé le droit en français et en anglais dans un contexte de litige civil, droit de l'emploi et droit administratif, surtout à Ottawa et à Toronto aussi.

1020

Comme avocat, j'ai affiné des habilités d'interprétation juridique, rédaction juridique, procédure civile, évaluation de la preuve, les interactions avec des clients—parfois difficiles, parfois non—l'art du plaidoyer et la gestion de mon temps et de tous les documents que ça prend dans ce genre de travail.

Donc, je suis formé; j'ai un baccalauréat du Campus Saint-Jean de l'Université de l'Alberta et un diplôme de common law en français de l'Université d'Ottawa. Avec tout cela, je me suis persuadé que je peux contribuer à l'accès à la justice en Ontario—très important dans ce rôle, en français et en anglais—comme juriste, mais comme décideur de ces demandes, du nombre de demandes qu'on reçoit. Une expérience acquise en leadership au sein du tribunal, comme vice-président dernièrement, va m'assister aussi également. J'ai beaucoup de formation aussi—je ne l'ai pas mentionné—en tant que décideur, dernièrement, beaucoup d'expérience avec l'arbitrage actif. Vous pouvez lire mes décisions sur CanLII, mais il y a aussi toutes les

médiations, toutes les enquêtes et évaluations de la preuve derrière les scènes, aussi, dont j'ai fait preuve, je crois.

En vertu de tout ce qui précède—mon expérience, mes habilités, mon bilinguisme—je crois que je pourrais contribuer de façon positive à l'accès à la justice aux Ontariennes, aux Ontariens, en tant que décideur.

Donc, mes sincères remerciements aujourd'hui aux membres de ce comité de m'avoir accordé le droit de parole. Merci beaucoup.

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

We have three minutes and seven seconds for the government. MPP Dowie.

M. Andrew Dowie: Bonjour, monsieur Létourneau, et bienvenue au comité.

Alors, comme vous l'avez mentionné, vous avez siégé comme juge dans plusieurs tribunaux, dont le tribunal d'appel des permis, le Tribunal des droits de la personne de l'Ontario, la commission des libérations conditionnelles de l'Ontario, le conseil d'examen des soins aux animaux, et la Commission de la sécurité-incendie. Comment est-ce que ces expériences vous ont préparé à assumer le rôle de vice-président à temps plein au tribunal d'appel des permis?

M. Matthew Létourneau: Merci pour votre question, monsieur Dowie, et votre français est impeccable.

M. Andrew Dowie: Merci.

M. Matthew Létourneau: J'ai affiné mes habilités d'enquête de preuves—donc, mes habilités concrètes, d'une part, mais de leadership aussi, d'autre part. Évidemment, de travailler dans de divers contextes comme ceux-là, je développe beaucoup d'expérience dans le droit administratif, principalement. Quand on parle de droit administratif, c'est de connaître nos procédures internes, de connaître les lois habilitantes, les mandats de chaque tribunal et commission, mais aussi l'interaction avec une grande diversité de personnes, donc, D'ontariennes puis d'Ontariens.

Ça me permet d'évaluer, d'enquêter sur la preuve et de parler clairement, surtout avec des parties autoreprésentées avec le Tribunal d'appel en matière de permis. Oui, il y a des gens qui sont dans des accidents et plusieurs, souvent, ont des avocats, mais pas toujours. Parfois ils sont autoreprésentés, et ça prend beaucoup d'expérience, selon moi, de pouvoir bien gérer une audience difficile, complexe, légale, mais de la rendre plus accessible pour quelqu'un pour qui c'est peut-être la première fois qu'il est devant un tribunal—peut-être que le coeur est en train de battre—et de livrer ces services-là de façon accessible. Aussi, il y a des gens qui vont avoir des difficultés cognitives—

La Présidente (M^{me} Mary-Margaret McMahon): Une minute.

M. Matthew Létourneau: —et donc, d'évaluer la crédibilité dans ces contextes-là; la résolution informelle de conflits aussi; et d'établir une procédure dans de divers contextes.

Le leadership, là, ça c'est une évolution pour moi que j'ai commencé à accueillir avec le tribunal des droits de la personne. Donc, ça c'est pour moi important : de pouvoir

contribuer à un tribunal avec tout ce que j'ai appris de ce côté-là pour la gestion.

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

Ms. Laura Smith: Time?

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): It's 21 seconds.

M^{me} Laura Smith: Bienvenue et merci d'être venu. Thank you.

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): Over to the official opposition: MPP Bell.

Ms. Jessica Bell: Thank you, Mr. Létourneau, for coming in today. I am impressed by your experience and your qualifications.

I have some specific questions. My first question is about the Licence Appeal Tribunal. It hears matters involving licensing, compensation claims and accident benefits.

Many people before tribunals are self-represented. MPP Dowie touched upon this issue in his question.

My question to you is, what have you learned from your adjudication experience, about making hearings fair for more people who do not have lawyers? As part of your answer, it would be good if you could provide a little bit more clarity on how you would make the tribunal more accessible to people who do not have legal representation.

M. Matthew Létourneau: Merci pour la question. C'est une très bonne question. Je crois que mon expérience en tant que juriste—en fait, depuis 2012—c'est une évolution de rendre ça plus simple, plus accessible. Je dirais que je commence de plus en plus d'y arriver. Donc, il y a plusieurs choses qui peuvent être faites. Au fil du temps, on va raffiner nos procédures, donc nos interactions, nos outils. On veut peut-être vulgariser le langage. On a eu des formations à l'interne à ce sujet.

Il y a un grand effort, en ce moment, de rédiger aussi pour l'audience autoreprésentée, pour qu'ils puissent comprendre le pourquoi d'une décision, mais vraiment dans un sens accessible. Ça prend parfois des mots plus courts et plus simples; en français, ce n'est pas toujours possible. Donc, de vraiment expliquer ça—pas en utilisant des termes juridiques mais vraiment expliquant de façon claire et concise.

Lorsque je donne une ouverture pour une audience ou une médiation, j'essaie vraiment de me mettre dans les souliers de quelqu'un qui arrive devant nous. Vraiment, c'est le fruit d'une grande expérience dans différents contextes. Avec mon expérience de la commission des libérations conditionnelles—« parole board »—il y a aussi des gens qui vont arriver qui sont illettrés. Donc, il faut vraiment parler, expliquer, rédiger, tout de façon claire et concise, puis de développer ça avec la formation et des outils.

Ms. Jessica Bell: My next question is about the state of backlogs at the LAT. If there are a number of hearings that are waiting for their time to have access to justice—I can imagine that there are, because there are with a lot of tribunals—what would be some strategies that you would apply to reduce the backlogs that we are seeing at many tribunals?

M. Matthew Létourneau: Oui. Je peux juste parler peut-être de mon expérience avec le Tribunal d'appel en matière de permis depuis 2018. Je suis là depuis, bien, avant la pandémie et donc c'est toujours une évolution. Juste de prendre des audiences en personne—merci encore de me permettre d'être ici virtuellement—il y a eu beaucoup de changements.

Pour qu'on demeure rapide, il y a des changements de règlement qui ont eu lieu. On a regardé cela. On a porté bien attention à ce que sont les besoins dans ce nouveau monde. Donc, il y a eu des changements là. Il y a des changements proposés à d'autres tribunaux où je suis, le tribunal des droits de la personne. Sur le site Web, on peut voir des suggestions de changement de règlements.

On doit vraiment penser à nos procédures et aussi d'informer le public. Il y a les différentes parties, les « stakeholders », dans la communauté. Eux aussi ont un rôle à jouer, donc il y a des consultations continues avec eux. C'est vraiment le fruit, mais quand il y a des changements, peut-être parfois ce sont des petits changements qui ont un grand impact aussi. Donc, dans nos procédures, surtout, c'est là où on peut rendre ça plus rapide, mais il faut vraiment penser aux besoins du public dans ce travail.

1030

Ms. Jessica Bell: Our tribunal system in Ontario is one of the biggest in North America. In my view, there are a lot of benefits in having an accessible and affordable place for people to get justice. I hope that, if you are approved, in your role you will work diligently to address some of these issues around long wait times.

My next question is around fairness. What does fairness look like in a tribunal when one party may be legally sophisticated, have a lawyer representing them, and the other may be unrepresented, overwhelmed or unfamiliar with the process? How does the tribunal system deal with that inadequacy there?

M. Matthew Létourneau: Encore, merci pour la question. Oui, il arrive souvent qu'il y a un déséquilibre, peut-être quelqu'un autoreprésenté versus quelqu'un qui a un avocat. On fait beaucoup de travail pour rendre, encore une fois, les procédures justes. Je pense que le principal—c'est le « motto » aussi, le dicton, de la législature : « audi alteram partem ». Ça veut dire qu'il faut laisser entendre l'autre partie parler. Donc, en tout moment, il faut pouvoir entendre les personnes, comme j'ai dit avant, là où elles sont. Il faut vraiment être patient, écouter, accepter d'entendre des soumissions. Si la personne a la difficulté à l'écrit, il faut pouvoir la donner la chance à l'oral. Il faut prendre le temps d'entendre les deux parties à chaque moment.

Moi, je rappelle les parties souvent que tout ce qu'elles ont à dire, c'est important. Ça va m'aider à prendre une décision. Avec le temps puis l'expérience, j'ai pu découvrir que le décideur peut rendre une décision, je crois, juste avec les matériaux de quelqu'un autoreprésenté si on nous arrête puis on applique les mêmes règles aux deux parties de façon juste, équilibrée. On prend le temps et on rend une décision

qui explique globalement comment on a rendu une décision.

Ça peut prendre de l'expérience pour bien naviguer là, mais je crois qu'on fait beaucoup de formation aussi à l'intention d'aider avec cela. Mais c'est un grand sujet et j'espère pouvoir, comme vous avez dit, aider avec cela dans ce rôle.

Ms. Jessica Bell: What do you see as the biggest challenge currently facing the Licence Appeal Tribunal—delay, accessibility, complexity, or something else—and what would you do in this role to address it?

M. Matthew Létourneau: Les priorités sont identifiées à l'interne. Ce n'est pas nécessairement moi le porte-parole du tribunal lorsque ça vient à haute priorité.

J'ai pu travailler dans un rôle de leadership avec les services en français. Lorsqu'on identifie des priorités, on développe des équipes qui vont s'y attaquer avec envergure. Je peux vous dire qu'il y a beaucoup d'effort pour adresser les priorités. J'hésite un peu d'identifier—d'où je suis en ce moment, sans être un membre-là avec la vice-présidence—ces priorités, mais je suis sensible à ce que, oui, il y a des difficultés un peu partout, puis il faut être vigilant. Ça prend beaucoup d'effort et c'est un travail d'équipe.

Ms. Jessica Bell: How long have I got?

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): One minute, 11 seconds.

Ms. Jessica Bell: This is my final question. Thank you.

You're listed as the French member lead for Tribunals Ontario. What are the most significant barriers facing francophone Ontarians before tribunals, and what have you done to improve French-language access?

M. Matthew Létourneau: Merci pour la question. C'est un travail qui continue depuis longtemps. Je crois d'abord que ça doit être très clair pour le public qu'on offre des services en français. Il faut offrir cela activement, sans que quelqu'un doit demander « Est-ce que je peux avoir des services en français? »

Je donne la formation obligatoire à tous les membres qui arrivent au tribunal pour leur expliquer l'offre active. D'abord, il faut pouvoir dire, avant que ça commence : « Ça a l'air que vous avez dit un mot en français. Ça a l'air que vous avez une lettre en français dans vos documents. On veut vous offrir des services. Ce n'est pas pour nous; c'est pour vous. »

C'est pour le public, donc on a développé notre politique et tous nos outils autour de ce concept-là. Donc, même si c'est peut-être bilingue à l'approche parfois, on va l'offrir, le service. On va s'assurer, dans chaque cas—

La Présidente (M^{me} Mary-Margaret McMahon): Merci beaucoup. C'est tout. Je m'excuse.

Over to the official opposition—

Interjection.

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): Third party: MPP Smyth. I keep promoting people. Sorry.

MPP Stephanie Smyth: Thank you, Chair. I'll take it any time I can.

I also want to thank Mr. Létourneau for your time and for the work that you're doing, and also for your

commitment to French-language access in tribunals and the publication of information in French. That's vitally important, so thank you for that.

When I saw your name come through for the Licence Appeal Tribunal vice-chair, full-time—of course we take a look at the applicants, the intended appointees and their experience. I have to say that your current roster is something else and impressive. It spans, as we know, human rights tribunal, Animal Care Review Board, Fire Safety Commission, Ontario Parole Board, and now a potential leadership role at the Licence Appeal Tribunal.

What is your response—and I have to admit this crossed my mind immediately—to the criticism that loading up an individual with five vastly different tribunal seats creates this insular circle of professional adjudications, rather than allowing specialists and experts to individual panels?

M. Matthew Létourneau: Merci pour la question, membre Smyth. Oui, la réponse est un peu en parties parce que nos audiences en français sont beaucoup moindres que celles en anglais. On peut voir sur notre site Web—on calcule le montant de dossiers. Mais aussi, peut-être parce qu'il y a moins de dossiers en français, il y a moins de ressources humaines en français aussi.

On fait de notre mieux, mais je pense qu'une partie de la réponse c'est que j'ai pu assister là. Par exemple, les soins aux animaux, il y a eu un dossier—je pense—bilingue depuis les dernières années, et donc je peux aider avec ce dossier-là. C'est un dossier parmi tous les autres.

Donc, oui, a priori, ça a l'air que je suis un peu partout. Il y a beaucoup de titres, ainsi de suite, mais je peux naviguer les divers rôles parce qu'il y a moins. Mais l'impact est grand. L'impact est grand.

Dans le Tribunal d'appel en matière de permis, il y des dossiers, par exemple, dans les lois sur les soins et la garde des enfants, donc des garderies francophones. Au Tribunal des droits de la personne, peut-être qu'il y a des conseils scolaires francophones. Et donc, il y a des genres de dossiers qui peuvent être très limités dans la portée, mais qui ont un grand impact, encore une fois.

Donc, j'ai pu naviguer un peu en vraiment mettant l'emphasis sur des dossiers comme ceux-là, mais il y a aussi le côté—vraiment, mon temps—de connaître la procédure du côté d'un juriste, d'avocat en droit procédural administratif. Lorsque je commende une audience de ce côté-là, par exemple la loi sur les compétences légales, je connais comment évaluer la crédibilité, la preuve et interpréter des lois.

Je crois que mes évaluations de performance démontrent que j'ai affiné des habiletés dans ce domaine. Ça m'aide de me lancer dans d'autres secteurs aussi et puis d'avoir un impact et d'assister là où ce que peut-être d'autres ne peuvent pas.

MPP Stephanie Smyth: Thank you for that answer. That's very helpful in understanding the process and where we are right now with you.

As mentioned, you're already a member of the Licence Appeal Tribunal, and you're applying for this position that has more decision-making power, as a vice-chair. Are there any specific decisions or approaches to dispute

resolution you'd like to implement that are different from how the tribunal currently operates?

1040

M. Matthew Létourneau: Bien, déjà le tribunal—merci encore pour cette question. Je suis très en faveur des résolutions informelles, des autres mesures de rechange, de résolution informelle de conflit.

J'ai un taux de médiation assez élevé, apparemment, selon l'évaluation de performance dernièrement.

Donc, au tribunal des droits de la personne, on fait la médiation-arbitrage. Ça, c'est intéressant. Ce n'est pas toujours utilisé au Tribunal d'appel en matière de permis, mais avec mon temps au Tribunal d'appel en matière de permis, j'ai fait beaucoup, beaucoup de médiation. Ça fonctionne. C'est un autre rôle de décideur qu'il faut développer. Donc, je crois déjà qu'avec mon temps, mon expérience là, que ça va très bon train avec l'approche qui est en place. Mais je peux dire aussi que j'ai apprécié apprendre comment bien faire la médiation-arbitrage au tribunal des droits de la personne.

MPP Stephanie Smyth: We talked a little bit earlier about the backlog at the tribunal. The Automobile Accident Benefits Service, which is part of the Licence Appeal Tribunal, saw a 20% increase in cases last year. Do you think you're prepared to handle that increasing load that seems to be plaguing a lot of the tribunals in this province?

M. Matthew Létourneau: Oui, ce n'est jamais facile de rencontrer une augmentation de ces chiffres-là.

Je suis fier du travail que tous les tribunaux ont pu faire pour augmenter—en français, en anglais aussi—on a fait beaucoup de travail pour s'assurer qu'on tient la route. Les taux, quand ils montent en anglais, ça monte en français aussi.

Donc, c'est un challenge; c'est un défi. J'espère que je suis à la hauteur. J'ai travaillé vraiment fort pour développer les astuces pour pouvoir tenir le bout.

Je sais aussi qu'il y a des changements, qu'il y a une évolution aussi, là, avec les règlements. Tout ce que je peux dire, c'est que c'est un défi continu et puis le plus que j'en fais, le meilleur que je suis. Mais voilà, je pense que ça demeure un challenge. Mais pour les grands changements réglementaires, ce n'est pas de notre rôle. Ça, je suis clair. Donc, on va juste implémenter ce qui est la loi, les règlements, et faire ça du mieux qu'on peut.

MPP Stephanie Smyth: I see, according to stats—16,000 appeals; only 110 received decisions. Do you feel that a large proportion of settled or withdrawn cases is a sign that maybe the tribunal doesn't have enough capacity?

M. Matthew Létourneau: Bien, encore une fois, j'hésite, là. Je ne sais pas si je suis en mesure de bien me prononcer pour vous aider avec cette question-là. Je n'ai pas les chiffres à l'interne devant moi. Comme j'ai dit, dans le site Web, les indicateurs de performance—on est en train d'évaluer tout cela.

Selon mon expérience, je veux dire, il y a beaucoup de dossiers qu'on peut résoudre avec la médiation, on l'a mentionné, et beaucoup de dossiers qui sont retirés aussi. Parfois, la journée même d'une audience, c'est retiré—

paf. Moi, j'arrive là, et c'est retiré, donc il n'y a pas de décision dans ces cas. Des règlements, c'est encouragé.

Donc la grande majorité, de ce que je comprends, c'est en médiation parce que ce n'est pas tout le monde qui va pousser le dossier jusqu'à la fin, pour de multiples raisons. C'est une procédure aussi; il faut suivre la procédure. Ça peut changer en cours de route. Mais le fait d'être là depuis le début, aussi, je crois que c'est là où il faut qu'on apporte vraiment l'accessibilité à la justice, d'avoir l'occasion de préserver le droit d'aller plus loin dès le départ avec la demande. C'est dans notre système; là on peut la traiter au fil du temps.

Donc, oui, on traite de beaucoup, beaucoup de dossiers de multiples façons, mais les décisions ne sont qu'un résultat pour ces dossiers-là.

La Présidente (M^{me} Mary-Margaret McMahon): Une minute.

MPP Stephanie Smyth: When my colleague asked you about backlogs as well, you said small changes were happening with big impact. Was there an example of that? Is that what you're talking about—the mediation or settling offside?

M. Matthew Létourneau: Oui, mais ils ont fait des changements dans les règles, par exemple. Donc, les changements des règles et puis, peut-être, simplifier la procédure—on a fait des simplifications au fil des années. Au lieu d'avoir trois ou quatre conférences de suite, on va avoir une conférence, une médiation, puis aller plus rapidement des décisions à l'écrit, ainsi de suite. Donc, ces changements-là, oui, ça peut changer la direction au final.

MPP Stephanie Smyth: Merci. Thank you so much for your time today. I appreciate it.

M. Matthew Létourneau: Merci beaucoup.

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): Merci beaucoup, Matthew, for coming in today and for sharing your story and challenging some of our linguistic skills. We appreciate your time and your willingness to serve. You're welcome to stay on the line—we have another person to interview, and then we will do the concurrence—or you could go about your day, and you will find out the results later.

M. Matthew Létourneau: Merci, madame la Présidente. Merci, tout le monde.

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

DR. MARY-AGNES WILSON

Review of intended appointment, selected by third party: Mary-Agnes Wilson, intended appointee as member, Ontario Health board of directors.

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): We will now move to review the next intended appointee, who is here in person. Mary-Agnes Wilson is nominated as member of the Ontario Health board of directors.

Come on up to this friendly square table, Mary-Agnes. Welcome to our committee. We're happy you're here, in person especially. You can share your story, your experiences and your reasons for wanting to be on this board of

directors, and then we will all take turns questioning you—not me, as the Chair. The time that you speak will be deducted from the government’s 10 minutes—they’re fine with that, so don’t worry—and then the official opposition and the third party will have 10 minutes. The floor is yours.

Dr. Mary-Agnes Wilson: Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today.

As you heard, my name is Mary-Agnes Wilson. I’m honoured to be considered for appointment to the board of directors of Ontario Health. I come to this opportunity with a background in clinical practice—I am a nurse—and health system leadership and governance.

Over the course of my career, I’ve worked in both academic and community organizations, including most recently as the interim president and chief executive officer at Mackenzie Health. For those of you who are not familiar with Mackenzie Health, it is a large, multi-site regional health system that is serving the most rapidly growing population in the province. In that role, I helped to provide stability during an important organizational transition. I supported the continuity of operations. I worked with colleagues and partners to advance clinical and academic partnerships, expand services and ensure financial sustainability. Prior to that, I served as the executive vice-president, chief operating officer and chief nurse executive, and I was responsible for leading an extensive clinical portfolio across multiple sites, and I worked with multiple stakeholders.

My clinical background has shaped how I approach quality, safety, professional practice, and the importance of evidence-based, patient-centred care. Much of my work has focused on supporting reliable systems of care and improving outcomes with teams across organizations. This has included working on higher reliability practices, quality improvement, and service expansion in areas such as critical care and mental health, stroke rehabilitation, transitional care, long-term care, community care, primary care and hospital-at-home services.

I also had the opportunity to support system partners through leading the hospital’s COVID-19 response and recovery efforts and, with the opening of Cortellucci Vaughan Hospital, the first net new hospital in the province in the last 30 years.

I also have governance experience across health system and academic settings.

As a senior health care executive and chief nurse, I’ve been an ex officio member of many hospital boards and hospital foundations.

I currently serve as a Lieutenant Governor in Council appointee at the University of Toronto’s governing council, and I serve on many of its governing committees.

1050

At York University, I have served in governance and advisory roles specifically related to York’s new medical school.

These experiences helped shape my understanding of fiduciary responsibility, institutional strategy, risk oversight, and constructive board deliberation.

My academic and professional background also informs the perspective that I would bring to this role. I

hold a PhD from McMaster University. I have graduate and undergraduate nursing degrees from the University of Toronto. I’ve completed the Rotman-ICD Governance Essentials Program and advanced health care leadership program. I’ve served in faculty roles at McMaster University and the University of Toronto. I’m also a member of the College of Nurses of Ontario and the Canadian Nurses Association.

If appointed to the board of Ontario Health, I would hope to contribute a clinically informed perspective, practical operational experience, and a thoughtful approach to governance. I understand the importance of accountability, stewardship of public resources, and system integration in improving outcomes for patients and communities. I would be committed to supporting Ontario Health’s mandate to strengthen quality, advance digital and data capabilities, improve system performance, and promote equitable access to care across the province. And I would aim to contribute constructively, ask thoughtful questions, and support decisions that serve patients, families and communities across Ontario.

Thank you for considering my candidacy. I look forward to your questions.

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

We will go over to the government side, starting with—first of all, I want to tell you that you have five minutes and 42 seconds—MPP Smith.

Ms. Laura Smith: Thank you so much, Ms. Wilson, for coming here today. You share quite a bit of extensive experience. I live in York region. I appreciate what you do.

You talked about supporting care, multiple stakeholders and working within a team, and your credentials. How do you transfer all of this to a board position, given your professional background? Maybe you could give us some more information about that.

Dr. Mary-Agnes Wilson: Thank you for the question.

Certainly, as a board member, my role is not an operational role; that is the role of the leadership of Ontario Health, and I’m very much aware of that. As a member of the board, however, I do bring my perspective and background and deep understanding of the health care system, which allows me to ask good questions, to look for mechanisms where performance is being measured and reported on, and to ensure that the mandate of the government, as it is operationalized through Ontario Health, is executed.

My role as a governor is to focus on oversight. I have my fiduciary obligations, obviously: duty of care, duty of loyalty, and duty of obedience to legislation. But certainly, my experience in working with teams and large organizations, having oversight for strategy, direction and compliance, would translate well into this board position, and certainly the financial oversight, being able to manage large budgets and large initiatives, being able to ask good questions. I have had deep experience in terms of risk management in organizations, and then the oversight of the CEO performance. Those are the main roles of board

members, and I feel that my experience would lend itself well to being able to fulfill those roles.

There needs to be a good balance of skills on a board, and currently the membership on the board of Ontario Health has a good blend of clinical and non-clinical members. But I think that in addition to my expertise in the health care system, I do bring the lens of being a nurse and being the only nurse of the members. Nursing does represent the largest workforce in the health care sector, and I certainly believe that that provides me with a unique perspective and insight into the challenges that we're facing.

Ms. Laura Smith: That's an important thing to bring up. You are a nurse. Absolutely.

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

MPP Mohamed Firin: Thank you, Ms. Wilson, for putting your name forward.

Can you share an example of a situation, during your previous roles in serving various patient populations, that would translate as valuable experience for governance of the board?

Dr. Mary-Agnes Wilson: Thank you for the question.

I will speak mostly to my most recent experience at Mackenzie Health. As I said earlier, it's a rapidly growing patient population. Opening a net new hospital in a community that didn't have a hospital certainly exceeded the expectations that anybody had for us. We achieved full capacity a year and a half after full opening, and so the demand for service continued to improve and increase. Last year, the organization saw about 250,000 emergency department visits.

So that ability to work and develop integrated systems to address the needs of the community became essential to the organization's ability to deliver on its mandate, as well as meet the needs of the community.

Having that experience of having to work across multiple partners and sectors provides me a perspective and a deep experience as a board member to be able to ask good questions, and to be able to understand how Ontario Health is enacting its mandate, how it's measuring performance, what those outcomes are, and what the plans will be for the future.

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

MPP Denault.

MPP Billy Denault: Thank you, Ms. Wilson, for being here today. I appreciate you sharing your background and experience.

You noted some of your work as a former nurse as well, and it's good to see. My sister is a nurse, so I know how hard that work is and how that sort of adds to your experience as well—in addition to you being a former hospital executive. So, I guess, just in the little time we have, if you have additional things to add from that experience—and how it will mean to your participation on the board.

Dr. Mary-Agnes Wilson: Thank you for the question.

Nursing, again, I said, is the largest workforce in the health care system. For the most part, nurses are providing

24/7 care in the organizations that they work, and serving patients and families, so that ability to think—

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): Thank you very much. Sorry. We do value nurses.

But I have to go over to MPP Gates in the official opposition. Ten minutes.

MPP Wayne Gates: I ask these same questions all the time.

Do you belong to a political party?

Dr. Mary-Agnes Wilson: I'm not currently a member of any political party.

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

Dr. Mary-Agnes Wilson: I have donated to all three political parties throughout the course of my lifetime.

MPP Wayne Gates: Have you worked on a campaign?

Dr. Mary-Agnes Wilson: I have not worked on a campaign.

MPP Wayne Gates: I noticed during your presentation, you made it clear that you were a nurse.

There is a severe shortage of nurses. They're overworked. In my humble opinion, depending on whether they're in long-term care, whatever—you mentioned that—some are grossly underpaid.

My question to you: Why do you think nurses are leaving the profession, when I know the nurses I talk to love their jobs?

Dr. Mary-Agnes Wilson: Thank you for the question.

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

Ms. Laura Smith: I think we need to stick to the questions on the accreditation and the abilities of the applicant, please.

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

Can we make it relevant to the board or the intended appointee's qualifications?

MPP Wayne Gates: I'm going to question that, because the reality is—she mentioned in her presentation that she's a nurse. What I'm saying is, with her qualifications and being a member of Ontario Health—nursing is very, very important.

You mentioned that you're the only nurse on the board, so they need a voice.

I think that question that I asked is relevant. We have to stop nurses leaving—and making them feel respected and appreciated on the job. So I'm just asking, why do you think they're leaving?

Dr. Mary-Agnes Wilson: Thank you for the question.

There are many reasons why nurses leave their profession, why anyone leaves their profession.

I think the most recent published statistics by the College of Nurses have actually shown that there has been an increase in nursing registrations rather than a decrease. There have been significant efforts to recruit and retain nurses.

1100

My entire PhD thesis was based on creating contexts where nurses feel supported and work effectively. I will say that in my background working at Mount Sinai Hospital as chief nurse there, I was the first chief nurse in

Ontario to receive Magnet accreditation, which is an award of distinction for the quality of nursing care in the environments that nurses work in. So I'm very comfortable and familiar with factors that contribute to good work-life balance or to good work contexts.

I think in my role as a governor of Ontario Health, I bring those perspectives. But my role is, as I said, to provide strategy oversight, fiduciary oversight and oversight of the performance of the CEO.

MPP Wayne Gates: Across Ontario, especially in my area of Niagara, people are waiting for months to get diagnostics like MRIs, TCSs, EEGs. Considering many places are way above the province's 28-day mandate—which is mandated by the province—are Ontario Health and the government of Ontario doing enough to bring these wait times down?

Dr. Mary-Agnes Wilson: In my role as a director, my role would be to ensure that Ontario Health is performance-managing the system. There are many initiatives currently under way to reduce wait times specifically for diagnostic tests and procedures. More recently, there has been an expansion of services and a creation of central intake and wait time processes to ensure that people who need access to care get it when they need it.

Again, my role as a governor would be to ensure that Ontario Health is monitoring the performance of the health care system, intervening where they need to intervene, but ensuring that they have a plan, that they're executing on the plan, and that the performance is improving over time.

We certainly measure a lot in health care, and I know this very well from being on the side of having to report on those measures.

Working on the board of directors would continue to support the accountability mechanism that's currently in place in Ontario Health to deliver on the services that are required.

MPP Wayne Gates: Again, being a nurse and knowing what's going on every day in our hospitals, how important do you feel that urgent care centres are to alleviate the incredible stress that's on our emergency rooms?

Dr. Mary-Agnes Wilson: Thank you for the question. It's, I suppose, a personal opinion question rather than a question that speaks to my role as a governor on the board of Ontario Health.

Urgent care centres play a role in the system. Every provider plays a role in the system. Pharmacies play a role in the system. Everything that is being done to improve access, supports, access to care for patients—we know the demand is greater than what we're able to provide, because we have an aging and growing population. So our challenge and the challenge ahead of us is to continue to improve the system, to develop structures, to develop policies that will allow us to meet the needs and the demands of the system.

As a member of the board of directors, I would be committed to, again, ensuring that there is significant performance monitoring and reporting on the outcomes.

MPP Wayne Gates: I liked your answer.

A follow-up to that: Do you believe that closing and cutting hours at urgent care centres is in the best interest of the residents of Ontario when it comes to quality of care?

Dr. Mary-Agnes Wilson: I think that Ontario Health sets the context in which services are delivered. Urgent care centres, for the most part, don't fall, necessarily, under those auspices. But again, they do contribute significantly to the system.

MPP Wayne Gates: Time?

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): Two minutes, 22 seconds.

Dr. Mary-Agnes Wilson: Any reduction of services needs to be considered. Why are those services being reduced? What are the local decisions that are going into that? I will say that the health care system needs to allow local flexibility for decisions to be made in those contexts. So my personal opinion as to whether it's a good thing or a bad thing is really, I don't think, relevant for my role as a governor.

My role as a governor is to ensure that we are complying with the legislation as set out, that we are meeting the mandate of Ontario Health, and that Ontario Health continues to monitor its performance.

MPP Wayne Gates: Well, in my opinion—I'm certainly not a nurse or involved in it—urgent care centres across Ontario, particularly in rural Ontario, play an important role in the overall health of our health care system.

How should Ontario Health tackle illegal fees charged at private clinics that the Ford government is expanding?

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

Ms. Laura Smith: The questions should be pertinent to her accreditation and her skill set.

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): MPP Gates, if you can make them relevant to this appointment to the Ontario Health board of directors, please.

MPP Wayne Gates: Again, I'll say I believe it is.

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): And it's the one-minute warning.

MPP Wayne Gates: I think it is Ontario Health's responsibility to stop the illegal fees that are being charged by private clinics and particularly hurting our seniors who can't afford to pay—but they have to get health care.

Do you think the level of spending on agency nursing is a threat to our public health care system? Has the government done enough to ensure that we have enough full-time staff—

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): MPP Smith, on a point of order again.

MPP Wayne Gates: I'm not finished yet.

Ms. Laura Smith: It's okay. Finish.

MPP Wayne Gates: Has the government done enough to ensure we have enough full-time staff to reduce our reliance on agencies?

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): MPP Smith, eight seconds left.

Ms. Laura Smith: Once again, the questions need to be part of the scope of her application.

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): Right—and that is time. Thank you very much.

Over to the third party: MPP Smyth, you have the floor.

MPP Stephanie Smyth: Thank you, Ms. Wilson, for being here today.

I might have heard a glimmer of hope in something you said when my colleague asked you about nurses and nursing shortages. If I heard you correctly, you said there has been an increase in nursing registrations and significant efforts to recruit and retain nurses. Did I hear that correctly? That's great news.

We know that the workforce has faced some very serious challenges when it comes to nurses, and we've had to rely on private nurses to fill those gaps, which has been a very costly solution to this problem.

Given your background as a chief nurse executive, what specific role do you think the Ontario Health board should play in stabilizing permanent, public sector, front-line nurses, nursing, right across the province?

Dr. Mary-Agnes Wilson: Thank you for the question.

The role of Ontario Health, again, is to execute on the plans and mandates of the government. Certainly, there's active, ongoing work within Ontario Health that is supporting workforce wellness and workforce engagement.

There are a variety of initiatives that have been enacted by the government that don't necessarily come under the auspices of Ontario Health, related to supporting, again, the retention and recruiting of nurses—specifically, you're asking about nurses. When I think about things like having a new graduate nurse initiative, having nurse externs, having support for organizations to recruit nurses, whether it's into hospitals or long-term care, those have all been quite successful. I will say my experience in hiring about 2,000 nurses at Mackenzie Health to open a brand new hospital over the course of a very short period of time was challenging, to say the least. But all of those initiatives that were stood up by the government were essential to our success, and I am happy to say that the hospital has been open for five years and it's a great success. So it can be done.

1110

I think all of these challenges that we're talking about today—and I have to say I feel like I'm being put in the place of defending the health care system. The population is aging. The workforce is shrinking. All of this costs more money than we have. These are things that concern me as a citizen.

My professional background has always been a desire to help, to make things better for patients and families, first as a nurse and then as an administrator. I believe that my ability to be appointed, if I'm successful in being appointed to the board of directors, will continue to allow me to do that and to use my knowledge and skills of the system and governments to support those efforts and achieve a good outcome.

MPP Stephanie Smyth: So that's your motivation for wanting to be on the board, right?

When we look at the board, we know it is responsible for measuring and reporting on health system performance. Are

there any metrics that you can see, with your experience, that you think need to be examined more rigorously?

Dr. Mary-Agnes Wilson: That's a great question.

I think maybe not more rigorously, but certainly, post-COVID-19, and with the recovery of the health care system, patient satisfaction and patient experience—the quality of the health care system, and by quality, I mean specifically safety. We do measure access, and we measure all of these things, so it's not that we don't measure them. But it's easy to become distracted.

So one of the things that I think I would bring to the board is that continued focus on being able to ensure that our systems are safe, high-quality, and we continue to provide the best possible care for patients and families.

MPP Stephanie Smyth: Ontario Health atHome was created by amalgamating the 14 local service providers two years ago. Do you have any concern about the implementation of this change, and how might you help oversee that?

Dr. Mary-Agnes Wilson: Thank you for the question.

I don't have any concerns.

One of the things that I have personal experience in is setting up a hospital-at-home program. We did that for a variety of different reasons. That is an adjunct to the Ontario Health atHome services that are delivered in the region.

Again, all services are important, and so I don't have any particular concerns around the integration. I think it's continuing to encourage that system integration, encourage the delivery of care, and working effectively together in partnerships that becomes extremely important.

MPP Stephanie Smyth: We're seeing that Ontario Health's recent spring and summer operational directions stress the urgent priority of reducing the alternate-level-of-care clinical bottleneck.

Drawing on your vast experience of managing day-to-day operations at Mackenzie Health, what structural changes might you see or think that Ontario Health should push forward to transition the ALC patients out of acute-care beds, to free up capacity?

Dr. Mary-Agnes Wilson: That work has been ongoing, and has been, quite frankly, ongoing for the last 15 years. It's not a new phenomenon. There are legislative frameworks that are in place that support the transition of patients out of hospitals and into other alternative settings. I think there are many efforts under way, both keeping patients out of hospital when they don't need to be in hospital and helping them leave hospital when they no longer need acute-care services, whether it be into community or to other levels of care. All of these things are challenges that we need to not only evaluate and push forward, but actually look at as a system, as a whole.

Again, my role in system integration and having wide experience on working in a variety of acute community and at-home programs, I think, brings that unique perspective of seeing how patients flow through the system, and continuing to support the strategy and direction of Ontario care to achieve those outcomes.

MPP Stephanie Smyth: Ontario Health also has expanded its operational scope to bring community care

directly under the umbrella, through Ontario Health atHome, and there's unprecedented patient volume there, it seems, as everywhere else, and some really severe service demands with that. So how do you intend to balance the realistic financial constraints—as you said, more pressure, less money, not nearly enough money—but the financial constraints of—

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

Ms. Laura Smith: If we could keep the topics within the scope of this board and her accreditation, her abilities, her résumé, please.

MPP Stephanie Smyth: I'm not sure, but okay, we can—

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): Make a stronger connection.

Ms. Laura Smith: This specific board.

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

MPP Stephanie Smyth: Let's talk about public versus private service. Is that considered by this board—impacts? Have you found a difference in either the quality of access or quality of service between publicly and privately provided care?

Dr. Mary-Agnes Wilson: In terms of this board, it's access to care. I believe, for some of the private providers of public services, they will be held accountable to the same—

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

Dr. Mary-Agnes Wilson: They will be accountable to the same metrics as the publicly delivered services, the public providers of public services. I think fundamentally it is the public funding that is at issue here, and if the service is being delivered using public funds, they should all be measured and be evaluated by the same—and as a member of the board of directors. I would have, certainly, strong interest in ensuring that that is the case.

MPP Stephanie Smyth: What would you like your legacy to be on this board?

Dr. Mary-Agnes Wilson: I think, for me, my legacy would be to see greater system integration.

If there is one lesson that I think COVID-19 taught us, as a health care system, it was that the need for integration was greater than ever before. Mackenzie Health was a hot spot. We opened Cortellucci Vaughan as the pandemic response hospital when—prior to opening the hospital and looking at, when I was at Richmond Hill—

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): Thank you very much. Sorry. We're under strict timelines. I don't mean to always interrupt you.

Thank you for your willingness to serve and coming in and sharing your story today and taking the time to do so in person. We always appreciate that.

We are going to consider concurrences. You're welcome to sit in the audience and observe, if you like, and if not, you can go about your day and you'll be notified later.

Thank you very much for coming, Mary-Agnes.

Dr. Mary-Agnes Wilson: Thank you.

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): Before we have a little recess, before the next intended appointee at 11:30, we will consider the concurrence of the four intended appointees, as I mentioned.

First is the intended appointment of Hugh Mai. Can I have—

Interjection.

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

MPP Wayne Gates: I've got a question, because I'm not really sure—in good faith, the committee has agreed that we would meet with two people in every one of these time slots, and I was surprised, when I got my documentation, that there are only five. One of the reasons why we decided to try to bring it all together—instead of coming here three times in July, we're coming once. And I think it's fair and reasonable to make sure that if we're all giving up our time to come here to make sure this committee is doing their job—and here we end up with one less person. So I'm asking the Chair, can you explain how that happened? That would really help. And how many people did we ask to fill the six places? How many people did we call, how many people did we email—whatever that process is. Because I think it shows a lot of disrespect to how we do our job here, by not being able to fill six spots, if people are just saying, "I'm not coming." It makes no sense to me.

1120

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): Every intended appointee who was requested by the subcommittee in the report was reached out to, and it was a matter of who was available. Everyone who was available came in today.

MPP Wayne Gates: I appreciate that.

How many people did we communicate with to try to fill six spots?

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): We'll get you that number.

Interjection.

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): It's 17.

MPP Wayne Gates: So we had 17 people to fill six spots, and they just said, no, they're not coming, and therefore their time limit on the 30 days may expire and they're automatically appointed.

My concern is that maybe that would be the next step that is going on here—that people just say, "No, I'm not available." We have Zoom—although I don't like Zooms; I think everybody should come to this committee. There are many, many ways that they can come to committee.

I think we should be very careful on making this committee exactly what it was, while we don't meet for six months. People just say no, they get appointed automatically, and we don't get a chance to talk to them. I really think having five people here and 17—not 17; I guess that's 12—people saying no is a problem for this committee, and I think it has to be addressed.

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): Further discussion? MPP Smyth.

MPP Stephanie Smyth: Clearly, there isn't any directive that appointees must appear before this committee before they are—if possible, in that 30-day window, which is problematic in and of itself. But should they not be compelled to appear before the committee when asked, as part of being an intended appointee? And “not available” shouldn't be an answer. We can talk to people up in space; there's no reason why they can't come back down to earth and talk to us for 10 minutes.

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): The intended appointees are invited. We cannot compel them to attend. But what we can do is—the deadline for extension could be extended.

MPP Stephanie Smyth: Which it wouldn't be, right? We know that the deadlines are never extended, so I guess—

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): That's the only tool we have.

MPP Stephanie Smyth: Madam Chair, the question would be, how can we effect change to make it compulsory for intended appointees to appear before the committee?

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): Currently, the only way is to extend the extension deadline.

MPP Stephanie Smyth: How can we change that?

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): A standing order change.

MPP Stephanie Smyth: Okay.

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): We cannot compel. We can hope that people would want to join our committee in good faith and come here. As we've shown, I think we're fairly friendly.

MPP Gates.

MPP Wayne Gates: Well, I'm going to say that if they want to and they're eager to get on the committee, the best way to say, “I'm not coming to the committee”—we know we're not getting an extension of 30 days. It has been voted down ever since I've been on committee. Whatever the government is on that side, they don't extend it.

So we need to put some safeguards in place that—yes, they should come. And one way, I think, to do that is to embarrass people who are being appointed—that they didn't even come to the committee—and name them. Put it out there that they're refusing to come to the committee, yet they're still getting appointed to a committee—even though, as we saw today, there are, quite frankly, some really good candidates, and there are some that I can't support. But as we saw, as we question them, we learn about them. We see that there are some really good ones. They should be coming to this committee. It shouldn't be just that I say no and then, that way, I get on—“I'm going to say no. I'm going to get on.” That really is totally disrespectful to what our job is, and it's totally disrespectful to everybody on that side and everybody on this side. You guys are giving up your time. They can give up their time, through Zoom or whatever.

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): Your other option is—

MPP Wayne Gates: I understand the standing committee; I understand the orders and stuff—

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): I was going to say something else.

MPP Wayne Gates: —but I think we should be embarrassing those people who are saying no.

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): Would you like to hear? I'm going to say something else.

Another option is the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs makes changes to the standing orders—

The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Vanessa Kattar): Recommendations.

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): Committee recommendations.

Are we ready for concurrence? MPP Bell.

Ms. Jessica Bell: Can you just describe this process to me? I've never sat on this committee before. I'm certainly learning a lot today. Is there time to have debate, and then we go to a vote? Is that it?

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

Ms. Jessica Bell: Okay.

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): The first is the intended appointment of Hugh Mai. Can I have a motion, please? MPP Smith.

Ms. Laura Smith: I move concurrence in the intended appointment of Hugh Mai, nominated as member of the Council of the College of Dental Technologists of Ontario.

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

MPP Wayne Gates: Recorded vote, please.

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

Interjection.

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): Oh, MPP Bell, is that discussion?

Ms. Jessica Bell: Yes.

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

Ms. Jessica Bell: Overall, I was very impressed by the speakers who came in today and their applications to be heads of tribunals. However, I have some concerns about this applicant, Hugh Mai, because he does not have a background in dental technology, and I got the overall impression that he was not entirely prepared for the job or fully aware of what the job would entail.

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

Mr. Sheref Sabawy: I think that some of those committees have, specifically, members who are not exactly from the profession, but considered from the public, to have a public opinion in the committees. I guess this one and the medical one and the pharmaceutical one have those kinds of appointments.

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

Mr. Andrew Dowie: Just to echo MPP Sabawy's comments—previous to being elected, I was grateful to serve on the Council of the Association of Ontario Land

Surveyors. Being a professional engineer, I was not a land surveyor, but I know that as a member of the council, I really gained a lot, as a member of the public, and imparting the knowledge that I had from my background.

In this case, our applicant has a background where he's registered with the regulator for the legal profession, so it is one that may actually come into play when it comes to complaints and discipline, which are relevant to the regulation of the practitioners.

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

Ayes

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

Nays

Bell, Gates, Smyth.

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

We will now consider the intended appointment of Armand La Barge. Can I have a motion, please? MPP Smith.

Ms. Laura Smith: I move concurrence in the intended appointment of Armand La Barge, nominated as chair of the Postsecondary Education Quality Assessment Board.

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): Concurrence has been moved by MPP Smith. Any discussion on this? Are the members ready to vote? All those in favour? All those opposed? Obviously, unanimous. Look at that. We can do it—unanimous.

We will now consider the intended appointment of Matthew Létourneau. Can I have a motion? MPP Smith.

Ms. Laura Smith: I move concurrence in the intended appointment of Matthew Létourneau, nominated as vice-chair of the Licence Appeal Tribunal.

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): Any discussion? Seeing none, are the members ready to vote? All those in favour? None opposed—so unanimous again.

We will now consider the intended appointment of Mary-Agnes Wilson. Can I have a motion, please? MPP Smith.

Ms. Laura Smith: I move concurrence in the intended appointment of Mary-Agnes Wilson, nominated as member of the Ontario Health board of directors.

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): Concurrence has been moved by MPP Smith. Any discussion? Are the members ready to vote? All those in favour? All those opposed? That carries.

Congratulations, Mary-Agnes.

We were going to recess, but I don't think we are now, because we have an 11:30 intended appointee who is going to be virtual.

Interjection.

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): Do you want a two-minute recess? Yes? All right—a two-minute recess.

The committee recessed from 1131 to 1135.

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): The Standing Committee on Government Agencies will resume.

MS. SARAH COLMAN

Review of intended appointment, selected by official opposition party: Sarah Colman, intended appointee as member, Human Rights Legal Support Centre board of directors.

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): We have our final intended appointee: Sarah Colman is nominated as a member of the Human Rights Legal Support Centre board of directors for the province of Ontario.

Sarah, thank you so much for coming and for being willing to serve to improve Ontario. We would like to hear your story and your education, experience and relevance for this committee, and afterwards we will ask you questions. The government side will—your time will be deducted from their 10 minutes, and that is fine. They are happy—we're all happy to hear from you. And then, the official opposition and the third party will have 10 minutes of questions. The floor is yours. Welcome.

Ms. Sarah Colman: Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you, members of the standing committee. I do appreciate the opportunity to appear before you here today.

My name is Sarah Colman. I'm a retired lawyer. I live in Stratford, Ontario. In my retirement, I'm undertaking a variety of activities that I believe will contribute meaningfully to my community and to our province.

I'm honoured to be considered for appointment to the board of directors for Ontario's Human Rights Legal Support Centre, which I believe is an excellent way to put my experience, education and skills to good use. I believe that my application is supported by my experience both as a former lawyer and as someone with significant board experience.

Throughout my legal career and even in my legal education, I demonstrated a strong commitment to protecting and upholding human rights.

I won the course prize in both human rights law and constitutional law during my studies at Queen's University.

I was called to the bar in 1999, after having clerked at the Court of Appeal for Ontario during my articling year.

In my 23 years of full-time practice, I frequently represented clients in human rights matters, assisting them in advancing their concerns within the workplace and at the tribunal.

As general counsel for the Ontario Principals' Council, where I worked for more than 20 years, I also advised principals and vice-principals working in the English public school system about how to uphold the human rights of their students and staff. I did this in a number of ways—first, through direct legal advice, responsive to a particular fact situation when a principal or vice-principal called us for assistance. Second, I also developed and delivered workshops [*inaudible*] for groups of principals and vice-principals [*inaudible*] professional development conferences and meetings. Finally, I wrote articles for OPC's

magazine, called the Register, and developed Q&A resources for our members to access online so they would always have resources at hand if they were facing a tricky situation. It was always my goal to help these educators understand their important role in advancing and upholding the human rights of their students and staff, and to help them to navigate difficult issues that would sometimes arise, often around competing rights. I also advocated directly for principals and vice-principals who themselves were facing discrimination, using either the dispute resolution process provided for under their contracts or, in rare cases, by making application to the tribunal.

In addition to my familiarity with human rights law and the work of the tribunal, commission and legal support centre, I believe that my legal training and experience more generally will be useful to the board.

While I no longer practise law, my analytical and communication skills are still sharp and are regularly put to good use in my other board positions.

I believe that my ability to work collegially within a group and to work with integrity and respect for all peoples will allow me to transition into a position on the board with success.

1140

I now want to discuss my board and governance experience more specifically.

First, I should mention that in my early days as a lawyer, when I worked for Lerner and Associates in London, Ontario—it's now called Lerner LLP—I served on the board for Meals on Wheels in London and eventually became the president of that organization.

Where I gained [inaudible] experience in the operations of the governance board, however, was as general counsel for the OPC, where I played a key role in developing the policies that formed the basis for the governance of that association. I advised the board of directors and the executive—I attended board members and provided support to the president throughout. When I worked there, the OPC had a really interesting board composition, in that the constating documents required that each English public district school board elect two representatives through their local associations—one from the secondary school panel and one from the elementary school panel—to be directors at the OPC. As a result, our meetings often had more than 80 people in attendance, which is a huge board, including the directors, the executive and the key staff. These were multi-day meetings that required significant preparation and skilful navigation. In the course of this work, I further honed my negotiation and problem-solving acumen. I was required to be an adept communicator and translator of legal concepts for a non-legal audience, and to work collegially and co-operatively with fellow staff members, as well as the principals and vice-principals from all across the province. I believe these skills and experiences would be well used, as a board member for the legal support centre.

Since my retirement from my position with the OPC, I have joined two volunteer boards local to me in Stratford.

I have been on the board for Family Services Perth-Huron for a number of years and served both on the executive and governance committees. This is an organization that provides counselling support and respite services to vulnerable individuals and families in our community. It does amazing work, and I'm proud to serve on the board of directors there.

I also joined the board for the Stratford General Hospital Foundation in 2025. The foundation is an organization dedicated to engaging with the community to raise much-needed funds to support the equipment, facility and training needs of our local hospital. There, I serve on the finance committee as well as the strategic planning committee for that board. Again, this is an amazing organization that provides crucial support to [inaudible].

I'm engaged in a number of other activities in my retirement as well, and I'm happy to answer questions about those, but I think I've addressed what is most relevant to the position on the board. I know that you have my information before you, and I'm happy to answer any questions you have.

Ultimately, I believe that my past work with the OPC, my subsequent work on the boards of Family Services Perth-Huron and the Stratford General Hospital Foundation, and my long-standing commitment to advancing and upholding human rights will allow me to contribute positively to the work of the board of the Human Rights Legal Support Centre. I will be happy to discuss this further and to answer any questions that you might have about my skills and experience.

Thank you for your time and attention.

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

Two minutes, 45 seconds, MPP Dowie.

Mr. Andrew Dowie: Thank you, Ms. Colman, for being here.

I appreciate, really, the heavy lifting that you've done volunteering in the community. Family services and the hospital are very important to our local communities. I hope you can share a little bit about your experiences with those organizations and the others that you volunteered with and how they might shape your approach to how you're going to work in this role at the Human Rights Legal Support Centre.

Ms. Sarah Colman: I've been on the board for Family Services Perth-Huron for several years. It's a governance board, so our role is to oversee the operation decisions of the executive director. Really, our only employee is the executive director, so I'm involved in reviewing her performance and the performance of the organization more generally.

I think that is essentially the role on the Human Rights Legal Support Centre as well—it's to make sure that the centre is delivering on the promises set out in the legislation; it's that oversight capacity that the board has that's fundamental to the role. I think my experience on Family Services Perth-Huron, and also my long-standing service as general counsel for the OPC, make me well-placed to perform that oversight role.

My work with the hospital foundation has been shorter-lived; I only joined in 2025. It's a very dynamic board—it's still the governance model, but it definitely has more work that's done directly, because it's a fundraising board. There are lots of opportunities to be more directly engaged in those fundraising activities. Of course, that's not going to be necessary for the centre, but it's something I enjoy very much with that board.

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

MPP Bailey, 44 seconds.

Mr. Robert Bailey: Thank you for appearing today, Ms. Colman.

I'd just like you to explain, in the few short seconds we have, how the Ontario human rights council that you're applying for fits in with the overall human rights council in Ontario.

Ms. Sarah Colman: The legal support centre's role is to provide timely access to advice and support so that individuals in Ontario can advance their human rights claims. It's an important service. I'm not sure of the exact date it was introduced, but it has not existed for the whole time that I've been—

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

MPP Gates, with the official opposition: 10 minutes.

MPP Wayne Gates: Thanks for being here, Sarah. I've got a few questions for you, and I'm going to share my time with my colleague as well.

In late 2024, Remi Warner, the executive director of the Human Rights Legal Support Centre, said that their resources were spread thin. With the number of people they're trying to support, do you think the Human Rights Legal Support Centre being stretched so thin is hurting access to justice?

Ms. Sarah Colman: Well, I don't know about the status of their resources because I'm not on the inside of that, but I can say that I think having resources that are adequate for their needs is very important. I do know that many people rely on the support centre to be able to advance their claims. A lot of people cannot afford to pay for legal advice. The cost of lawyers is very expensive.

I think human rights are fundamental. It's something we as a society have expressed, through this legislation, as being very important. And it's quasi-constitutional legislation; it has got a higher standing than anything else that we do.

I support a fully funded legal support centre so that individuals can access their rights.

MPP Wayne Gates: Thank you very much.

I ask these questions to everybody—but with the number of people who were refusing to come to the committee, I may see a different answer than we've been seeing in the past.

Have you ever supported a political party?

Ms. Sarah Colman: Yes. Through donations—is that what you mean?

MPP Wayne Gates: Yes, donations, or—that would be the second part of my question. But seeing as you've raised it, have you ever donated to a political party?

Ms. Sarah Colman: I have. It has been a while.

Some of the other work that I do is for Elections Canada, so since joining that organization and performing work there, I no longer make any statements that could be perceived as political. I really try to remain non-partisan, and I've not made any donations since that time, but, certainly, in the past, I know that I have.

MPP Wayne Gates: Do you remember who you donated to? What party?

Ms. Sarah Colman: The most recent one was to the NDP, but I could not—

MPP Wayne Gates: That was a good choice.

Ms. Sarah Colman: Yes—I couldn't say before that.

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

Ms. Sarah Colman: No, I have not.

MPP Wayne Gates: You haven't? You should. It's a lot of fun.

Do you think that the current level of free legal support available is adequate to help applicants who can't afford private lawyers or paralegals?

Ms. Sarah Colman: Again, I don't have insight into that because I'm not aware—

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

MPP Smith.

Ms. Laura Smith: The questions should be within the scope of her capacity to perform the job and her application.

MPP Wayne Gates: I certainly do appreciate you raising your hand.

1150

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): Thank you—if we can make a stronger connection, MPP Gates.

MPP Wayne Gates: Yes, it's good.

Do you believe that the current human rights tribunal roles are too complex for self-represented applications to deal with? And how could this be changed to make it fair?

Ms. Sarah Colman: I actually think that the rules are fairly straightforward, and I do know that staff within the tribunal are available to answer process questions, much as they are for other Ontario tribunals. So I'm not convinced that they are too complex. I think you have to have a meaningful set of rules in order for things to function effectively. But certainly, that's one of the roles of the support centre—to provide that assistance with interpretation, if it's required. So I do think that's a very important role that the centre plays.

MPP Wayne Gates: You mentioned during your presentation a few times about making sure they get to the human rights with a timely—but when human rights tribunal applications are waiting for years just to have a hearing, are they getting fair access to justice, waiting that long?

Ms. Sarah Colman: I think it depends on the complexity of the matter. Some things are very complex and therefore do take a long time. There are other matters, though,

that obviously should be dealt with more expeditiously, and in those cases, justice delayed is justice denied. But I think that the tribunal—at least from my understanding—is working very hard to try to reduce wait times.

MPP Wayne Gates: What do you think the province can do to bring down the multi-year backlog of cases to be heard at the human rights tribunal? What do you think a solution is?

Ms. Sarah Colman: I think one thing would be to ensure that there's a full complement of staff and vice-chairs to hear matters. That would help to clear up backlogs that may exist. But probably, there are other things they could be doing internally for efficiency. Again, I don't have insight into that because I'm not there as part of the tribunal. But I think we can all work on our processes to try to improve efficiency, through technology and through proper resourcing.

MPP Wayne Gates: I'm just going to finish by saying that I noticed that you volunteer for Meals on Wheels.

Ms. Sarah Colman: I did.

MPP Wayne Gates: It's a really good organization, and they're doing incredible work. More and more seniors are needing Meals on Wheels, more and more volunteers. So the fact that you volunteered—I just want to say thanks before I turn my comments over to my colleague. Thank you.

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): MPP Bell, three minutes, 45 seconds.

Ms. Jessica Bell: Thank you for coming here, Ms. Colman, to apply to sit on the board of the Human Rights Legal Support Centre.

My questions are similar to MPP Gates' questions.

My first question is around access. The people who contact the legal support centre are often dealing with major power imbalances with employers, landlords, schools, service providers or government. Given your expertise and background, how do you believe the board should ensure the centre remains accessible to the people who need it most?

Ms. Sarah Colman: Well, I think the fact that the centre exists is the first amazing thing. When I first started practising law, there was no such centre, and so people were required to navigate the rules on their own and be self-represented or pay for a lawyer. Many people couldn't afford that. So I think the existence of the centre is a significant contributor to access, and that it has a job to do in terms of screening those applications and making sure that the resources are put to good use, because not all applications are meritorious or meet the requirements of the legislation. But beyond that, I think extending the reach and ensuring that those with meritorious claims are able to proceed with those claims—that is the *raison d'être* of the support centre.

Ms. Jessica Bell: This is a related question: In your view, given your experience, what do you see as the biggest access-to-justice challenges facing people trying to make human rights claims in Ontario?

Ms. Sarah Colman: Probably one issue would be their level of understanding or knowledge about the existence

of support in doing so. I think many people also don't even have awareness of the work of the tribunal. I think there is always a barrier to access when information is not well known. So I think that's the first requirement—to make sure that the people of Ontario have real familiarity with the work of the tribunal and the work of legal support centres so they're aware they can access that support.

And then, next, I suppose it would be that lots of people have poor access to technology because of their financial circumstances—

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

Ms. Sarah Colman: —or access to reliable WiFi, and that makes accessing support very difficult, because so much of that is done online now. That's another thing I think that can then pose a real barrier.

Ms. Jessica Bell: Thank you for those answers.

We regularly have people approach our office who want to go to the human rights tribunal. Some of their claims have merit, and we refer them.

If you are appointed, I wish you the best in the work that you do. It is a very important tribunal, and this is a very important role.

Ms. Sarah Colman: Agreed. Thank you.

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): Over to the third party: MPP Smyth.

MPP Stephanie Smyth: Thank you for being here today, Sarah.

We're always dealing with backlog with a lot of tribunals in this province—real issues there.

But let's start with you for a minute, and correct me if any of this isn't right.

Since 2026—this year—you've got multiple public appointments, including serving as a part-time member both of the Animal Care Review Board and the Pay Equity Hearings Tribunal. Correct?

Ms. Sarah Colman: Correct.

MPP Stephanie Smyth: Busy jobs.

How will you ensure that you have the required time and the capacity to help the support centre navigate its current operational procedures while balancing your active board duties? We've been speaking about backlog, and you've been talking about timely access to advice and support. How do you reconcile all that?

Ms. Sarah Colman: Well, certainly, as a board member, I would not be one of the people providing that advice. The demand on my time would be the board meetings and the preparation for the board meetings, and certainly, I feel that is well within my capacity to perform.

When I was working full-time as a lawyer, I was working 70 to 80 hours a week. So I have a considerable capacity to perform work. I no longer wish to work that much, which is partly why I retired, but I still feel that I have lots to offer and the time to do it. I feel well able to balance those competing obligations.

MPP Stephanie Smyth: I know you mentioned some connection with human rights, but can you just map out

for us again your direct involvement or background in human rights?

Ms. Sarah Colman: When I was an associate lawyer at Lerner's, I did not have a great deal to do with human rights for individual clients, except through my work for the Ontario Principals' Council. So right from the beginning, from the very start of me being a lawyer, I was already working for the Ontario Principals' Council, providing advice and support to principals and vice-principals in the province.

As you may know, schools are a place where human rights are often at issue. There are accessibility concerns. There are concerns about the kinds of materials that are in libraries—that was a big issue and something that principals had to figure out how to navigate. There are certainly issues of racial discrimination that have been prevalent. So there were many issues that would arise in the work of principals and vice-principals, that they were required to navigate, figure out how to balance rights, and I was counsel and able to provide individuals with that kind of advice and support. And then, principals themselves face discrimination in their workplaces, and so, as I said, I would help address those, both through their terms and conditions of employment that had dispute resolution processes. Akin to a grievance process, we would take those issues up the chain to arbitration if necessary. And then on some occasions—not a lot of occasions, but on some occasions—I also made applications on their behalf to the tribunal for those matters to be adjudicated.

1200

MPP Stephanie Smyth: So you saw your share of issues you defined as human rights issues.

Do you feel, with that experience or what you're seeing in society now, that there's any specific marginalized group the legal support centres are providing aid to—that we want to ensure that they're providing aid to?

Ms. Sarah Colman: I think any marginalized group. That's what the enumerated grounds are for. It's to establish those groups of people who have experienced historic disadvantage and try to use the Human Rights Code to ensure that those people are protected from that kind of discrimination. So I would not single out any particular group. I think anyone who is involved, a part of a marginalized community, ought to have access. That's my answer there. Sorry.

MPP Stephanie Smyth: Over the last three years, we've seen an increase in the proportion of cases related to disability-related aid, and it's the largest area of calls to the HRLSC. So do you have any experience specifically with disability rights that you can call—I know you mentioned with the OPC, but supporting those discriminated against on the grounds of disability?

Ms. Sarah Colman: Well, through the OPC, again, we had principals and vice-principals who would experience disability—they might have a cancer diagnosis, they might be in a car accident, they might have a chronic illness and

require accommodation in their workplace. So, yes, I have that experience in advocating for them.

We also, at the OPC, sponsored a long-term disability plan for principals and vice-principals that I was part of overseeing, and also a part of the return-to-work process, where people coming off of a disability claim would need to return to work. Often, that process was difficult, gradual, as they could—and with accommodation to allow them to perform their jobs with dignity. Those issues also required significant negotiation. So, yes, I do have experience in that area as well.

MPP Stephanie Smyth: With this appointment to the board—I always say, what is your legacy, what has motivated you first, and what do you see as a really strong issue that you stand for or something that you want to do to effect change, make impact?

Ms. Sarah Colman: Good question.

Since I retired, I have really been very focused on ensuring that I continue to have my skills and experience make a meaningful impact in my community, and Ontario as a whole is my community as well. So while I focused a lot in the last couple of years to build my connections in Stratford, where I live, and to make a positive impact directly here, I also now, more recently—my appointments to the ACRB and to the Pay Equity Hearings Tribunal have both been very recent. I've just decided that I want to expand my reach and use my skills to help the people of Ontario and to really have an impact that my legal training and my experience allow me to have.

MPP Stephanie Smyth: What are your greatest concerns about what you're seeing at the HRTTO and then the Human Rights Legal Support Centre? Are you worried about funding and maybe not being able to follow through on the hopes that you have, to have impact?

Ms. Sarah Colman: Again, I don't have a lot of insight into whatever funding issues there might be. I'm not aware of it. I do know about the backlogs at the tribunal, and I am concerned about those. I hope that with greater efficiencies and proper resourcing and essentially enough personnel to move the cases through, that backlog can be dealt with.

I know I have heard in my work for Tribunals Ontario that many of their backlogs have been cleared and that they are really doing a great job of catching up on those. So I have every hope that that will be the case, too, for the human rights tribunal.

MPP Stephanie Smyth: Sarah, thank you very much for your time today. I appreciate it.

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): Thank you very much, Sarah, for coming in today, virtually, and sharing your story, and for your willingness to serve.

We will now consider the concurrence of Sarah Colman. Can I have a motion, please? MPP Smith.

Ms. Laura Smith: I move concurrence in the intended appointment of Sarah Colman, nominated as member of the Human Rights Legal Support Centre board of directors.

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

MPP Wayne Gates: Recorded vote, please.

Ayes

Bailey, Bell, Denault, Dowie, Firin, Gates, Laura Smith, Smyth.

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): That carries unanimously. That is a great way to almost end the meeting.

Congratulations, Sarah, if you're still there.

The last item of business is the extension of the two certificates.

Ms. Sarah Colman: I will try to leave.

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): Go celebrate, yes. Thank you.

The deadline to review the intended appointments selected from the June 19, 2026, certificate is set to expire on July 19, 2026. Is there unanimous consent to extend the certificate by 30 days? I heard a no.

MPP Wayne Gates: Who said no?

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): The deadline to review the intended appointments selected from the June 26, 2026, certificate is set to expire on July 26, 2026. Is there unanimous consent to extend the certificate by 30 days? I heard a no.

MPP Wayne Gates: Again?

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): This concludes our business for today. The committee now stands adjourned until July 30, 2026. Be safe. Have a good summer.

The committee adjourned at 1208.

STANDING COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT AGENCIES

Chair / Présidente

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

First Vice-Chair / Premier Vice-Président

Mr. Robert Bailey (Sarnia–Lambton PC)

Second Vice-Chair / Deuxième Vice-Président

MPP Wayne Gates (Niagara Falls ND)

Mr. Robert Bailey (Sarnia–Lambton PC)

MPP Billy Denault (Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke PC)

Mr. Andrew Dowie (Windsor–Tecumseh PC)

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

MPP Wayne Gates (Niagara Falls ND)

MPP Alexa Gilmour (Parkdale–High Park ND)

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

Mr. Matthew Rae (Perth–Wellington PC)

Mr. Sheref Sabawy (Mississauga–Erin Mills PC)

Ms. Laura Smith (Thornhill PC)

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

Substitutions / Membres remplaçants

Ms. Jessica Bell (University–Rosedale ND)

Clerk / Greffière

Ms. Vanessa Kattar

Staff / Personnel

Ms. Pia Anthony Muttu, research officer,
Research Services