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(Hansard)**

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**Journal
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(Hansard)**

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**Standing Committee on
General Government**

Committee business

**Comité permanent des
affaires gouvernementales**

Travaux de comité

2nd Session
42nd Parliament

Wednesday 3 November 2021

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Mercredi 3 novembre 2021

Chair: Logan Kanapathi
Clerk: Isaiah Thorning

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ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

**STANDING COMMITTEE ON
GENERAL GOVERNMENT**

**COMITÉ PERMANENT DES
AFFAIRES GOUVERNEMENTALES**

Wednesday 3 November 2021

Mercredi 3 novembre 2021

The committee met at 1600 in room 151 and by video conference.

The Chair (Mr. Logan Kanapathi): Good afternoon. The Standing Committee on General Government will now come to order.

We have the following members on Zoom: MPP Bob Bailey, MPP Guy Bourgouin, MPP Chris Glover, MPP Mike Harris, MPP Sabawy, MPP Daisy Wai, MPP Dave Smith, MPP Catherine Fife. MPP Will Bouma is not here. MPP Jill Andrew is not here.

We are also joined by staff from legislative research, Hansard, and broadcast and recording.

Please speak slowly and clearly and wait until I recognize you before starting to speak. Since it could take a little time for your audio and video to come up after I recognize you, please take a brief pause before beginning.

As always, all comments should go through the Chair, please.

Are there any questions before we begin?

COMMITTEE BUSINESS

The Chair (Mr. Logan Kanapathi): Seeing none, on the agenda is committee business. Are there any motions? MPP Dave Smith, please go ahead.

Mr. Dave Smith: I move that the committee enter closed session for the purpose of organizing committee business and that broadcasting staff be permitted to remain in the closed session meeting for the purpose of operating the electronic meeting technology.

The Chair (Mr. Logan Kanapathi): Is there any discussion or comment? MPP Catherine Fife, please go ahead.

Ms. Catherine Fife: The New Democrats have no issue with having a public meeting to discuss the scheduling and, of course, the need to have hearings on this piece of legislation. We're fine to keep this an open meeting and public.

The Chair (Mr. Logan Kanapathi): Are there any further discussion or comments? MPP Chris Glover, please go ahead.

Mr. Chris Glover: What is the purpose of going into a closed session? What is the topic of this meeting that would require a closed session where the public can't see what we're doing?

The Chair (Mr. Logan Kanapathi): Any further discussion or comments? MPP Dave Smith, please go ahead.

Mr. Dave Smith: We seem to be going through this every time we do this. It has been the practice now, for the entire three years that we have been in government, that we have a closed session meeting with either the sub-committee or the committee as a group to discuss our committee business. That has been the procedure for the entire time. I'm not sure why questions are coming up yet again about why we're doing something we have been doing for three and a half years.

The Chair (Mr. Logan Kanapathi): MPP Guy Bourgouin.

Mr. Guy Bourgouin: It has only been a practice since this government has been in power. We don't see the need for going to closed sessions. These meetings should be transparent, should be open to the public. Since you've been in government, this is the practice, which it should not be. I think if we talk about transparency, this should be available to the whole public. We don't see the need to do this. Yes, we're going to bring it up every time, because I believe we need to be transparent. It has been a practice since you've been in government, so I beg to differ; prior to that, it was not.

The Chair (Mr. Logan Kanapathi): MPP Catherine Fife, please go ahead.

Ms. Catherine Fife: I think that we've made the case that there's no reason to move in camera and to have these discussions in private about how we are going to engage with the public on Bill 13, the Supporting People and Businesses Act. There's a lot of interest from the public on, specifically, schedule 2, around cannabis for municipalities. There's a lot of interest, of course, on schedule 10, around the Environmental Assessment Act, and certainly around the Mining Act. We've heard from stakeholders; they reached out to us. They said, "When can we hear what the government is planning to do with this legislation?" We said, "There's an organizational meeting today at 4 o'clock in the people's House." We're doing the people's work, and the practice of closing the door on the public engagement on a piece of legislation like this is not good for our democracy.

MPP Smith is right: They started this practice. It was not the practice prior to that, and I think it really does set a dangerous precedent.

It shouldn't surprise MPP Smith that we're going to raise these issues, because stakeholders want to hear how we are going to navigate this piece of legislation at the committee level. It's a perfectly reasonable request.

I would ask for a recorded vote, once again, on this organizational meeting, as people vote on this motion that we've actually just seen for the first time about two minutes ago.

The Chair (Mr. Logan Kanapathi): MPP Mike Harris.

Mr. Mike Harris: I'd like to remind members of the committee, and especially those members who have been here longer than the past three and a half years, that typically this type of organizational work would be done during subcommittee business and then the general public would find out from that point forward where we would be going with this, when hearings would be, how they would be able to get in contact, how long they would have for their submissions etc. But it has been the opposition—and I will remind everyone that that is the NDP—that has been blocking these subcommittees meetings and making sure that we end up having to come to these full committee votes anyway and, quite frankly, trying to clog up the system and not making it work very efficiently.

The members here on the committee are entitled, obviously, to say whatever they like. But when we're talking about facts being facts, let's make sure that we're being a little bit more forthcoming with what we're saying to the people of the province of Ontario.

The Chair (Mr. Logan Kanapathi): MPP Chris Glover.

Mr. Chris Glover: In response to what MPP Harris said: If the subcommittee meetings were held in camera—again, this is what you talked about—the topics here, when hearings would be held and that kind of thing on an important bill like Bill 13—there's no discussion there that should not be in the public.

If we are going to have a transparent democracy, then how we are going to consult with the community and the residents of Ontario about a bill that's going to affect them and their businesses—we should be having that discussion in a public setting. This meeting could be in a public session. We don't need to go into a closed session now, and we don't need to go to a subcommittee where it would also be a closed session, where the public would not be able to listen to the discussion that's being had. This is a bill that's going to affect people's lives, and if that's the case, they should be able to listen to every stage of the process, including when hearings are going to be held and how the bill is going to make its way through the committee hearings. I don't see any need for this to go into a closed session.

I would encourage all of my colleagues to vote against this current motion to go into closed session, and to keep this meeting open and transparent for the public to see.

The Chair (Mr. Logan Kanapathi): MPP Daisy Wai.

Mrs. Daisy Wai: I believe we have been open and transparent all the time. But this is very clear: The purpose of right now is for the organizing of the committee business. It's really not anything too much to do with the public. We will just make things efficient and do it reasonably. I don't see any reason why we cannot have and should not have a closed session, and just agree with the things that we have to agree on on both sides, and then start the meeting

properly for the public. These organizational things will not impact whichever way the public needs to know about the process of what we're going to do next.

The Chair (Mr. Logan Kanapathi): Questions or comments? MPP Chris Glover.

Mr. Chris Glover: I'll ask the Chair—I think I know, but I just want to make sure: What is the restriction on the members of the committee of what is said and done in the closed session?

1610

The Chair (Mr. Logan Kanapathi): The closed session, or in-camera meeting, traditionally is off the record to keep the confidentiality. That's the purpose of the in-camera meeting. In my municipal time, I attended in-camera meetings, and it's the same concept.

Mr. Chris Glover: So whatever is said in there is confidential, and we are not allowed to repeat to the public what is said there. Is that correct?

The Chair (Mr. Logan Kanapathi): Yes.

Mr. Chris Glover: Okay. So as far as transparency goes, even those of us in opposition are restricted by the Legislature from talking about what is said in the closed session. So this is a completely non-transparent process. I'm sure the public would like to know what is being said. When you go into the closed process, when you put a muzzle on everybody who is part of that process, then you raise suspicions about what is actually being done there. That's why I strongly encourage all of the members of this committee, including the government members, to vote against this motion and to keep this meeting open and transparent, so there are no suspicions raised about what the government is doing and why they're asking to go into a closed session.

The Chair (Mr. Logan Kanapathi): Thank you. I'd like to check the attendance.

MPP Mike Schreiner is in the room. Thank you for being here.

MPP Amarjot Sandhu, could you please confirm that you are the MPP and you are currently in Ontario?

Mr. Amarjot Sandhu: This is Amarjot Sandhu, and I'm calling from Brampton, Ontario.

The Chair (Mr. Logan Kanapathi): Thank you. We'll carry on with the meeting.

Any further discussion or comments? Seeing none—*Interjection.*

The Chair (Mr. Logan Kanapathi): Recorded vote.

Ayes

Bailey, Harris, Sabawy, Sandhu, Dave Smith, Wai.

Nays

Bourgouin, Fife, Glover, Schreiner.

The Chair (Mr. Logan Kanapathi): The motion is carried.

We need two minutes to go into the closed session. This committee will break for two minutes.

The committee continued in closed session at 1615.

STANDING COMMITTEE ON GENERAL GOVERNMENT

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Vice-Chair / Vice-Président

Mr. Mike Schreiner (Guelph G)

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Mr. Robert Bailey (Sarnia–Lambton PC)
Mr. Will Bouma (Brantford–Brant PC)
Mr. Guy Bourgouin (Mushkegowuk–James Bay / Mushkegowuk–Baie James ND)
Mr. Chris Glover (Spadina–Fort York ND)
Mr. Mike Harris (Kitchener–Conestoga PC)
Mr. Logan Kanapathi (Markham–Thornhill PC)
Mr. Sheref Sabawy (Mississauga–Erin Mills PC)
Mr. Amarjot Sandhu (Brampton West / Brampton-Ouest PC)
Mr. Mike Schreiner (Guelph G)
Mrs. Daisy Wai (Richmond Hill PC)

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