

Legislative
Assembly
of Ontario



Assemblée
législative
de l'Ontario

**Official Report
of Debates
(Hansard)**

A-11

**Journal
des débats
(Hansard)**

A-11

**Standing Committee on
Government Agencies**

Intended appointments

1st Session
43rd Parliament

Thursday 30 March 2023

**Comité permanent des
organismes gouvernementaux**

Nominations prévues

1^{re} session
43^e législature

Jeudi 30 mars 2023

Chair: Will Bouma
Clerk: Isaiah Thorning

Président : Will Bouma
Greffier : Isaiah Thorning

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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
Published by the Legislative Assembly of Ontario



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
Publié par l'Assemblée législative de l'Ontario

ISSN 1180-4335

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

STANDING COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT AGENCIES

COMITÉ PERMANENT DES ORGANISMES GOUVERNEMENTAUX

Thursday 30 March 2023

Jeudi 30 mars 2023

The committee met at 0900 in room 151.

INTENDED APPOINTMENTS

MS. BONNIE OAKES CHARRON

Review of intended appointment, selected by government party: Bonnie Oakes Charron, intended appointee as member, Licence Appeal Tribunal.

The Chair (Mr. Will Bouma): Good morning, everybody. The Standing Committee on Government Agencies will now come to order. We are meeting to conduct a review of an intended appointee. We are joined by staff from legislative research, Hansard and broadcast and recording.

To make sure that everyone can understand what is going on, it is important that all participants speak slowly and clearly. Please wait until I recognize you before starting to speak. As always, all comments by members and witnesses should go through the Chair.

We will now move on to the review of the intended appointee. Our appointee today is Bonnie Oakes Charron, nominated as member of the Licence Appeal Tribunal.

Thank you so much for joining us today, Bonnie, if that's okay. You may start with an initial statement at your discretion. Following this, there will be questions from the members of the committee. With that questioning, we will start with the government, followed by the official opposition, with 15 minutes allocated to each recognized party. Any time that you take in your statement will be deducted from the time allotted to government.

Thank you for joining us today. You have the floor, just make your statement. It's very good to see you today.

Ms. Bonnie Oakes Charron: Thank you very much.

Good morning, Mr. Chair and honourable members of the committee. I thank you for inviting me here today. My name is Bonnie Oakes Charron, and I'm joining you from Ottawa to discuss my appointment to the Licence Appeal Tribunal.

I've been a resident of Ottawa for over 25 years. It is where I live with my husband and son, and it is a place where I've spent the majority of my working career. It is a great place to live and to raise a family.

I'm originally from a small town in southwestern Ontario where community service was a visible part of everyday life. I saw many examples growing up of parents and neighbours volunteering in their children's schools and elsewhere in the community. I was keenly aware that this act of volunteering made our town a better place to live. I've made an effort in my own career to focus on public service and

building community, whether it be in my professional or personal networks.

I hold an honours Bachelor of Arts in the humanities, which included courses in literature, the arts, philosophy and history. These studies gave me skills in analysis, critical thinking and perspective, and have given me a deep understanding of the human experience across time and place. When I pursued a master's degree in library and information science, I was able to add skills in the evaluation, management and organization of information. Libraries are a place of civic engagement and my training in librarianship was foundational in shaping my career.

Ottawa is known as a city of public servants, and I have been one of them. I've worked in procedural services at the House of Commons, as a policy analyst at the Treasury Board Secretariat, supported several national boards of directors as secretary to the board, collaborated on important governance initiatives at Governance Professionals of Canada and served as a board director, committee chair and adjudicator. The unifying theme of these roles is a focus on good governance.

More recently, while completing some course work to become a licensed paralegal, I've come to realize that adjudication and administrative law are where I'd like to take my career on a full-time basis. Adjudicating matters in the public interest draws on my skills in professional administration, information management and evidence-based decision-making, while some of the personal qualities I would bring to the role are the ability to remain calm when faced with conflict, to see issues from all perspectives, to communicate clearly and to manage my time effectively.

In conclusion, the work at the Licence Appeal Tribunal involves resolving disputes concerning compensation claims and licensing activities in the province. I believe that my background, both personal and professional, prepares me to take on this role and to meet both the challenges and opportunities it will present.

Thank you for your time and consideration today regarding my intended appointment to the Licence Appeal Tribunal.

The Chair (Mr. Will Bouma): Thank you so much for that. We will now turn to the government for questions, starting with member Coe. You have 13 minutes on the clock.

Mr. Lorne Coe: Thank you, Chair, and through you to our candidate: Welcome to the committee. We appreciate you taking the time to do that.

Ms. Bonnie Oakes Charron: Thank you very much.

Mr. Lorne Coe: Can you talk a little bit more about your experience managing heavy caseloads? The context there, of course, is that the tribunal has a high caseload volume. And in answering that, also tell us how you would ensure that you'd stay on top of that workload and deliver your decisions within the targeted processing times, please.

Ms. Bonnie Oakes Charron: Thank you for the question. Indeed, most of my positions in the past have been in challenging, very fast-paced environments. The decision-making roles that I've held are ones where the applications that come before us can be thousands of pages in length. We have a dedicated amount of time to be able to master that material and to arrive at a hearing prepared to adjudicate and to make a decision. Following those timelines has been a part of almost every role that I've had in the past, whether it be working at Parliament—which, as we know, runs in real time, hour to hour—or being an adjudicator on a tribunal. I am on the committee of adjustment at the city of Ottawa. All of these roles have very defined timelines, and I'm a task-oriented person who moves through my tasks according to those timelines. I would bring that experience to the Licence Appeal Tribunal.

Juggling different roles and different projects all at once has also been a part of my work as a self-employed consultant, so I feel confident that I can manage the caseload at the Licence Appeal Tribunal.

Mr. Lorne Coe: Thank you very much for that response. And through you, Chair, to MPP Gallagher Murphy, please.

The Chair (Mr. Will Bouma): Member Gallagher Murphy, go ahead.

M^{me} Dawn Gallagher Murphy: Thank you, Ms. Oakes, for joining us today, and thank you very much for your public service.

I noted three items that you talked about, and I'm hoping you can elaborate in the question I'm going to pose. You noted about focus on good governance. You talked about taking a course on paralegal—congratulations for that; I think that's great, adding to your busy portfolio—and also seeing issues from all perspectives. That being the case, what do you believe it takes to be an effective member on the Licence Appeal Tribunal?

Ms. Bonnie Oakes Charron: Thank you for the question. Indeed, my career has been about good governance and being a process leader, focusing on the systems that make the various organizations run where I worked in the past. The paralegal coursework also adds to my knowledge of the legal landscape in Ontario. All of these things frame my work on a day-to-day basis and what I bring to it.

Seeing issues from all perspectives: I would say it's that breadth of experience through different governance systems, whether they be local, provincial, federal. I've been a support to boards of directors, so making the machinery of it all run, as well as sitting on those boards and making decisions myself. So I think my varied experience is what gives me the ability to think about things from all sides and to imagine what each party involved in a situation—how they view things, what their lens is on a situation. That's what I bring to my role as an adjudicator. I'm a neutral, unbiased decision-maker. I review the material—preparation

is extremely important. That's what gives one that opportunity to have perspective and go into a hearing ready to hear all sides.

M^{me} Dawn Gallagher Murphy: Great. Thank you very much. Chair, through you, I'd like to hand it over to my colleague MPP Billy Pang.

The Chair (Mr. Will Bouma): Member Pang, go ahead.

Mr. Billy Pang: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Through you to Bonnie: Good morning. Thank you for putting your name forward.

I want to know, what sort of engagement do you have in your community, say volunteering or other engagements? And what have you learned from it, and how did it inform you on your work for the Licence Appeal Tribunal?

Ms. Bonnie Oakes Charron: Thank you for the question. My work in the community has been very important to me. I've been very involved in my part of Ottawa.

Dating back about seven or eight years, I became quite involved in the local school governance serving on parent councils, working at the regional level at the Ottawa Carleton Assembly of School Councils, and from there being appointed to the Parent Involvement Committee at the district school board. That was an important part of my community service.

At the same time, I was a member of my community association and worked on various issues—transportation, land use planning—and was also a liaison to the Federation of Citizens' Associations, which is a regional group that also deals with land use planning, transportation, basically everything that makes a city run.

That work was very, very interesting, and it's what led me to put my name forward as an adjudicator at the City of Ottawa's committee of adjustment, where we adjudicate on minor variances from the zoning bylaws for land use and planning.

As a result of me having been appointed to that position—that was four years ago now—for conflict-of-interest reasons, we aren't allowed to continue our volunteering in our local community. That's why, over the past four years, I haven't done as much, but in the future I would hope to. So I bring all of that to the table.

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What I learned from doing all of that volunteer work was that there are many, many different perspectives in the community, and that sometimes we think that we can have our pulse on what's happening even in our local area, and then through different committees and round tables and other forms of civic engagement, we can find new perspectives.

The example I would use is, I was part of a community round table, twice a month, that was hosted by a community organizer, and the goal specifically was to bring everyone together who was working in the community to try to make our community a better place. It was a lot of organizations serving newcomers, but it was also—it could be sports-related; it could be planning-related. We all came together, and there was always a presenter. I kept many, many files on those presentations, and I still have them. The goal was really to take those new relationships forward

and be able to create connections. An example I would use is, there was a day scheduled at the local community skating rink for newcomers. As a group, everybody was asked to obtain skating equipment—whether it be helmets or skates—that was no longer of use to our neighbours and to bring them and offer them to newcomers on a special day when lessons were offered. There were monitors there to assist everyone in learning how to skate and to enjoy our local community rink. So that’s an example of everybody coming together.

Through that round table, I was able to see deeper into the community than I could on my own, through all of those connections and relationships. I’m at the meetings hearing all about all of the different associations and organizations in our area that are working to make our community a better place. So what I learned from all that committee work is that there’s always more to learn, in terms of meeting people in the community who have different perspectives. That informs my work as I go forward. I’m always thinking about who’s in the room, who’s not in the room, all of the different views that can be brought to bear on an issue, and I think that makes me an excellent adjudicator.

Mr. Billy Pang: Thank you for sharing your experiences and your passion in serving the community.

How much time do we have, Mr. Chair?

The Chair (Mr. Will Bouma): Four and a half minutes.

Mr. Billy Pang: May I pass the questions to MPP Sandhu?

The Chair (Mr. Will Bouma): Member Sandhu, go ahead.

Mr. Amarjot Sandhu: Thank you so much for your presentation.

COVID-19 presents some significant challenges, especially for operating the Licence Appeal Tribunal; in particular, with in-person hearings. How do you think the Licence Appeal Tribunal can adapt? And do you have any concerns about not being able to conduct in-person hearings?

Ms. Bonnie Oakes Charron: Thank you for your question. Yes, everyone is moving out of the COVID-19 phase and into the future.

I would say that the transition into remote hearings because of COVID-19, from my perspective, was a very successful one. I was involved in two different roles at the time as an adjudicator with the committee of adjustment. I had been with the committee less than a year, and when COVID-19 hit, we rolled right into remote hearings—so everything from home. When we had been on-site, we were able to consult large maps and other materials, and it was a period of adaptation. We learned to do the same kind of work, but from home, and I would say it definitely was successful.

I was also appointed to the Ontario College of Teachers basically the week that COVID-19 began. That’s an organization where I served for several years, and there were never any in-person hearings—and so it was, from the very beginning, learning to join an organization remotely and to be on such committees as investigations and ac-

creditation panels, all remote. So it was an interesting experience to be able to meet a whole new set of colleagues and develop those relationships online, and to be able to work online.

Some of the things that could make that transition easier, that I see in my experience, are unifying elements like having standard backgrounds for all of the individuals involved on a certain committee or on a certain panel. The expert support from the staff is also critical. I found in both my experiences that the support staff managing the remote hearings, such as we’re in today, did an absolutely excellent job of managing the technology and allowed us as adjudicators or governing members to focus on our own work rather than technology.

So I think it’s about adaptation and flexibility. A lot of organizations are in the midst of moving back to hybrid-style hearings or in-person hearings, and I don’t have any concerns. I’ve been a part of all three types. I think that everyone, if they focus on their role and how to do their own job in that new environment—I’ve always had the ability to be flexible and to adapt to whatever situation presented.

Mr. Amarjot Sandhu: Thank you.

The Chair (Mr. Will Bouma): With a minute and 20 seconds left, member Ghamari.

Ms. Goldie Ghamari: Thank you very much. I’d like if you could keep your answer as short as possible just so we can get to my colleague MPP Harris as well.

You were recommended for this process following a Tribunals Ontario competitive, merit-based recruitment process. What was your impression of the process and why do you think you were the best candidate for this role?

Ms. Bonnie Oakes Charron: With regard to process, it was a very straightforward process through the online portal. I found it very simple and effective. With regard to why I would be the best candidate, I can’t speak to the selection process itself other than to say, on my end, it was simple and straightforward. I would say that I would just point to my background and 25-year career in the governance sector.

Ms. Goldie Ghamari: Thank you very much.

The Chair (Mr. Will Bouma): Twenty-seven seconds left: member Harris.

Mr. Mike Harris: Thank you very much, Bonnie. We don’t have a lot of time, but I just want to thank you for being here today, and it sounds like you’re a very qualified and competent candidate. I look forward to hearing questions from our colleagues in the opposition. Thank you, Chair.

The Chair (Mr. Will Bouma): We’ll turn now to the opposition side. Member Pasma, 15 minutes.

Ms. Chandra Pasma: Thank you very much, Ms. Oakes Charron, for being here with us this morning, from a fellow Ottawa resident. No disrespect to my colleagues, but I think we live in the best city in the province.

Mr. Mike Harris: Boo.

The Chair (Mr. Will Bouma): Boo.

Interjection.

Ms. Chandra Pasma: Obviously this colleague is not feeling disrespected by it.

I want to start by digging into workload a little bit. Can you just confirm that you remain on the Ontario College of Teachers with that appointment, as well as the city of Ottawa committee of adjustment.

Ms. Bonnie Oakes Charron: Yes, these are current appointments.

Ms. Chandra Pasma: How many hours a week are those appointments?

Ms. Bonnie Oakes Charron: It would vary. However, I would note that these terms are ending very soon.

Ms. Chandra Pasma: Okay. So you do plan to be able to commit full-time hours to this new appointment?

Ms. Bonnie Oakes Charron: That's correct.

Ms. Chandra Pasma: Okay. I'm wondering, because the Licence Appeal Tribunal can deal with some people who are in pretty vulnerable situations—I know I hear from constituents all the time that losing access to their licence really takes away their independence and their ability to remain in their own homes, living independently. You have a lot of experience in procedural affairs, but do you have any specific experience in issues of licensing that you will bring to this appointment?

Ms. Bonnie Oakes Charron: Thank you for the question. And yes, I will speak about my experience at the Ontario College of Teachers where I've been on the governing council, as well as a number of committees, including investigations where the investigations committee reviews situations with licensed teachers and the decisions that we would make could affect the loss of their licence or serious sanctions.

Teachers are the largest self-regulating body in Ontario, and so I definitely have experience making decisions that have a high impact on people's lives. Losing one's licence to practise is a very, very serious matter. I would say that I have been involved in decisions where you have to seriously consider all of the impact on that person, that person's family and the community, and I have done that in those roles.

Ms. Chandra Pasma: Right. Thank you.

You spoke about virtual hearings from the perspective of adjudicators or the committee members who are participating. I wonder if you have any concerns about access to justice for people who are vulnerable through remote platforms. We've seen with a number of the tribunals that not everybody has equitable access to the Internet, certainly not Internet where they can connect to a virtual meeting. It has made it more difficult for people to have legal representation through community legal services to have a lawyer or a paralegal present.

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Do you have any concern about how the past few years have impacted access to justice? And do you have any ideas about how we can ensure, moving forward, that everybody gets equitable access to justice through the Licence Appeal Tribunal?

Ms. Bonnie Oakes Charron: Thank you for the question. Indeed, remote hearings are not just about the adjudicator

but also the participants. I would say, over the last four years, as I mentioned, most of my work with the committee of adjustment has been remote. It has been a period of adaptability for not just the adjudicators but also the persons appearing.

I would say that I've had excellent experience with being able to offer options to stakeholders. It's very true that some don't have access to technology. Some of the ways to get around this can be participating by telephone, participation through a proxy or through an agent. Some of the techniques that can be used as an adjudicator are to offer an adjournment if a stakeholder is having difficulty to attend a certain hearing or get access to the technology in time. Usually, a short adjournment allows for some kind of situation to arise that will allow them to participate.

And I think having—again, as I mentioned before—the support staff. The expertise of support staff has been excellent, in my opinion, in assisting stakeholders to be able to participate.

The other thing that I might add is scheduling of hearings, so being flexible as to whether they're in the morning or the afternoon. Obviously, many people work. Some have young children. Some are ill. Some have had deaths in the family. Any situation can arise. I think as long as the adjudicator is sensitive to those situations, there is a way to find access to justice.

Ms. Chandra Pasma: Great. Thank you very much.

So you know each part of the Licence Appeal Tribunal has performance targets. The Automobile Accident Benefits Service has failed to meet its performance targets in four categories. Do you have any strategies that you would recommend to help this section meet its performance targets?

Ms. Bonnie Oakes Charron: I think at this time, since I'm not a member, I'm not able to offer specific input. However, based on my background, I would just say that I'm someone who focuses on resources, never ever wastes resources and uses what's available to me as tools to reach whatever targets have been set. I certainly have never had an issue in the past.

As I mentioned, I'm very task-oriented and would follow whatever directions were provided by the tribunal in terms of resources and suggestions for timelines etc. I don't have a concern about being able to do that.

Ms. Chandra Pasma: Thank you. I'm going to turn over the rest of my time to MPP Bourgouin.

The Chair (Mr. Will Bouma): Member Bourgouin, go ahead.

M. Guy Bourgouin: Merci, madame Charron. J'ai vu dans votre curriculum que vous êtes bilingue. Ça fait que ça me donne l'opportunité de vous demander des questions en français.

Merci de participer aujourd'hui. Je vais vous poser une série de questions qui peut être inconfortable, mais on la demande à tous les candidats.

La première, c'est : êtes-vous membre du Parti conservateur, provincial ou fédéral?

M^{me} Bonnie Oakes Charron: Non.

M. Guy Bourgouin: Avez-vous déjà donné financièrement au parti provincial ou fédéral?

M^{me} Bonnie Oakes Charron: Non, jamais.

M. Guy Bourgouin: Une donation—

M^{me} Bonnie Oakes Charron: Jamais, non.

M. Guy Bourgouin: Avez-vous déjà participé à une campagne électorale, fédérale ou provinciale, pour le Parti conservateur?

M^{me} Bonnie Oakes Charron: Non.

M. Guy Bourgouin: Je pense que ce sont toutes mes questions.

Interjection.

M. Guy Bourgouin: Y a-t-il quelqu'un du Parti conservateur qui vous a demandé d'appliquer pour le poste?

M^{me} Bonnie Oakes Charron: Non.

M. Guy Bourgouin: Non. Bien, merci, madame Charron.

M^{me} Bonnie Oakes Charron: Merci.

M. Guy Bourgouin: Je vais passer—I'll pass the question to my colleague du Parti libéral.

The Chair (Mr. Will Bouma): Member Fraser.

Mr. John Fraser: Ms. Oakes Charron, thank you very much for being here. You're an excellent candidate—

M^{me} Bonnie Oakes Charron: Thank you.

Mr. John Fraser: —and I note some of your history here. In my riding of Ottawa South, I can see some of the work that you have done in schools.

But I think the thing that's most encouraging with you putting your name forward is there are real challenges at our appeal tribunals with competency and ensuring that members have the understanding of administrative justice and the ability to write clear decisions. When I look at your résumé, I'm sure you will be able to do that.

I want to thank you for putting your name forward. It's going to be a lot of work. There's a lot of work at our appeal

tribunals. I'm glad to support you being here, and I want to thank you again.

The Chair (Mr. Will Bouma): With that, we will conclude the time for questions.

Ms. Oakes Charron, you can stay on the line as we finish up our committee meeting, but you're free otherwise. Thank you very much for joining us today. We really appreciate your testimony. Again, as has been mentioned, thank you for putting your name forward and being willing to serve the people of Ontario in this fashion. Have a wonderful day.

Ms. Bonnie Oakes Charron: Thank you.

The Chair (Mr. Will Bouma): We will now consider the intended appointment of Bonnie Oakes Charron, nominated as member of the Licence Appeal Tribunal. Do we have a motion? Member Coe.

Mr. Lorne Coe: Chair, through you, I move concurrence in the intended appointment of Bonnie Oakes Charron, nominated as member of the Licence Appeal Tribunal.

The Chair (Mr. Will Bouma): Concurrence in the appointment has been moved by member Coe. Is there any discussion? Seeing none, are members ready to vote? I will call the vote. All those in favour? That is unanimous.

Committee members, the deadline to review the intended appointments of Michael Ras, Nasser Chahbar, Madeleine Bodenstein and Lisa Del Vecchio, selected from the March 10, 2023, certificate, is April 9, 2023. Do we have unanimous consent to extend the deadline to consider the intended appointments to April 16, 2023? Yes. Thank you very much.

That concludes our business for today. Have a wonderful day, everyone. See you in question period.

The committee adjourned at 0927.

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