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(Hansard)**

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des débats  
(Hansard)**

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**Standing Committee  
on Procedure  
and House Affairs**

Television broadcast system

**Comité permanent  
de la procédure  
et des affaires de la Chambre**

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Wednesday 7 September 2022

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Mercredi 7 septembre 2022

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Chair: Jennifer K. French  
Clerk: Valerie Quioc Lim

Présidente : Jennifer K. French  
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House 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  
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Service linguistique et des publications parlementaires  
Salle 500, aile ouest, Édifice du Parlement  
111, rue Wellesley ouest, Queen's Park  
Toronto ON M7A 1A2  
Téléphone, 416-325-7400  
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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

**STANDING COMMITTEE  
ON PROCEDURE  
AND HOUSE AFFAIRS**

**LE COMITÉ PERMANENT  
DE LA PROCÉDURE  
ET DES AFFAIRES DE LA CHAMBRE**

Wednesday 7 September 2022

Mercredi 7 septembre 2022

*The committee met at 1300 in room 151.*

**TELEVISION BROADCAST SYSTEM**

**The Chair (Ms. Jennifer K. French):** Good afternoon, members. The Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs will now come to order.

I would like to welcome Todd Decker, the Clerk of the Legislative Assembly, and Michael Donofrio, director of Broadcast and Recording Service. They're here today to provide us with a briefing on the assembly's television broadcast system, and then after that we will be going on a tour, just so folks know.

Welcome. The floor is yours.

**The Clerk of the Assembly (Mr. Todd Decker):** Thank you, Chair. It's a pleasure to be here with you this afternoon to talk about the Ont.Parl broadcasting system. As Clerk of the Assembly, I'm extremely proud of Ont.Parl and the work that it does, and most especially the very dedicated, talented, professional staff we have, in this room and unseen places that we'll see during the tour, who make Ont.Parl work and bring Parliament to the people of Ontario.

Mr. Oosterhoff reminded me that it has been several years—it was actually in the last Parliament—since Mike and I last met with the predecessor to this committee to talk about Ont.Parl, and a lot has happened in that time. The scope of Ont.Parl has increased, the number of venues that are being broadcast has increased and, because of the support of the committee at that time and the Board of Internal Economy, we've been able to improve and increase the services that Ont.Parl provides, bringing committees, the House and now press conferences in the media studio to broadcast to the province of Ontario.

Mike Donofrio, as you said, is the director of the Broadcast and Recording Service. He's the person who's most intimately familiar with all of the day-to-day operations of Ont.Parl, and especially with the range of additions and service increases that have taken place over the last several years. If the committee agrees, Mike is able to walk you through all that has been going on with Ont.Parl over the last several years.

**Mr. Michael Donofrio:** Thanks, Todd.

I thought I would just do a very quick history of Broadcast and Recording Service for new members, then go through the improvements that we've been able to enact

since the last time we were in front of the committee. Then, if it's okay with you, I figured we'll go on the tour and that might spark questions you may have.

To give you a bit of background, the Ontario Parliament Network started broadcasting Ontario provincial proceedings in 1986. Our signal is distributed via satellite and cable TV and is streamed around the world on our website and Parlance app. The audio signals from the House, committee rooms and travelling committees are provided to House Publications and Language Services, and are used to produce the official Hansard publication.

When BRS started broadcasting in 1986, we had the capacity to broadcast the House and the Amethyst committee room. These were broadcast over traditional television only. The House took priority and aired live gavel-to-gavel coverage on the Ontario Parliament Network. The Amethyst committee room would be recorded and played later that evening, after the House adjourned for the day.

Today, we broadcast from five different venues. This includes the House, all three committee rooms, and the media studio. All these feeds are simultaneously interpreted live in both English and in French, and live, real-time closed captions are provided for the hearing impaired.

We also operate the media studio, and it's operated by us as a service on behalf of the press gallery. It provides a neutral forum for the government, opposition, MPPs and interested groups to communicate with the media and the public. The media studio can be booked by MPPs, ministries and officers of the Legislature.

BRS also provides an internal television network, which distributes seven television channels throughout the assembly and adjoining government buildings. They are the House feed, the Amethyst Room feed, committee room 1, committee room 2, the media studio and information channel, and CPAC. We provide each caucus and members of the press gallery with a video and audio feed of the House and committee proceedings. We also provide copies of footage or dubs on request, free of charge, via a Google Drive download.

At the request of the Speaker's office, Broadcast and Recording Service will document special events and ceremonies that occur at Queen's Park; for example, the Order of Ontario, the firefighter and police bravery awards, Lights Across Canada, and the Christmas choir series.

BRS will also provide the press gallery with a television pool feed for special events that occur at Queen's Park; for

example, royal visits, executive council swear-in ceremonies, the Lieutenant Governor's arrival by landau, and inspection of the royal guard. We also provide the audio set-up for non-partisan Legislative Assembly events such as flag-raising ceremonies.

Before I take you on a tour, again, I'd just like to go over some of the improvements we have made to the broadcast system since we appeared before the committee four years ago. Every one of the improvements and recommendations we made to the committee in December 2018 have now been implemented. This includes building and launching an iOS and Android app called Parlance. With this app, you can watch any of our five feeds live, from anywhere in the world, on your phone, tablet or smart television.

We added televised capabilities to committee room 1, committee room 2 and the media studio. This has more than doubled the production of BRS, giving us the ability to broadcast and stream every legislative proceeding. These rooms are broadcast live, with simultaneous interpretation and closed captioning. This work was done in-house by our technical department, led by John Walsh. We were able to complete the project in 15 months, start to finish. I think this is remarkable. Not only was this accomplished in the middle of a pandemic, during severe supply chain shortages, but the broadcast infrastructure for committee rooms 1 and 2 did not exist prior to August 2020. We essentially built two and a half new television studios in a little over a year. By the way, we did this while continuing to do our regular work. The launch went extremely well, and everything worked perfectly. I am very, very proud of the entire BRS team, led by Teresa Lohan, our operations manager, for making this possible. The team worked many, many hours, did several rehearsals, came in on their own and learned all new equipment to make sure everything went as well as it did. I couldn't be happier with the result and the way it turned out.

As most of you have probably seen, at the beginning of this new Parliament, a new sixth camera has been installed in the House above the Speaker's dais.

In February of this year, the House passed the update to the television guidelines that we recommended to the committee. This was the first update of the guidelines since the implementation of broadcast in 1986 and basically brought it up to today's standards—because it was still talking about videotape, and it had no mention of streaming or anything like that.

Some of the other improvements to the system that we've made since our last appearance are hybrid virtual committees. This was implemented in response to the pandemic, allowing the Ontario Legislature to continue to work for the people of Ontario. This was launched in less than two months, allowing members to resume committee meetings over Zoom from the safety of their homes. We are still using Zoom, so people all across the province can present to a committee without the need to travel to Toronto. This has helped to ensure an open and accountable Parliament.

Another improvement that we made during the pandemic was the addition of a phone conference line in the media studio. This allowed members of the media to ask questions from their home. Shortly after the world shut down due to COVID-19, the media studio was the first venue to open, giving Ontario's medical officer of health and the media a place to update Ontarians with vital health information.

In preparation for the launch of our app, we negotiated a deal with the University of Toronto to use their music on any of our platforms—this includes TV, Web and our app. In exchange, we provide the University of Toronto a courtesy key for each song. Before this, we only had television rights to our music. Without this kind of a deal, we would not have been able to broadcast anywhere other than television.

We produced a documentary called Women Should Vote. We were nominated for a Canadian Screen Award for best writing in a documentary, in 2020, for this documentary.

And we started the process of digitizing all our archived proceedings, dating back to the inception of broadcast in 1986. These are currently stored on tape at the Archives of Ontario and are very hard to access, but we are now bringing them all in-house digitally and are going to make them very accessible.

I wanted to make it quick, because I'm sure you guys would like to see everything, and then I'm sure you have lots of questions for us. That was the end of what I had for you right now.

**The Chair (Ms. Jennifer K. French):** Thank you very much. I'm curious about the documentary and where we could see that, because that was new information.

I recognize MPP Harris.

**Mr. Mike Harris:** The federal Parliament uses a plug-and-play, online—I think it's a SAS solution or app that's delivered online. Folks are able to go in, look for a member, go directly to a date and time or what have you, and pull up whatever they've said through Hansard. Are we in the process of evaluating whether that might be something that can work here?

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**Mr. Michael Donofrio:** We actually started this kind of a process when I arrived almost six years ago, and we are just finishing up testing on a media asset management solution called eMAM. That is part of the process I was telling you about—digitizing all of our material. When it is ready to launch, all members will have access to the system and be able to have access to everything Broadcast and Recording Service has done since 1986. You'll be able to search for any of our material. You'll actually be able to do your own dubs with the system, as well, and send it to yourself with the system.

**Mr. Mike Harris:** Do you have a timeline as to when you think that's going to be ready?

**Mr. Michael Donofrio:** We've sort of launched it a little bit internally, because we want to make sure that before we release it to you, we've ironed out all of the bugs. In the next few weeks, we will be doing some internal

training with our IT support team so that if there are any issues, they'll know how to address them, because that's where the phone calls will go. Once we're sure we've got a lot of those bugs worked out, we'd like to do a pilot project with the caucus video teams and some of the individual independent members so they can do a bit of a test-case scenario with us and give us some feedback. Then, after that, we'll release it to everyone.

**Mr. Mike Harris:** So a couple of months?

**Mr. Michael Donofrio:** Yes, depending on how it goes with the test people.

I did a media asset management system years ago, when I was the operation manager at the Weather Network, and I found that if you release this too quickly—because they always have bugs to iron out—people can get a bad taste in their mouth about a system, and then once it gets to the point where it's working really well, they don't want to give it a try again, and it's always like, "No. Sorry. That system is no good." I don't want that to happen, so I want to be very, very sure that we've ironed out most of the details. It's a pretty complex system. Once we do that and we have good feedback, our next step is, we would like to integrate it with our website someday so the public has access to it.

**The Chair (Ms. Jennifer K. French):** MPP Hogarth.

**Ms. Christine Hogarth:** You mentioned that there's an app.

**Mr. Michael Donofrio:** Yes.

**Ms. Christine Hogarth:** What is the app?

**Mr. Michael Donofrio:** It's called Parlance, as a matter of fact. I will probably make my staff in the control room a little—

**Ms. Christine Hogarth:** That's interesting. I wasn't aware—

**Mr. Michael Donofrio:** The Parlance app—right here—

**Ms. Christine Hogarth:** You could watch the Legislative Assembly anywhere, then. That would be helpful.

**Mr. Michael Donofrio:** Right now, here's our committee and me a little bit delayed.

**The Chair (Ms. Jennifer K. French):** If I may be so bold, as to a strategy: There's a couple of seconds' delay, so if you were to have it on silent and have it on in front of you and be speaking in committee or the House, then you can just screen-grab a couple of seconds later, so you'd get your own pictures of yourself—not that you need to; your staff could do that.

**Mr. Michael Donofrio:** Basically, it's all of our feeds live, so if you have it on the main page, you can see every one of our live venues. If you push on one of them, it will bring it forward and activate the audio for that one, but then if you push on it again, it will move it back. The audio will actually still be active, but you can see all the others. So you can actually watch them all but have audio of only one so you know what's going on. It's available for any iOS device, including Apple TVs. It's available for all Android devices as well. So in your constituency office, for example, if you've got an Apple TV device or an Android TV device, your office staff can have access to

every one of our feeds right within your constituency office. Anyone in the world can have access to watching this.

**Ms. Christine Hogarth:** That's great. And kudos for all the work you did to make sure that we could have the virtual committee hearings. I thought that was absolutely amazing. So thank you for all the work you and your team did to make sure that happened. I thought it was really great that anyone anywhere in Ontario could participate in those committees.

**Mr. Michael Donofrio:** Thank you. Again, it wasn't only Broadcasting and Recording Service—we kind of led it, but we worked with all the other departments across the Legislative Assembly. They were able to pull it off very, very quickly, and I think it made the product look much better too.

**The Chair (Ms. Jennifer K. French):** MPP Hsu.

**Mr. Ted Hsu:** Thanks for the presentation.

I just have a couple of questions from my own caucus. Maybe the answers are already there. One was a request for French floor broadcast with no translator during the live broadcast. So, in other words, you can listen to the parts of the English without any translation.

**Mr. Michael Donofrio:** You can get a dub from us with that. We're limited as to how many feeds we can put out—depending on what device you have. On our Parlance app, if you have a device that's set for English, you will get the English translation. If you have a device that's set for French, you will have the French translation. If you're watching our broadcast on any cable station, you get the English translation on the main channel, but if you choose the SAP channel you will get the French translation. But we're limited. We can only broadcast one additional language.

**Mr. Ted Hsu:** So you can't have an extra no-translation stream or something? Some people would like to hear the actual words in French or English.

**Mr. Michael Donofrio:** We can look into that in terms of putting something like that on our internal network. It would just be a matter of, probably, purchasing another device in order for us to put that on our in-house channel. We can look into the feasibility of that. In terms of broadcasting itself on a broadcast television station, we only have access to the one SAP channel. It's the limit of the television network.

**Mr. Ted Hsu:** I have another technical question. It's about file formats of the video clips. The ones that we're working with now, the MPEG ones—when you play around with it, often the sound and the video are not synchronized. So we were just wondering if it could be changed from MPEG to MP4 or something else.

**Mr. Michael Donofrio:** Obviously, there are a tremendous number of video codecs to choose from. The video codec that we picked was one that you can send directly to social media or YouTube and it will maintain the closed captioning. So if you just send it directly to YouTube or you just send it directly to Twitter or something like that, it will go and it will keep the closed captioning. There are not many codecs that do that.

We do have the option to send an H264 file to you as well, which can be used in most editing systems and can

be played around with on your phone. We have been doing that. We are doing that. The difference with that is, it will strip the closed captioning, and you'll have to be responsible for closed captioning yourself on that.

Not only that—once this new system gets put into place and you're able to send yourself your own codecs, you will be able to have a choice of a few different ones that would work for you.

But right now, if you're looking for something to edit before you put it out, you can tell our team that you're going to edit the clip and we will send you the H264 version.

**The Chair (Ms. Jennifer K. French):** MPP Oosterhoff has a question.

**Mr. Sam Oosterhoff:** First of all, thank you. The work and the versatility that you demonstrated over the course of the last four years, but especially the last couple of years, has been remarkable, so major kudos to you and your entire team for that. You talked about some of that. There's a lot of operationalizing of all of that with protocols in place and everything else that you had to deal with. So we appreciate your ability to be nimble and change with rapidity when there was a fluid situation.

I'm really, really curious about that archive. Is that archive going to be on the Ont.Parl website? Will everyone be able to access it, or is this more of a members' access? What do you envision happening with that?

**Mr. Michael Donofrio:** The first step is as a Legislative Assembly tool, because the first step is to not only make sure that it's working well, but it's going to be a several-year project to be able to ingest all this old material in the system. Once we've gone through that and we know everything is working well, a phase 2 approach is to work with the company that has developed this and our website into being able to integrate it within our website and make it available for the public. So that is something that we do want to add to the system, yes. Before we chose the system, it needed that capability.

**The Chair (Ms. Jennifer K. French):** Mr. Hsu.

**Mr. Ted Hsu:** Thank you for indulging us.

This is another very technical question. If we have something where online viewers can choose different things—English, French and maybe a floor audio where's there no translation—would it also be possible to choose between high and low resolution, depending on the quality of the connection that somebody has?

**Mr. Michael Donofrio:** Again, everything is possible. It all has to do with cost. Believe it or not, we put this app together at an extremely low cost. Our phase 2 portion of

the app that we want to work towards is actually starting to do a bit of an on-demand portion to it as well. Right now, it's currently all live feeds. We are talking with the company that developed it with us in order to add, say, the last two weeks of the House broadcasts, the last two weeks of different committee broadcasts, different things like that, so that you'll be able to go in and say, "Actually, I wanted to see the House from two weeks ago," and there it is in the app.

Depending on what it is that is requested—like I said, you can do anything with these things. It just depends on what the cost is going to be and how many people are really interested in some of it, as well—the weighing of that.

**The Chair (Ms. Jennifer K. French):** If anyone has anything further they want to add now—or if they want to hold those thoughts, we're going on the tour.

MPP Harris, if I may be so bold—at the subcommittee meeting we did talk about, later, in a further meeting, remembering some of these questions to discuss. So if you have any thoughts you want to hold on to, keep them.

Anything further? All right. The committee will now recess and resume after the tour.

*The committee recessed from 1322 to 1433.*

**The Chair (Ms. Jennifer K. French):** The committee is now resumed. We will continue with the presentation if there's anything further from the Clerk and Mr. Donofrio.

**Mr. Michael Donofrio:** That was all I had.

**The Chair (Ms. Jennifer K. French):** Well, on behalf of the committee, I would like to say that was very worthwhile. We really appreciated your time and attention to all the details and all of the questions that we had.

I saw a hand. Yes?

**Mr. Sam Oosterhoff:** I was just going to see if there would be interest from the committee to having you come back and work on some questions with the committee.

**The Chair (Ms. Jennifer K. French):** Do we have agreement from the committee to invite folks back, Mr. Donofrio to come back, at a later date? It appears that we have agreement. So the committee is agreed and will decide when that is going to be.

Is there anything further? Okay.

Again, thank you very much. That was a pretty neat way to spend committee time.

There being no further business, the committee is adjourned.

*The committee adjourned at 1434.*









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