Legislative Assembly of Ontario



Assemblée législative de l'Ontario

Official Report of Debates (Hansard)

A-26

Journal des débats (Hansard)

A-26

Standing Committee on Government Agencies

Comité permanent des organismes gouvernementaux

Intended appointments

Nominations prévues

1st Session
44th Parliament

Thursday 29 October 2026

1re session
44e législature

Jeudi 29 octobre 2026

Chair: Mary-Margaret McMahon
Clerk: Vanessa Kattar

Présidente : Mary-Margaret McMahon
Greffière : Vanessa Kattar

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

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

ISSN 1180-4335

CONTENTS

Thursday 29 October 2026

Appointment of Vice-Chair A-333
Appointment of subcommittee A-333
Intended appointments A-333
    Ms. Sayanisa Suthanthirakaran A-333
    Ms. Heidi Francis A-338
Committee business A-343

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

STANDING COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT AGENCIES

COMITÉ PERMANENT DES ORGANISMES GOUVERNEMENTAUX

Thursday 29 October 2026

Jeudi 29 octobre 2026

The committee met at 0902 in room 151.

APPOINTMENT OF VICE-CHAIR

The Second Vice-Chair (MPP Wayne Gates): There you go. All right. We're off.

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

Standing order 119(e) states when the Chair of a standing committee is a member of the recognized party in opposition to the government other than the official opposition, the First Vice-Chair shall be a member of the party forming the government.

With that, it is my duty to call upon you to appoint a First Vice-Chair. Is there a motion? MPP Bresee.

Mr. Ric Bresee: I move that MPP Anand be appointed as First Vice-Chair of this committee.

The Second Vice-Chair (MPP Wayne Gates): A motion has been moved. Is there any debate? Are members ready to vote? All in favour? The opposition is doing this; I know what that means—

MPP Alexa Gilmour: We'll see how favourable.

The Second Vice-Chair (MPP Wayne Gates): Shall the motion carry? All those in favour? As opposed, raise your hands. Nobody? Good. The motion is carried.

Congratulations.

APPOINTMENT OF SUBCOMMITTEE

The Second Vice-Chair (MPP Wayne Gates): Next item on the agenda is the appointment of a subcommittee on committee business. Is there a motion? MPP Bresee.

Mr. Ric Bresee: I move that MPP Dowie be appointed to the subcommittee on committee business.

The Second Vice-Chair (MPP Wayne Gates): Okay. Are members ready to vote? Shall the motion carry? All in favour? Opposed?

Congratulations, MPP Dowie.

Mr. Andrew Dowie: I can't wait.

The Second Vice-Chair (MPP Wayne Gates): I'm sure. It's carried.

INTENDED APPOINTMENTS

MS. SAYANISA SUTHANTHIRAKARAN

Review of intended appointment, selected by official opposition party and third party: Sayanisa Suthanthirakaran, intended appointee as vice-chair, Workplace Safety and Insurance Appeals Tribunal.

The Second Vice-Chair (MPP Wayne Gates): We'll now move to review intended appointees. Our first intended appointee today is Nisa Karan, nominated as vice-chair of the Workplace Safety and Insurance Appeals Tribunal.

You may make your initial statement at your discretion. Following this, there will be questions from members of the committee. With that questioning, we will start with the government, followed by the official opposition and then the third party. Ten minutes will be allocated to each recognized party. Any time you take in your statement will be deducted from the Conservative side—the government side; I'm sorry. I apologize.

You can start your presentation now.

Ms. Sayanisa Suthanthirakaran: Good morning, Chair, Vice-Chair and honourable members of the Standing Committee on Government Agencies. Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today and for considering my appointment as vice-chair of the Workplace Safety and Insurance Appeals Tribunal.

For those I haven't had the pleasure of meeting, my name is Sayanisa Suthanthirakaran, otherwise known as Nisa Karan. I'm a registered nurse, an occupational health and safety professional, an entrepreneur and currently a member of the Workplace Safety and Insurance Appeals Tribunal.

My educational background includes a bachelor of science in nursing and a master of business administration. I also hold the Canadian Registered Safety Professional designation, specialized occupational health and safety qualifications and formal adjudication training through Osgoode Professional Development and the Society of Ontario Adjudicators and Regulators. While these qualifications have provided a strong foundation, I believe my practical experience has been equally important in shaping my judgment and commitment to public service.

I began my career as an occupational health nurse working in high-risk environments, responding first-hand to workplace injuries and occupational emergencies. I had the opportunity to care directly for injured workers, witness how injuries occurred and, more importantly, understand how those injuries affected their health, livelihoods, independence and families.

I later transitioned into hospital leadership, serving as a director responsible for workplace health and safety across several hospitals, where I worked closely with front-line

staff, unions, senior leadership and regulatory stakeholders.

One of the most defining periods of my career was helping lead the occupational health and safety response during COVID-19. I've been fortunate to receive recognition for this work. In 2020, I had a Blanding's turtle named after me by the Toronto Zoo and the Scarborough Health Network for my commitment and sacrifice to health care during the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2021, I received recognition from the CEO and executive vice-presidents of Scarborough Health Network for my time, leadership and skills over the assigned long-term-care homes under the Ontario government-issued mandatory management orders, which allowed local hospitals to temporarily take over the operations of struggling long-term-care homes during COVID-19 outbreaks. In 2023, I was named one of Canada's Top Women in Safety by Canadian Occupational Safety, and in 2025, I was honoured to receive the OHS honours Professional of the Year Award from OHS Canada.

I'm grateful for these recognitions, but they also reflect the extraordinary teams and colleagues I've had the privilege of working alongside.

Following my hospital leadership career, I founded Cobra Safety, an occupational health and safety consulting firm.

However, I believe one of my strongest qualifications for this appointment is that I already serve as a member of the Workplace Safety and Insurance Appeals Tribunal. In my current role, I participate in tripartite panels conducting appeal hearings alongside vice-chairs and fellow tribunal members. This has provided me with direct adjudicative experience and familiarity with the tribunal's legislation, policies and hearing procedures and an appreciation for the careful assessment of evidence and application of the law.

I recognize that the vice-chair position carries additional responsibilities, including presiding over hearings and preparing written decisions. However, my existing experience, together with the guidance and collegial support I've received within the tribunal, provides a strong foundation and would allow me to transition with a shorter learning curve.

I also want to address the distinction between my consulting work and my responsibilities as an adjudicator. At Cobra Safety, my role is to provide professional advice to organizations to strengthen workplace health and safety programs.

At the tribunal, my responsibility is fundamentally different. I do not represent employers; I do not represent workers. My responsibility is to the law, the evidence and the principles of natural justice and procedural fairness. As a current tribunal member, I already identify and declare relevant actual or potential perceived conflicts of interest to the tribunal chair in accordance with established policies, and I continue to do so.

I recognize that impartiality requires more than believing oneself to be fair; it requires transparency, clear professional boundaries and the willingness to step aside when appropriate. These are not simply commitments I intend to make if appointed vice-chair; they are principles I already apply in my adjudicative work, and I will continue to uphold them with the utmost integrity.

Beyond my professional responsibilities, I serve on the tribunal excellence committee of the Council of Canadian Administrative Tribunals and on Seneca Polytechnic's workplace safety and prevention program advisory committee.

I also volunteer as a hike leader, creating opportunities for women to connect through outdoor adventure. While that may seem unrelated to administrative justice, it continually reminds me that good leadership requires listening, inclusion, sound judgment and service to others.

0910

I recognize the significant responsibility that comes with this appointment. My experience has taught me that good judgment requires not only knowledge but humility and a willingness to continually learn. If entrusted with the position of vice-chair, I would bring my clinical and professional experience, established adjudicative experience, familiarity with the tribunal and an unwavering commitment to independence, fairness and integrity. I would be honoured to continue serving the people of Ontario in this capacity.

Thank you, Chair and members of the committee, for your consideration. I would be pleased to answer any questions you may have.

The Second Vice-Chair (MPP Wayne Gates): Thank you very much.

You have four minutes and nine seconds—to the governing party. MPP Lahey.

MPP Susan Lahey: Through you, Vice-Chair, first question: Ms. Karan, you've built a career in occupational health and safety over many years. Thank you for sharing your experience with us, including running your own business in Markham, Ontario. Could you please tell us a little more about your professional journey and what motivated you to put your name forward for this appointment?

Ms. Sayanisa Suthanthirakaran: Thank you for that question, honourable member. I was appointed to the Workplace Safety and Insurance Appeals Tribunal three years ago. I was reappointed in the most recent term. I am an employer-member currently, and I sit with the tribunal in tripartite hearings already.

Sitting alongside vice-chairs gave me exposure to the type of role and the work that they do. In addition to what I currently do, I can contribute to writing decisions, and that's something that I wanted to particularly learn when I was a member of the tripartite—or currently a member of the tripartite committee. That sparked an interest for me to want to apply for this position when the opening came up.

I've been in occupational health and safety for about 13 years now, and so I understand the importance of the tribunal's work. That's what actually prompted me to apply for it to begin with, through the PAS website, and it was an absolute privilege to be appointed as a side member to begin with.

The Second Vice-Chair (MPP Wayne Gates): MPP Beattie.

Mr. Jeff Beattie: Chair, through you, thank you for being here today, Ms. Karan, and congratulations on your candidacy.

As you already know through your experience with the WSIAT, hearings have the ability to severely impact those involved. I'm wondering, outside of your service on the WSIAT, what experience do you have in making decisions that affect the rights, interests and beliefs of the individuals involved?

Ms. Sayanisa Suthanthirakaran: Thank you for that question, honourable member. I know you didn't ask about the WSIAT, but in my current role as a member, it's imperative that we exercise evidence-based decision-making when we make decisions. While we understand our decisions will affect the parties that are involved, whoever the appellant is, our hearing conduct and the way that we conduct the hearings is based on objective, fair, evidenced decision-making.

Throughout my career—and I will touch a little bit on my nursing career. Providing clinical care to an injured worker requires a significant amount of objective judgment, whether that's clinical information, clinical data or what's actually happening with the injured worker. Over the course of 13 years, I've been exercising the experience of using that type of objective, fair, evidenced-based judgment in all of my career paths, and that has contributed quite well to my current role as a member and to my role as a vice-chair.

I hope that answers your question.

Mr. Jeff Beattie: Yes, it does. Thank you.

The Second Vice-Chair (MPP Wayne Gates): One minute. MPP Bresee.

Mr. Ric Bresee: Thank you for being here today; I appreciate it.

You've expressed your history, your, I'll say, relatively long career in both nursing and health and safety. Given that specifically the occupational health and safety space and that sector is evolving, is modernizing very quickly, what do you see as the role for an administrative tribunal within that justice system, within that changed space?

Ms. Sayanisa Suthanthirakaran: I think, irrespective of what change is taking place—and I know technology is evolving and all sorts of different things are happening, laws are changing, so it's important for us as decision-makers to make sure that we stay abreast of those things. The fundamental basis is still objective decision-making, so we're looking—

The Second Vice-Chair (MPP Wayne Gates): Sorry to cut you off, but we have to move on to the official opposition and MPP Gilmour.

MPP Alexa Gilmour: Thank you, Ms. Suthanthirakaran. I appreciate you coming before us today. As I look at your education, your employment record, you appear to be born for this role, so we're glad to have you here.

In terms of just some pro forma questions that we ask all of our candidates coming before us, have you ever made any donations to any political parties?

Ms. Sayanisa Suthanthirakaran: No.

MPP Alexa Gilmour: And are you part of any political party in terms of membership?

Ms. Sayanisa Suthanthirakaran: No.

MPP Alexa Gilmour: Great. I was wondering if you could tell me a little bit more about that process. You spoke about applying yourself to the website for the part-time role before. In your discernment to this role, did you speak to anybody? Were you encouraged by anybody—in particular, any political members or anything like that?

Ms. Sayanisa Suthanthirakaran: No. I get the notifications from the PAS website, and I saw the vacancy and applied.

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

As I said, I've mentioned that I think you're exceptionally qualified, but I have to ask a little about the time piece.

The late Ron Ellis, who you may know was the first chair of the tribunal, believed that it takes years of full-time hearing experience for an adjudicator to master active hearing management, synthesize complex medical, legal records, draft legally sound reasons under the administrative scrutiny. You've served for three years now, part-time. What makes you feel like you're ready right now?

Ms. Sayanisa Suthanthirakaran: I know the past 13 to 14 years, although it may not have been directly at the tribunal, my work on the front-line side also included return to work and collaborating with stakeholders to get injured workers back to work. I know a large piece of that is return-to-work programs and policies that have been developed by organizations such as the WSIB and collaborating with the WSIB and case management to return people back to work. Again, that also contributes to utilizing objective information and medical evidence to be able to make those decisions.

I believe my medical background provides me a unique competitive advantage. Because I've been in this space for quite some time, occupational injuries are what I know and that is what I'm really good at understanding.

While I know it takes time to develop the skills to get into a vice-chair position, I am a very fast learner. I enjoy taking on challenges, and I am also surrounded by some incredible vice-chairs at the tribunal as well as our chair. So I take note to the way hearings are conducted, and I pay particular attention to what's required of a vice-chair in all of the hearings that I have taken part in already. I think that really allows me to be able to apply those skills if I get into that position.

MPP Alexa Gilmour: I'm thinking now, as you move towards these single vice-chair panels, the tribunal is, as you've spoken of a little bit, intended to balance the views of labour and management through that tripartite panel, but now we increasingly rely on single vice-chair panels. Given the organization you have that works with employers, given your background where you've worked with employees, I'm wondering if you can speak a little bit more about balancing all sides of this complex question.

Ms. Sayanisa Suthanthirakaran: Yes. For the past three years, sitting on a tripartite panel has allowed me the ability to hear things being deliberated from a variety of

different perspectives. I also want to mention that having the experience working directly with injured workers as an occupational health nurse, also having the experience working with employers with return-to-work services, and also working in a role now as an employer member gives me the three perspectives that I think I would need to successfully make an unbiased decision.

Again, I think the biggest thing is, sitting on the panel right now, I have a lot of experience in how things are deliberated and the questions that go back and forth between the three decision-makers, and that's a skill that I would bring to my adjudication if I was a single vice-chair.

0920

MPP Alexa Gilmour: Thank you.

I also think you bring something, given all your past experience over the last three years, and I wondered if you might speak a little bit from that experience to what you think the major challenges or shortcomings of the tribunal are. I'm thinking about things like the chronic backlog or the difficulty ensuring access or a variety of things. Maybe you could speak to some of those.

Ms. Sayanisa Suthanthirakaran: In our tribunal, we take particular care of ensuring that hearings are assigned in a timely manner, as well as ensuring that our decisions are out in a timely manner, especially when there are three people involved. We're all very engaged in ensuring that the decisions get out at a good time. At the tribunal, it's recorded as well, so we're able to keep track of what those key performance indicators are.

As of right now, to be completely honest, there isn't anything that sticks out to me as a major challenge, but what I can foresee perhaps in the future if hearing volumes increase is managing those hearing volumes and being able to stay organized and get those decisions out in a timely manner so that workers and employers alike are able to receive a decision at the time we promised.

MPP Alexa Gilmour: I appreciate that. I'm wondering, though, about what we've heard in the past about the difficulty of ensuring access to competent representation. What have you seen there in terms of challenges, and what would you bring to alleviate that and reform that?

Ms. Sayanisa Suthanthirakaran: Are you referencing workers accessing competent representation?

MPP Alexa Gilmour: Yes.

Ms. Sayanisa Suthanthirakaran: Access to justice has always been a focus for us. When we are assigned hearings, we don't have a lot of control over who those representatives are. However, if we do have a hearing where an employee is representing themselves, we provide a supportive environment—obviously keeping it objective but recognizing that the person may not have the same professional experience as, say, a lawyer or paralegal will. So we try to support them in the best way that we can in the hearing environment, especially since it could be considered very intimidating, so that they're still able to express what their experience is and get a fair hearing out of their hearing date with us.

MPP Alexa Gilmour: Thank you.

I know that most people coming before you, and even most people living their lives, don't really have a very sophisticated understanding of the law until we come into a moment where we need it. But most people out there speak about wanting things to be fair. We have this sense of fairness, and we know that somehow the law is connected to that fairness.

The WSIB has a practice of deeming, where the board reduces or eliminates an injured worker's loss-of-earning benefits by pretending that they are earning income from a job that they don't actually have. It's widely seen by many as unfair. The WSIB assumes that the worker is earning that wage, even if the worker remains unemployed or no employer will hire them or such jobs don't really exist in the community. I literally don't know a single person who thinks that is fair.

The tribunal has the power to set aside deemings that it considers inappropriate. I wonder how you approach such cases.

Ms. Sayanisa Suthanthirakaran: I can't comment on WSIB as it's outside of my scope and expertise, but with respect to the WSIAT, every hearing is de novo, so it's brand new. Everything that we look at in terms of the objective evidence, everything that's in the file—their testimony at the hearing is looked at from a fresh pair of eyes, and so that's what we make a decision on when the person is before us.

The Second Vice-Chair (MPP Wayne Gates): One minute.

Ms. Sayanisa Suthanthirakaran: I can't comment on WSIB's historical decision-making because we start fresh from when we get the case record and the hearing is assigned.

MPP Alexa Gilmour: Thank you.

Those are my questions, Chair.

The Second Vice-Chair (MPP Wayne Gates): Thank you very much.

We'll now move to the third party. MPP Smyth.

MPP Stephanie Smyth: Thank you so much for being here. Your experience is there—we can see it—and we appreciate your passion and your understanding of, obviously, your previous roles and the impact that it has now in this new position at the appeals tribunal.

You've served as a part-time member since 2023, and now you're hoping to take on these additional responsibilities as vice-chair. What have you seen, or has anything stood out to you in the process, that you would want to make a difference with when it comes to decision-making and how it happens and impacts on the people before you?

Ms. Sayanisa Suthanthirakaran: This is something that is important to me. Others may not agree, but I really appreciate in-person hearings. I really appreciate seeing people in real life. It makes a big difference in how the hearing goes and how comfortable people are in expressing what they're experiencing—both parties. And you really get a feel for what is going on. That's important to me. I don't know if it's the nurse in me and I liked that interaction. But I prefer in-person hearings, and currently at the tribunal, I volunteer to take a lot of the in-person hearings. So that's something that's important to me.

MPP Stephanie Smyth: How many would you say are virtual now versus in-person?

Ms. Sayanisa Suthanthirakaran: I don't have the statistics on that, unfortunately. For me, in terms of the hearings that I'm assigned, I think I've done about five or six in-person hearings, but I don't have the actual statistics of the tribunal itself.

MPP Stephanie Smyth: That's okay. I was just trying to get a feel myself of how many are virtual versus in-person.

Looking at your nursing background and having that direct experience with people—and then you come to a tribunal where—and you mentioned many times that this is the way it should be, and I understand that. But you have to be impartial. You have to make these decisions and take out that emotion, knowing that this could have a real impact.

When you look at what you've witnessed over the past few years, do you feel that the tribunal has been effective in that, and who do you feel really comes out winning in these cases?

Ms. Sayanisa Suthanthirakaran: I don't have a comment on who comes out winning, only because we deal with evidence that is before us. So for me, I'm able to stay objective because the principles of fairness and justice really rely on what is before us.

MPP Stephanie Smyth: The evidence you talk about.

Ms. Sayanisa Suthanthirakaran: Exactly. It could be objective medical evidence; it could be other evidence that's contained in the file. So that allows me to remain impartial as long as I anchor to actually what the evidence is. And that also includes oral testimony between the parties involved—

MPP Stephanie Smyth: Sorry to interrupt. So that evidence tells the full story—that's it? Because when you see this person in-person, evidence isn't always—and the personal submissions help round out that story and give context. So how much would context impact evidence?

Ms. Sayanisa Suthanthirakaran: We also have the ability to ask questions. We have the evidence before us, and we have the testimony as well. And with my experience sitting on the tripartite panel, we'll also take a caucus to come up with questions that we want answered so that we can perhaps fill in some of the gaps or get more information about what's actually happening.

So you're right, there are cases where there's lots of evidence but there are some things that we want to know more about, and so we would ask those questions.

MPP Stephanie Smyth: Right. And you feel there's enough time for that kind of questioning?

Ms. Sayanisa Suthanthirakaran: Oh, yes.

MPP Stephanie Smyth: Do you ever have concerns about people being able to attend tribunals and being able to testify on their behalf? Are there any barriers, do you find, to fairness?

Ms. Sayanisa Suthanthirakaran: Our tribunal has a pretty sophisticated, mature process in place with respect to supporting individuals attending hearings. Even for technology, there is a pre-hearing check where they connect with the member who's going to be showing up to make sure that they're able to join, including in-person—to make sure if there are any accommodations. So there are a lot of layers to ensuring that there's support available for the people who are appearing before us.

MPP Stephanie Smyth: And I guess good layers, you feel?

Ms. Sayanisa Suthanthirakaran: Yes.

MPP Stephanie Smyth: There are concerns about backlog, concerns about efficiency of timelines and stuff. Do you feel that that might be compromised, if you suddenly see a bump in the number of people appearing before the tribunals?

Ms. Sayanisa Suthanthirakaran: I don't think so, only because our hearing times are designated. And so, if we have a full-day hearing, then that time is dedicated to the people that are going to be before us.

MPP Stephanie Smyth: I just want to talk a little bit about your outside business interests. It's no wonder that you founded Cobra Safety, understanding what you have through your experience. Can you explain a bit more about what Cobra does?

0930

Ms. Sayanisa Suthanthirakaran: Yes. We work with organizations to help them develop programs for occupational health and safety. We don't get involved in anything in relation to regulatory interventions. This is all preventative program planning. I can give you an example: If they want to set up a workplace violence prevention program, we assist them with the best practices for writing policies and things like that for their organization.

Other than that, we don't get involved in anything else, and if there are any clients that we serve, they're all declared at the WSIAT, so they're never going to be in front of me.

MPP Stephanie Smyth: Right, okay, and I was going to say: What safeguards will you put in place to ensure that your business activities don't create any actual, potential, perceived conflicts with your tribunal responsibilities?

Ms. Sayanisa Suthanthirakaran: Our tribunal has a members' code of conduct, and so just even from the beginning, I have declared all of my conflicts and any potential concurrent conflicts as far as five to six years back, to make sure that they don't come before me. We also don't deal with anything WSIB-related or WSIAT, so it's strictly only health and safety and setting up programs.

MPP Stephanie Smyth: You did work as a WSIB claims specialist and occupational health nurse at Toyota Canada?

Ms. Sayanisa Suthanthirakaran: Yes.

MPP Stephanie Smyth: Okay. And then you held safety and disability management responsibilities for Scarborough Health Network. So how do you ensure that your prior experience doesn't lead you to possibly favour any institutional employer perspectives over the evidence that you're seeing in an appeal?

Ms. Sayanisa Suthanthirakaran: They're all declared as conflicts, so they won't be before me. But the WSIB claims specialist role was the return-to-work experience that I was talking about. My role was strictly supporting the return-to-work process of those WSIB claims or working with the case manager, the return-to-work specialist to get the injured worker back to work. I wasn't involved in the actual claims piece of it. That was a different organization they hired, I think.

MPP Stephanie Smyth: Do you have anything in your observations that you've seen over the past few years with the tribunal—is there any place you feel you could make an impact, something you'd want to see maybe changed or improved in this process?

Ms. Sayanisa Suthanthirakaran: I don't mean to be biased, but I think our tribunal is fantastic.

MPP Stephanie Smyth: That's good.

Ms. Sayanisa Suthanthirakaran: We have an amazing chair. She is probably one of the most responsive leaders I've ever met. We have a lot of learning opportunities as well, so people who feel like they want to learn more about things were encouraged to take part in those things.

Where I think I would be able to contribute the best value is maybe in some of the occupational medicine type of medical discussion paper reviews, which I do support the organization with, and that sort of clinical lens.

But other than that, I think it's a pretty robust, well-oiled machine, in my opinion.

MPP Stephanie Smyth: Does it take a lot of time to make a decision? How do feel about—I'm getting at taxing your time: You're busy; you've got a lot going on, which is great. You're obviously very passionate about the work that you do. Do you feel like you have the bandwidth?

Ms. Sayanisa Suthanthirakaran: I do, yes.

The Second Vice-Chair (MPP Wayne Gates): One minute.

Ms. Sayanisa Suthanthirakaran: In our hearings, when we make the decisions, we make them on the day that we have a hearing, so we all get together, and we deliberate at the end of it, and we arrive at a decision at the end. Even if our hearing is up until the last second, we stay until a decision is made, so it doesn't drag on.

The only times that maybe we need to have a discussion later is if anything needs to go into post-hearing or there's additional information that we need to obtain. But more often than not, we've come to a decision by the end of that hearing because that's sort of how we end it for ourselves, yes.

With respect to bandwidth: In terms of consulting, I make time for consulting around my WSIAT schedule.

MPP Stephanie Smyth: Great. Okay, well, thank you very much. I appreciate it.

Ms. Sayanisa Suthanthirakaran: Thank you.

The Second Vice-Chair (MPP Wayne Gates): Thank you, and thank you for your presentation. If you'd like to hang out with us for another half an hour until we get to the voting, you're more than welcome to. Thank you again. We appreciate it.

MS. HEIDI FRANCIS

Review of intended appointment, selected by government party: Heidi Francis, intended appointee as member, Consent and Capacity Board.

The Second Vice-Chair (MPP Wayne Gates): We will now move to the review of the second intended appointee. Heidi Francis is nominated as member of the Consent and Capacity Board, will be appearing virtually.

You may make a—

Interjections.

The Second Vice-Chair (MPP Wayne Gates): Oh, you're here. I'm just reading my notes, man.

You may make an initial statement at your discretion. Following this, there will be questions from the members of the committee. With the questioning, we will start with the government, followed by the official opposition and then the third party. Ten minutes will be allocated to each recognized party. Any time you take in your statement will be deducted from the time allocated to the government.

You can start.

Ms. Heidi Francis: Good morning. Thank you for your time today. I'm very happy to be here.

I am going to talk a little bit about my background. I've done a few words on the places I've been. I've been in a number of places, if you read my résumé, and as I started to think about this position before I applied, I started to go back through my mind. I thought it might be helpful if I touch on a few of those places and tell you what I have done there and why I think those things—I hope you agree—would be important for this role.

I'm Heidi Francis, as you know. I grew up in North York and I've lived in Woodbridge for the last 25 years. I'm a licensed lawyer in the province of Ontario. I started my career in Ontario working in transportation. I spent a few years outside of government also at 407 ETR as their first general counsel. This was one of the first P3 toll roads in Canada, so it was a new experience for everybody. There were a lot of stakeholders, and many had different perspectives on the toll road. I learned first-hand very early in my career the significance of treating people fairly and with respect and ensuring all voices are heard and seen to be heard, especially when making decisions or resolving disagreements.

I returned to government near the end of the summer of 2003, and then I spent the next 20 years in unique positions, some in the capacity as a lawyer and some as a senior manager. While with the Ministry of the Attorney General, I held the position of portfolio director. It was a newly created position in the civil law division. The world was changing. Issues were large now, and they crossed multiple ministries with multiple deputies and multiple ministers. I sharpened my ability to deal with the complexity of various and sometimes interlaced regulatory frameworks to impartially weigh evidence and varying ministry objectives while remaining open-minded and ensuring that all perspectives were considered. The experience also strengthened my analytical reasoning and communication skills.

While at the Ministry of Transportation, I held the position of assistant deputy minister of the road user safety division. We had a large number of stakeholders with very different perspectives, temperaments and very different views on how they should be regulated. I strengthened my abilities in remaining calm under pressure, managing emotionally charged environments and defusing volatile conflicts with steady, respectful authority to reach an alignment with stakeholders where possible. During this time, we were also able to bring forward a number of bills and we were able to broker it across all parties and get consensus.

While with the new name of Ministry of Public and Business Service Delivery and Procurement, I held the position of associate deputy minister with responsibility for five divisions that delivered internal services. I honed my ability to remain impartial and fair and work collaboratively to reach agreement on one operational plan with five assistant deputy ministers.

During the end of my career, COVID surprised all of us, and I was tasked with assembling and leading a supply chain for PPE for the non-health entities. I was also the chair of the allocation control table for scarce resources. I demonstrated my ability to work with not only tight timelines but in high uncertainty while creating new relationships quickly to ensure efficiency of workflow to stay within strict timelines. We were sourcing and delivering critical products across the province to a large number of stakeholders.

My last assignment in the Ontario public service brought me full circle back to transportation as the executive director of the Ottawa light rail commission. The commission was on a tight timeline: It had one year. The role was to assemble a team to support the work of the commission and its legal team. I was responsible for sourcing, negotiating and drafting all contracts. This work brought together much of my skills from my operational, legal and policy career. I was leveraging management operational skills, including my knowledge of large infrastructure. The commission was governed by the principles of natural justice and procedural fairness, and it also was a complex evidentiary evaluation.

0940

For almost 20 years, I've taught at the Toronto Metropolitan University. I have taught students various regulatory structures—federal and provincial. I have also taught them how to answer a question properly. TMU assessments require students to spot the issue, articulate it well, know the rule of law and apply the relevant facts for a defensible outcome.

I have extensive experience as a director on several non-profit boards and currently also sit on a federal board. I am accustomed to boardroom dynamics where consensus must be built among peers with very different areas of expertise. I have always respected and enjoyed the interdisciplinary model of decision-making.

Lastly, I volunteer in my community at a local farmers' market in the summer, on weekends. I've always volunteered in some capacity, whether that be on the community board, mentoring, coaching or, even earlier in my career, pro bono mediation.

Thank you for listening to me. I look forward to our discussion.

The Second Vice-Chair (MPP Wayne Gates): Thank you very much for your presentation.

We'll start with the government. You have four minutes and 37 seconds remaining.

Mr. Deepak Anand: Thank you for coming here. Putting in your name is not an easy thing, and so we want to ask—

The Second Vice-Chair (MPP Wayne Gates): Excuse me. Can you move your mike so people can hear you? Thank you very much.

Mr. Deepak Anand: Chair, can you hear me, please?

The Second Vice-Chair (MPP Wayne Gates): Yes, thank you.

Mr. Deepak Anand: Back to you, ma'am—thank you for coming and attending this.

I want to ask you a very simple question: Can you give an example of a situation during one of your previous roles where you had to balance and consider a number of priorities to reach a decision, and how did you do that?

Ms. Heidi Francis: Actually, in every role I've had to do that, because I've been at senior levels.

During COVID—I guess the hardest one would be the allocation control table; there just weren't enough supplies. That actually was a framework which was decided between health and non-health entities—how we would actually distribute. So that was done upfront. There was real strict adherence to going through that. But prior to that decision, you also had to hear from the table if anything had changed.

That's one decision, but I also had that on boards as well. We make pretty big strategic decisions, and you've got to listen to every single person out there, whether they have finance, whether they have operation, whether they have health care experience. So it has been my whole life.

Mr. Deepak Anand: And how do you think we will share it with this role? How can you take that and translate into this role? Quickly—and then I have to move to the next MPP.

Ms. Heidi Francis: It's an interdisciplinary panel, right? So I think one of the things is you've got to have some respect and understand and listen well to what your panel members' perspectives are, because those are important as well. This was set up as a tripartite.

I think the other thing is you have to really listen carefully to who is before you. You have to know what is being said, and then you have to have the ability to tease out of that what's relevant and what's not relevant and then apply it to the legislative framework and the requirements of it.

Mr. Deepak Anand: Thank you so much. Over to MPP—

The Second Vice-Chair (MPP Wayne Gates): MPP Sabawy.

Mr. Sheref Sabawy: Thank you very much, Ms. Heidi, for the presentation and the rich background we got from you.

Recognizing that conflicts of interest could exist anywhere, what steps would you take if you realized that you had a personal or professional relationship with a party appearing before you?

Ms. Heidi Francis: Again, it's my whole life, being a government servant, being on boards. You look and you take very seriously conflicts of interest, real or imagined, because at the end of the day, it's the integrity of the process and the decision.

For me, what I do is I'm proactive; I'm not reactive. And in this case, for here, I spoke to the chairs of both my boards, and I asked for a clearance from each of them that this would be fine—to sit on those boards and also have this role. Otherwise, I'd have a tough decision.

So I would be very proactive in this role. I imagine that I would look at the files ahead of time, before they're opened. If I find that there's a conflict or a perceived conflict, I would approach the chair right away. I would make

sure that it is disclosed. I would make sure it is on the record as well, if I was proceeding with it.

You adhere to the legislation around conflicts and the rules around this board as well.

Mr. Sheref Sabawy: Have you had any incidents before where you had a situation where you had to declare that there is a conflict?

Ms. Heidi Francis: Absolutely. Just recently, I had a friend apply for an appointment on the board that I'm sitting on—

The Second Vice-Chair (MPP Wayne Gates): One minute.

Ms. Heidi Francis: —so I recused myself from even looking at the candidates, and they made a choice on that.

I've done that at 407 also. Coming into the government, I completely put a bright line between my relationships, my work and the work I was now doing.

Mr. Sheref Sabawy: Thank you.

The Second Vice-Chair (MPP Wayne Gates): MPP Smith.

Mr. David Smith: Thank you, Ms. Francis, for your presentation here today.

My question is: How do you plan to contribute to the board's objective in ensuring matters related to individual autonomy and capacity of people making decisions related to health, treatment and safety of the public are balanced?

Ms. Heidi Francis: Again, there's wisdom in putting a panel together that had three perspectives. So you have the legal, you have the clinical and you have the—

The Second Vice-Chair (MPP Wayne Gates): Thank you very much. Sorry to interrupt, but we have to move on to the official opposition and MPP Gilmour.

MPP Alexa Gilmour: Thank you so much, Ms. Francis, for coming before us. You are a person of great achievement. I'm always happy to see someone with so much accomplishment behind them offering to serve the people of Ontario, so thank you for that.

A couple of just pro forma questions: Have you ever made any political donations to a party, and/or do you belong to a political party?

Ms. Heidi Francis: No, I do not, and no, I have not.

MPP Alexa Gilmour: When you decided to put your name forward, were you approached or did you speak to anybody from the government or otherwise about this?

Ms. Heidi Francis: Absolutely not.

MPP Alexa Gilmour: I have mentioned your achievements, and they are massively impressive. Among other things, you headed a team that enabled Ontario's pandemic supply. That's impressive. But I'm struggling as I look at your résumé—we've got transportation, we've got Attorney General, we've got business law, and even in your volunteer life—to find the kind of specific skills and experience that I would expect in this position. For example, have you ever worked as a litigator?

Ms. Heidi Francis: No, I have never worked as a litigator, but I have been in litigation and managed it at 407. So I have experience with—

MPP Alexa Gilmour: Have you ever held a position in administrative law?

Ms. Heidi Francis: I have not held a position in administrative law, but working in government, I understand administrative law.

MPP Alexa Gilmour: Sure. And have you actually ever actually practiced as a lawyer?

Ms. Heidi Francis: Absolutely.

MPP Alexa Gilmour: Okay. The other piece that I'm looking for: You have put your name forward for the Consent and Capacity Board. This reviews patients in dire situations where we are talking about their mental health, their ability to consent, talking about administrative capacity law. Again, I see transportation, I see business law, I see Attorney General, but in your résumé, even in your volunteer life, I see nothing in the space of mental health and of capacity.

What is your experience? Even when you spoke at the beginning, you didn't mention mental health once. What is your experience, skills, knowledge of mental health and of capacity and consent?

Ms. Heidi Francis: Great question—I had looked at this very hard before I came, and talked to a lot of people in that area as well.

In terms of experience, when I was at Ministry of Transportation, I was the registrar. We were also responsible for licensing, which can be capacity issues. One of the things that I was most proud of is that I worked with Baycrest and Sunnybrook in bringing in a cognitive test for seniors, because I realized very quickly that this was a cognitive issue, not something that was a technical issue in driving. I had under me there a third of the division who were analysts for medical review. I stay very close to all of the business lines I have.

I also have sat on two hospitals, so I understand that also, the mental health issue, because it's strained also in the hospitals. I have some personal experience as well from my personal life with people that have gone through this as well as people that have practised before the Consent and Capacity Board.

MPP Alexa Gilmour: Thank you, and I appreciate that you have personal experiences of mental health. But I think you might be willing to agree with me that licensing cognitive tests around and for seniors is very different than the psychiatric consent that we're talking about in this case.

I'm not a lawyer, so I don't know, but my researchers do tell me that there's a handful of cases that form the bedrock of Ontario mental health consent and administrative capacity law—just a handful. So I'm wondering if you can tell me about the impact of Fleming v. Reid, for example.

0950

Ms. Heidi Francis: I wouldn't have that now. I have some cases when I've looked at them, but I just would like to add that when I looked at this particular role, there is a reason that there's a clinical person on the panel, and there's a reason there's a lawyer on the panel. I felt very comfortable when I put my name forward that I could fulfill the role of a lawyer.

I also know from my background that I feel very comfortable that I can pick up anything that's technical or an expertise that's not mine. I've demonstrated that through—I

didn't have shared services experience. I didn't have COVID or procurement experience. It's something that I will pick up over time.

But I think the role of the lawyer literally is ensuring that this is a fair hearing, that everybody has a chance to be heard, that the process is followed, that timelines are adhered to, that evidence comes before them and that relevant evidence is the evidence that's considered—has the ability to listen to their colleagues and understand and incorporate their perspectives in the decision and ensure it stays within the legislative framework and the requirements of the legislation. That, I believe, I can do.

MPP Alexa Gilmour: Sure, and I agree. That's why I was pulling up these bedrock cases. That one's pretty obscure, but I'm wondering—any of these, like Starson v. Swayze—if you've had a chance to look at these. I'm asking because I understand that the average hearing is two hours long. You're not going to have time to look up stuff and present it that quickly.

Ms. Heidi Francis: Well, I would be prepared when I got to a hearing. I'm not appointed yet, but I have read a lot of case law. I've just recently taught one on consumer protection, which I'm not, also. I can read case law, I can understand it and I'm a really big reader and preparer. I have read some of those. I had to do a decision, and I took great care in doing that and reading the case law around that. So I don't feel that I would have a disadvantage.

I actually think it might be an advantage not to have somebody so deep in that, because you may have a bias, and that takes away from the role of being impartial and being a lawyer in this role.

MPP Alexa Gilmour: I understand that. I still wonder about that body of evidence, the skills of litigation there.

I know that you've managed complex systems—very complex systems. You spoke about that—complex policies. You've worked at the very highest levels of government, but in this role, with every case that you hear, you're going to be walking that tightrope between protecting an individual's autonomy and ensuring rapid access to treatment for some of the most vulnerable people in the province. You don't have that experience in your legal work or in your business work, and none of that has anything to do with designing systems or developing policies.

These individuals have their lives literally hanging in the balance in that moment. It's a daunting challenge, I think, for people with years of experience. And I'm wondering how you, without having prepared for today—but you will prepare when you get this appointment, presumably—how are you going to make this kind of determination?

Ms. Heidi Francis: What determination is that?

MPP Alexa Gilmour: Well, that tightrope piece between protecting the individual's autonomy but ensuring rapid access for their care.

Ms. Heidi Francis: I'm just going to add one comment and then go back to your question.

MPP Alexa Gilmour: Yes.

Ms. Heidi Francis: You know, when I was at 407, I managed the litigation for the first class action suit. That was new also. Working with the lawyers, my job is to manage it and ensure that we had carriage of the file properly. So it's not that I can't understand it; I've done it through different pieces. But I've not been a litigator; I've been something else.

In terms of protecting people that are vulnerable—and I take a personal interest in this because my daughter actually had a learning disability growing up. I know how hard it was to navigate the health care system and the educational system without any money, because I was just a student. So I take this very seriously.

I think the best way you can protect anybody is to ensure that they have a safe environment, that they have a meaningful opportunity to present their evidence, that they understand the process that's going on and then you stick to the legislation. Because at the end of the day, it always comes down to what evidence is before you, and does that evidence meet the test of the legislation.

Now, there's a clinician there and there's a public member there as well, so you have a broader spectrum. And as a lawyer, you prepare. I fully expect that if I'm appointed, the first thing I will do when I get home is start to prepare, and I had done some of that earlier.

MPP Alexa Gilmour: I appreciate that answer. I think, when we're dealing with people with mental health challenges severe enough to call their competence into question—

The Second Vice-Chair (MPP Wayne Gates): One minute.

MPP Alexa Gilmour: —we need to ensure, here in this committee, that the people that are stepping forward are stepping forward ready to take on that challenge.

I want to say thank you for being here. I think you're going to face some real challenges should you go forward with this application. I really do hope that you'll take the time and the work that's needed to meet these individuals, because at this moment I haven't heard that. I'm concerned about the reasons why you may have put your name in this particular tribunal, versus some other space where you've got incredible competence.

Ms. Heidi Francis: Well, when I looked at this, I took it seriously. I mean, I've had a great career; I'm doing things that I want to do and can contribute.

This is something that's really near and dear to my heart. I do believe that people need to have a fair hearing. There's no doubt in my mind about that. I know that I have the expertise to do this and stay impartial—

The Second Vice-Chair (MPP Wayne Gates): Thank you very much. We appreciate your presentation. If you would like to hang around for a couple of minutes, we're going to do—

MPP Alexa Gilmour: There's still the—

The Second Vice-Chair (MPP Wayne Gates): Oh, I'm sorry. I missed one.

Interjection.

The Second Vice-Chair (MPP Wayne Gates): You know what? I got thrown off by MPP Fraser coming in. It kind of threw me off a bit.

MPP Smyth.

MPP Stephanie Smyth: Thank you, Ms. Francis, for being here. I truly appreciate your work in public service. Your résumé is so impressive.

If I am to follow in the line of questioning of my colleague, I guess the concern is that we're dealing with the most vulnerable, and you want people there who—yes, it's a tripartite tribunal or capacity board. I understand that your role is legal. I understand that there's no deep background in mental health that you've dealt with.

When you thought about joining the Consent and Capacity Board, did you think, "Okay, yes, I am a lawyer. But do I know enough about the types of cases I'm going to be listening to, dealing with and making decisions on"?

Ms. Heidi Francis: Absolutely. I took this very seriously. I mean, as you see from my résumé, I've done lots of things.

I looked at this and I talked to a lot of people, and I thought, "This one really interests me." It's an interdisciplinary panel. It does important things for the community, for people.

I know that I'm fair. I know I'm impartial. I know I can be prepared. And I also know that I can manage a hearing very well, having done a million meetings with very contentious people. And so I know that I can add to the tribunal in the sense that I can keep the time limits, for sure. I can ensure that I can keep it calm and respectful, because that's something I really believe in.

I know that I am uber-prepared in everything I do and I will be the same here. I know that I can work very well with my colleagues and understand their perspectives, as well as, if I am appointed, understand what the law is around mental health. I did take time—this was a while ago, when I first had my interview—to read some of the cases. They were very similar in some ways, and then there were some that stood out as the hallmarks.

So, I wouldn't do something I feel I couldn't do or get up to speed with. I know I can do this and be very impartial and understand what it is I'm doing. I don't have any hesitancy with that.

I'm not saying it's going to be easy in the sense that there's a lot of work, but I've never taken a job that has not had a lot of work behind it.

MPP Stephanie Smyth: Would you ever consider additional training in mental health law or capacity assessments? Is that offered to you? Are you able to seek that out?

Ms. Heidi Francis: Absolutely. You can see from my résumé and my educational background that I'm a big learner.

At the end of my career, I actually took a coaching certificate—not to coach but to learn to switch from mentor to coach, which is a very different role. It's one where you have to have acute listening, and so that was one of the things I wanted to do.

So, yes, absolutely, if it was offered, I would take that. And even if not offered, I would do that.

MPP Stephanie Smyth: Right. If that opportunity is there, it might be something to consider.

It's maybe a nitty-gritty kind of question, but how would you then approach a case where a person's wishes really differ from the health professional's assessment of their capacity or treatment needs? What principles would guide your decision then?

Ms. Heidi Francis: Again, you have to go back to what the relevant evidence before you is, and does it meet the tests of the legislation—which is exactly the same way we have taught students for 20 years. So you'll listen to the person's wishes, but it really comes down to the evidence.

MPP Stephanie Smyth: Have you talked to other lawyers who have sat on the board, who might have had similar experience to yours—not as much in mental health?

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Ms. Heidi Francis: I've talked to lawyers that have been on other boards, and I've talked to lawyers that practise in mental health. I really took a lot of time to—because that was one of the questions I had, would this be an issue, because I wasn't looking for just a position; I was looking for something that I could contribute, enjoy and make a difference, a positive difference.

MPP Stephanie Smyth: People before the board could be experiencing some mental health challenges—often are—or having difficulty even navigating the hearing. It is all daunting and not familiar, frightening. How would you ensure that they understand the process? We talk very legalese here—but to make sure that they have a really meaningful opportunity to participate and be treated with the dignity that they deserve?

Ms. Heidi Francis: Well, hopefully, they're represented, they have a lawyer also as an advocate for them. But one of the things I am very good at is reading a room and seeing if somebody feels safe and comfortable in contributing.

I think the job also here is to ensure that they have a meaningful opportunity to participate, so they need to understand what the process is. They have to understand what the board is deciding. Plain language, which I use all the time—I mean, I teach students, right? To teach a complicated subject, you use plain language and examples. So I would do the same here. I would be very acutely aware of their emotional well-being at the time and then also gently steer them back to what we're there to decide upon, because it's an emotionally charged thing, and you can go off on tangents. That is the job: to bring them back gently and respectfully to what needs to be discussed and what needs to be on the table.

MPP Stephanie Smyth: Thank you very much for your time.

Ms. Heidi Francis: Thank you.

The Second Vice-Chair (MPP Wayne Gates): Thank you for your presentation. If you'd like to hang around for the vote, which will take place very soon, you're more than welcome.

We will now consider the concurrence of the two intended appointees considered. First is the intended appointment of Nisa Karan. Can I have a motion? MPP Dowie.

Mr. Andrew Dowie: I move concurrence in the intended appointment of Nisa Karan, nominated as vice-chair of the Workplace Safety and Insurance Appeals Tribunal.

The Second Vice-Chair (MPP Wayne Gates): Any discussion?

MPP Alexa Gilmour: Recorded vote, please.

The Second Vice-Chair (MPP Wayne Gates): Recorded vote. Are the members ready to vote?

Ayes

Anand, Beattie, Bresee, Dowie, Fraser, Gilmour, Pierre, Sabawy, David Smith.

The Second Vice-Chair (MPP Wayne Gates): All those opposed? Carried.

Congratulations.

We will now consider the intended appointment of Heidi Francis. Can I have a motion? MPP Dowie.

Mr. Andrew Dowie: I move concurrence in the intended appointment of Heidi Francis, nominated as member of the Consent and Capacity Board.

MPP Alexa Gilmour: Recorded vote, please, Chair.

The Second Vice-Chair (MPP Wayne Gates): Okay, thank you.

Are members ready to vote?

Ayes

Anand, Beattie, Bresee, Dowie, Pierre, Sabawy, David Smith.

Nays

Gilmour.

The Second Vice-Chair (MPP Wayne Gates): Carried.

Congratulations.

COMMITTEE BUSINESS

The Second Vice-Chair (MPP Wayne Gates): The last item of business is extending one certificate. The deadline to review the intended appointments selected from the October 2, 2026, certificate is set to expire on November 1, 2026. Is there unanimous consent to extend the certificate by 30 days? No? Okay.

The last item of business is a motion filed by MPP Smyth. Who would like to move the motion? MPP Fraser.

Mr. John Fraser: I move that, pursuant to standing order 110(f), the committee conduct an agency review of the Workplace Safety and Insurance Board (WSIB), including the significant workforce reductions and office closures across Ontario; and

That in consultation with the Chair, the Clerk of the Committee schedule hearings by November 19, 2026; and

That Jeff Lang, the president and CEO of the Workplace Safety and Insurance Board, be invited to appear as a witness before the committee, and that the witness shall have 10 minutes to make an opening statement, followed by one hour of questions and answers divided into two rounds of 10 minutes for the official opposition members of the committee, two rounds of 10 minutes for the third party members of the committee, and two rounds of 10 minutes for the government members of the committee; and

That following the hearing, legislative research provide the committee members with a summary of the hearings; and

That the committee meet for report writing no later than five sessional days following the hearing; and

That the subcommittee on committee business be authorized to revise the hearing dates, report-writing dates and deadlines if necessary.

The Second Vice-Chair (MPP Wayne Gates): Thank you very much.

Any discussion? MPP Fraser.

Mr. John Fraser: I'm putting forward this motion out of very serious concern to what's happening here in Ontario. There are 10 regional offices of WSIB, 721 employees. That's 721 families who have been given the choice to move to downtown Toronto or lose their job. So far, out of 721, can you guess how many have chosen to move? About a hundred.

Think about your family. Think about where you live. Now, I know some of you live in Toronto; some of you don't. The Premier says to you, "You know what? You can't live there anymore. You're going to have to pick up your whole family and move them to Toronto—all of them, your kids, your wife—maybe leave the rest of your family." And at a time when Ontario has a 7% unemployment rate and jobs outside of the centres like Toronto and Ottawa, in the smaller centres, are scarce and people are hurting, I'd like to understand why this is a good idea. It doesn't feel that way.

The second thing I'd like to talk about—I have three things—is that Mr. Lang is currently talking about AI and how much AI they're going to use and how that will reduce the number of people who work for WSIB. To me, that's not right. The Premier talks about protecting jobs. You're not protecting jobs. People at the Workplace Safety and Insurance Board, with families, are going to lose their jobs. I think it would be good, as a committee that's responsible for agencies, that's responsible for WSIB and things like Metrolinx, to ask some questions. I'm only asking for one hour—one hour—of Mr. Lang's time and a few more hours of this committee's time.

The third thing I want to say, and it's related but not essential to this—I'll be done quick; I can see you watching the clock—is, Bill 105 got to second reading. We finished early. It never got to third reading, which is really unusual for this government. So I'm trying to figure out why those things—and there's some debate about what's in Bill 105. We didn't disagree with everything. But there are some really good things, like increasing the benefits for injured workers. There's another good thing, and that is coverage for workers in retirement homes and residential facilities. They've been asking for 20 years. You made them wait five more months. So you have to ask yourself the question, why are people waiting?

I know why they're waiting: because the people who pay them said to the Premier, "Don't do this. Don't do this." So I want to put on the record right now that, if the

Premier and this government somehow go back on their promise to those workers, there will be hell to pay. And I ask that we simply invite the person responsible for WSIB, the head, the CEO, here to tell us what's going on and why, and I hope I can have your support.

The Second Vice-Chair (MPP Wayne Gates): Any further discussion? MPP Gilmour.

MPP Alexa Gilmour: Thank you to my colleague for bringing this motion before us. While it's the first time I've heard the motion, we have also been very concerned with what's happening in WSIB and the closures of those offices, the layoffs, the workers that have to move.

1010

But also, we've been hearing from injured workers across the province, especially in northern Ontario, that are expressing concerns that the regional needs of one area cannot be met by individuals who live in a different area. There are pieces, aspects of being in the north, in the rural areas, that are different from being in a city like Toronto with these resources.

So I think it is really important, not just for the workers at WSIB that have been asked to relocate their entire families, that are facing a CEO that is talking about job replacement with AI, but also for the people that they serve. These are the most vulnerable in our province. They have served us well. They've been injured on the job, and then it feels to them—and it might be more than feeling; it might be reality—that they've been abandoned.

I think that this committee's job is to ask good questions and to get those concerns resolved before we see more injured workers, before we see a higher job loss. This province has an above-average unemployment rate, the highest since 2012. Even in COVID, there was a lower rate. Our unemployment rate is high, and we need to ensure that workers have good jobs at this moment in time. This government is always talking about tariff-proofing and the importance of jobs, and this particular move to close offices doesn't make sense in that context.

So I support the motion. I hope the government members will support the motion because that is our job to do. We would be negating our role as committee members if we don't support this motion, so I speak in favour of it. Thank you.

The Second Vice-Chair (MPP Wayne Gates): Any further discussion? MPP Fraser.

Mr. John Fraser: I'd like to thank my colleague for her support of this motion. I'm not the only one putting this thing forward; this has been a big effort by the two opposition parties. The government has had no debate or discussion about this move. Nobody brought this up. Nobody said anything about this.

It's funny how it coincided with Bill 105, which brought long-awaited benefits to workers, and they're announcing people losing their jobs in WSIB at the same time. You have got to wonder, was that a coincidence? I don't believe in coincidences—at least not around this place.

What's happening to these people is unfair. Again, I want you to think about it. I want you to think about your family. Think of a brother or sister's family. Somebody tells them, "You know what? Your job's moving. It's going to downtown Toronto, where it's expensive, hard to get around—maybe not the place you want your kids to grow up in. Maybe you love your community. Maybe you grew up there. Maybe you're working there because somebody else in your family worked there before."

We all have constit offices, right? We all see people. We all hear people's stories—and not just WSIB stories, but when we do, they're often tragic stories. They're people who have lost their income, become disabled and they can't work at the thing that they love or the thing they learned how to do. Our work is such a big part of our lives, so there's so much moral injury that can occur in a job like that. We're not talking about people who are pushing paper.

This committee will end before I'm finished. I just want you to think about it. I want you to think about the people who work in your constituency offices, what they hear every day, what they do for you. They're good people. I have great people in my office.

The people at WSIB are in the community. They're helping people whose lives have been turned upside down by something that wasn't their own fault, and their lives are not the same anymore. They need someone to be there for them. What we're saying to those people who are there for them in their communities is, "You're gone. And by the way, the rest of you folks who work here"—

The Second Vice-Chair (MPP Wayne Gates): It's now 10:15, and the committee now stands adjourned until November 5, 2026.

The committee adjourned at 1015.

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