

Legislative
Assembly
of Ontario



Assemblée
législative
de l'Ontario

**Official Report
of Debates
(Hansard)**

A-19

**Journal
des débats
(Hansard)**

A-19

**Standing Committee on
Government Agencies**

Intended appointments

1st Session
43rd Parliament

Thursday 5 October 2023

**Comité permanent des
organismes gouvernementaux**

Nominations prévues

1^{re} session
43^e législature

Jeudi 5 octobre 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

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

STANDING COMMITTEE ON
GOVERNMENT AGENCIESCOMITÉ PERMANENT DES
ORGANISMES GOUVERNEMENTAUX

Thursday 5 October 2023

Jeudi 5 octobre 2023

The committee met at 0900 in committee room 1.

The Chair (Mr. Will Bouma): Good morning, everyone, and welcome to the Standing Committee on Government Agencies. We will now come to order.

Mr. Mike Harris: Point of order, Chair.

The Chair (Mr. Will Bouma): Point of order: Mr. Harris.

Mr. Mike Harris: I just want to read into the record that it is Lorne Coe's birthday today. I'd love it if we could all give him a round of applause and wish him a happy birthday.

Happy birthday.

Applause.

Mr. Mike Harris: I know it's not a valid point of order. Thank you, Chair.

The Chair (Mr. Will Bouma): You took the words out of my mouth. Thank you very much, member Harris.

We are meeting to conduct a review of an intended appointee. We are joined by staff from legislative research, Hansard—

Mr. Joel Harden: Point of order.

The Chair (Mr. Will Bouma):—and broadcast and recording.

Oh. Point of order: Mr. Harden.

Mr. Joel Harden: I would like to take this opportunity to put a motion the floor for the committee's consideration, please.

The Chair (Mr. Will Bouma): I'm happy to do that. Should we keep the intended appointee waiting, or could we do that after we do that?

Mr. Joel Harden: My preference, Chair, is that we do the motion now, just as it's a pressing item of business before the House.

The Chair (Mr. Will Bouma): You have the floor. We'll hear your motion.

Mr. Joel Harden: I appreciate that. Thank you, Chair. I believe the Clerk can distribute copies to the other members of the committee.

Chair, I move that, pursuant to standing order 110(f)—

Mr. Mike Harris: Sorry, we don't have copies.

The Chair (Mr. Will Bouma): We'll get them.

Mr. Joel Harden: I'm happy to take a break until people do. Do you want to—

The Chair (Mr. Will Bouma): Please proceed.

Mr. Joel Harden: All right.

I move that, pursuant to standing order 110(f) the committee conduct a review on the operations of Metrolinx;

and that the committee meet for public hearings on the following dates:

—Monday, October 30, 2023, from 9 a.m. until 10 a.m. and from 1 p.m. until 6 p.m.; and

—Tuesday, October 31, 2023, from 9 a.m. until 10 a.m. and from 1 p.m. until 6 p.m.; and

—Wednesday, November 1, 2023, from 9 a.m. until 10 a.m. and from 1 p.m. until 6 p.m.; and

—Thursday, November 2, 2023, from 9 a.m. until 12 p.m. and from 1 p.m. until 5 p.m. in Peel, Ontario; and

—Tuesday, November 14, 2023, from 9 a.m. until 12 p.m. and from 1 p.m. until 5 p.m. in Durham, Ontario; and

—Thursday, November 16, 2023, from 9 a.m. until 12 p.m. and from 1 p.m. until 5 p.m. in Hamilton, Ontario; and

—Monday, November 20, 2023, from 9 a.m. until 12 p.m. and from 1 p.m. until 5 p.m. in Ottawa, Ontario; and

That the Clerk of the Committee be authorized to immediately post notices regarding the agency review on the Ontario parliamentary channel and on the Legislative Assembly's website; and

That the deadline for requests to appear for hearings be 12 p.m. on Wednesday, October 18, 2023; and

That the Minister of Transportation be invited to appear as the first witness at 9 a.m. on Monday, October 30, 2023, and that the witness shall have one hour to make an opening statement followed by five hours of questions and answers, divided into five rounds of 25 minutes for the government members, five rounds of 25 minutes for the official opposition members and five rounds of 10 minutes for the independent member of the committee; and

That the president of Metrolinx be invited to appear as the second witness at 9 a.m. on Tuesday, October 31, 2023, and that the witness shall have one hour to make an opening statement followed by five hours of questions and answers, divided into five rounds of 25 minutes for the government members, five rounds of 25 minutes for the official opposition members and five rounds of 10 minutes for the independent member of the committee; and

That witnesses shall be scheduled in groups of three for each one-hour time slot, with each presenter allotted seven minutes to make an opening statement followed by 39 minutes of questioning for all three witnesses, divided into two rounds of 7.5 minutes for the government members, two rounds of 7.5 minutes for the official opposition

members and two rounds of 4.5 minutes for the independent members of the committee as a group; and

That witnesses appearing be permitted to participate in person or participate remotely; however, a maximum of two individuals may appear in person on behalf of an organization, and any additional representatives of that organization shall participate remotely; and

That the Clerk of the Committee shall provide a list of all interested presenters to each member of the subcommittee on committee business and their designate as soon as possible following the deadline for requests to appear; and

That if all requests to appear cannot be accommodated, each member of the subcommittee on committee business or their designate may provide the Clerk of the Committee with a prioritized list of presenters to be scheduled, chosen from the list of all interested presenters for those respective hearings by 2 p.m. on Thursday, October 19, 2023; and

That the deadline for written submissions be 7 p.m. on Monday, November 20, 2023; and

That legislative research provide the committee members with a summary of oral presentations and written submissions as soon as possible following the written submission deadline; and

That the committee meet for report writing at Queen's Park on Thursday, November 23, 2023, from 9 a.m. until 10 a.m. and from 1 p.m. until 6 p.m.; and

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

The Chair (Mr. Will Bouma): I will open the floor to debate. Go ahead, member Harden. Any comments on your motion?

Mr. Joel Harden: First of all, Chair and members of the committee, I really appreciate your flexibility in accommodating my request to put this motion on the floor. I, like many Ontarians, have been gravely concerned at the operations of Metrolinx as an organization and the handling in particular of the Eglinton Crosstown LRT project, the deadline for which is still not forthcoming.

What's prompting this particular motion—Chair, just so I'm transparent with my colleagues—at this committee this morning is the news that the current president of Metrolinx, Mr. Phil Verster, has had his contract renewed by the government. I think at this point, this committee's responsibility is to have more information from the Ministry of Transportation, more information about Metrolinx, because I believe, on behalf of transit riders and workers in this province, the people who rely upon our transit system—we don't have forthcoming answers about Metrolinx, and our communities are hurting.

I welcome the opportunity to put this motion on the floor and to work collaboratively with the government to ensure some more transparency at Metrolinx. I look forward to the debate.

The Chair (Mr. Will Bouma): Further debate? Member Begum.

Ms. Doly Begum: I would also like to echo and support my colleague's motion. I hope that the government side will consider and support it. We are seeing a lot of people

across the city and across the province, frankly, wanting answers for a lot of delay, a lot of public dollars that have been spent on Metrolinx projects. This committee for government agencies has a mandate to make sure that every single government agency, every single entity that is within the jurisdiction of the provincial government—we are here, given that responsibility, to make sure that we hold those agencies to account.

I hope that members of this committee will take that role and that responsibility very seriously and consider this motion, because it allows for the committee to come together, to meet and have hearings and ask some tough questions to the people who are in charge, who are appointed to do jobs that should be really focusing on the well-being of the people of this province. So I really hope that the members of this committee will consider—and not only because of what is going on with Metrolinx but also the responsibility of members in this committee as well.

The Chair (Mr. Will Bouma): Further debate? Member Harris.

Mr. Mike Harris: I do appreciate that you want to take every opportunity you have to try and advance your agenda as the official opposition. I certainly respect that, but I also want to respect the time of the applicant we have here today and the folks who are going through trials and tribulations within the Social Benefits Tribunal. So I think it's imperative that we get to today's work.

I'm certainly going to be voting this motion down and look forward to them being able to raise this through other avenues.

The Chair (Mr. Will Bouma): Further debate? Member Harden.

Mr. Joel Harden: I will just say through you, Chair, to my friend from Kitchener–Conestoga: That's unfortunate, because I don't think this is a partisan issue. I think the waste at Metrolinx—the 59 vice-presidents, the 19 chief executive officers, the current leader who, as I understand it, if we can find out from more disclosure, may be earning compensation in excess of \$1 million a year, in particular for one transit project which is 4,338 days in process and going. I would hope, Chair, we could agree that we just commit to some hearings.

It's not a stunt. We have prompted in question period. I have prompted in members' statements. We have written letters. Chair, this is an opportunity for us to come together. Despite what my friend from Kitchener–Conestoga said, I hope we can just pass this and, as you mentioned rightly, get on to the appointment business of the committee. But this is a pressing matter all of us are receiving lots of phone calls and emails on. Let's come together and ask for some more transparency.

0910

The Chair (Mr. Will Bouma): Further debate?

Mr. Lorne Coe: Call the question, please.

The Chair (Mr. Will Bouma): Very good. Then I will call the question on the motion brought forward by member Harden.

Mr. Joel Harden: Recorded vote.

The Chair (Mr. Will Bouma): A recorded vote being requested, I will call the question.

Ayes

Begum, Bourgouin, Harden.

Nays

Coe, Gallagher Murphy, Harris, Pang, Sandhu, Laura Smith.

The Chair (Mr. Will Bouma): That motion is defeated.

INTENDED APPOINTMENTS

MS. JULIE GILL

Review of appointment, selected by official opposition party: Julie Gill, intended appointee as member, Social Benefits Tribunal.

The Chair (Mr. Will Bouma): Moving on, then: As always, all comments by members and witnesses should go through the Chair.

Our appointee today is Julie Anne Gill, nominated as member of the Social Benefits Tribunal. Julie Anne, welcome. As you're making your way up: You may make an 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, with 15 minutes allocated to each recognized party. Any time you take in your statement will be deducted from the time allotted to the government.

Thank you very much for joining us today. We really appreciate that. You may go ahead with your statement.

Ms. Julie Gill: Thank you, everybody. Good morning. Thank you very much, Mr. Chair and members of the standing committee, for the opportunity to share my credentials, skills and experience with you today. I think I need to wish a happy birthday to MPP Coe, and I'm thankful that we're not singing today.

Mr. Mike Harris: We can. It's not too late.

Ms. Julie Gill: I cannot make a motion for that.

As an intended part-time public appointee to the Social Benefits Tribunal, I think it's important that I first acknowledge the importance of the work being done and the need for that work. Delivering a fair, independent and timely process to the public to resolve appeals is fundamental for access to justice. My desire to continue serving the public motivated me to apply for this position, and I believe that the Social Benefits Tribunal can capitalize on my diverse experience.

I was an assistant vice-president of information services at the Bank of Montreal when I left in 2009. I started my career in 1993 as a trust banking administrator and moved on to supervisor, manager and then assistant vice-president. I have managed staffs of between three and 45, with overall budgets of between \$2 million and \$4 million. I developed and managed the business intelligence competency centre, which provided the basis for information management, reporting and strategic decision-making.

Relationship management operations, project management and strategic planning were among my accountabilities.

I highlight this progressive experience today as a results-oriented senior financial professional to demonstrate my ability to grow, to learn and to manage complex challenges. Over my 20-year career in the financial industry, I loved the work, the challenges and, certainly, the people who I worked with. Leaving the bank provided me the opportunity to restructure my life, find some work-life balance and to help people. Using my skills and life experience in a meaningful way is where I found myself then, and I continue to work hard, to grow and to look for different ways to be of service. I love learning and continue to upgrade my skills according to the needs of the people I work with. I expect this will be a lifelong activity for me.

In 2009, I started Families First Mediation, where I provide mediation, arbitration and coaching, specialized in working with self-represented individuals. I work with people to not only resolve disputes, but prevent them. I understand the emotional and financial stress on people and families related to unresolved disputes. My designations as a qualified mediator include several different areas of speciality related to family law and finance. I hold a wide array of certifications, including as an international advanced elder mediator.

In addition to these designations, I'm certified in mental health first aid. I'm an arbitrator, and I have extensive training in many forms of dispute resolution, including workplace, restorative justice and community disputes, as well as training and screening for a variety of challenges including domestic, family and inter-partner violence, coercive control and power imbalances.

As an arbitrator, I understand the importance of my decision-making role, of following legislation and applying evidence presented to that legislation. I'm able to write well-reasoned decisions and use clear communication and plain language when conducting hearings and in my written decisions. I'm a roster mediator with Telus, formerly Morneau Shepell, and I am on the Ontario Mandatory Mediation Program for Toronto. During my career, I've been a roster mediator with ADR Chambers for statutory accident benefits and helped FSCO clear the backlog, and a roster mediator for the ADR Institute for complaints against community care access centres.

I feel it is important to participate in making my community stronger, whether that be my personal or my professional community. I'm currently the chair of the board of directors for the Family Dispute Resolution Institute of Ontario and an active member of the Durham Elder Abuse Network. I'm experienced at working with vulnerable people, both youth and adults. Over the years I've shared and evolved my skills by involvement in Community Justice Alternatives, where I mediated cases related to victim-offender and community disputes. I was a co-facilitator of the CALM program for youth in Durham region, and I participated in the Durham Boys and Girls

Club, where I mediated with youth justice in restorative for both pre- and post-charge for youth.

I'm proud to say that I was recently the recipient of the 2023 Ontario Association for Family Mediation President's Award for leadership in the practice of family mediation.

I believe that my experience, along with Tribunals Ontario's commitment to providing ongoing professional development in legal and substantive areas, will allow me to make timely and well-reasoned decisions and resolve cases consistently while conducting fair proceedings.

Thank you for your consideration, and I will look forward to answering any questions you may have today.

The Chair (Mr. Will Bouma): Thank you very much. It was a pleasure to hear your qualifications.

We will now turn to the government, with 10 minutes on the clock. Member Coe.

Mr. Lorne Coe: Thank you, Chair, and, through you to Julie Gill: Thank you very much for being here this morning and waiting while we debated the motion going forward.

You know that you were part of a process following Tribunals Ontario's competitive merit-based recruitment process. I'd like you to share with us your impression of that process, please, and why you think you were the best candidate for this role that we're evaluating this morning. Thank you very much.

Ms. Julie Gill: Thank you. I can say that I think the process was thorough. I applied on the portal in March of this year and went through the interview process and the writing a decision and the very thorough background and ethics checks that we went through, all to lead me to get to you today, on October 5. So I think the process is quite thorough. Applying on the portal is simple. There is a great amount of information so that you can understand which tribunals you're applying for and what the mandates are.

As far as my credentials, I would suspect that—I believe—it's the fact that I can impartially manage a procedure. Any of the proceedings, whether it's mediation or arbitration, I have experience in that. And I work with vulnerable people. I work with self-represented and unrepresented clients. I understand the balance of the relationship between evidence and credibility and applying that to legislation. I am known for writing well-written decisions and memos of understanding. So I think my experience, both volunteer and professional, have led me to where I can serve the public of Ontario in an impartial manner.

Mr. Lorne Coe: Thank you for that response.

Chair, through you to MPP Dawn Gallagher Murphy, please. Thank you.

The Chair (Mr. Will Bouma): Member Gallagher Murphy, you have the floor.

M^{me} Dawn Gallagher Murphy: Thank you, Ms. Gill, for being here today. Looking at your wide range of professional experience—and I have to say, I like that you've come from the financial sector. I do believe there's a lot of relationship management skills that develop there.

As you're aware, the Social Benefits Tribunal—you're hearing from people who have been either refused social assistance or who are receiving it and are refuting a change

in their status. It's a very delicate situation, very vulnerable people we're dealing with. My question to you is, if you could share with us how your professional experience in all of these different areas has prepared you for the Social Benefits Tribunal.

Ms. Julie Gill: I think it would be a combination of my professional and my volunteer work. I've received training in both. But it's coming to the table with the sensitivities and the empathy for working with everyday people where they're at and trying to find out what their needs are and their concerns and their wants and help them to have a voice and actively participate in the process. Knowing how to manage that is a skill that I think—everything that I've done to date has kind of led me to where I'm sitting here today, thinking that I am a very good candidate for the Social Benefits Tribunal and working with the vulnerable people that will come before me.

0920

M^{me} Dawn Gallagher Murphy: Thank you, Ms. Gill.

Chair, through you, I'd like to pass it over to MPP Laura Smith.

The Chair (Mr. Will Bouma): Member Smith, go ahead. You have just under six minutes.

Ms. Laura Smith: I thank Ms. Gill for coming here today and presenting herself.

You have a very interesting background because you have finance and you also have the mediation, social—and I don't know if our committee members realize this, but it's very difficult because that's the yin and the yang. You don't usually see the two of those.

I used to deal with matters under the child protection act and finding somebody who was financially astute—so I dealt with mediators on a regular basis. It's very interesting. I have to say that I appreciate that. You must have brought a lot to the table for the people that you serve.

But I'm going to circle back and I'm going to talk about engagement you have with your community. You talked about some of the volunteer work that you've put forth. Can you talk about how it will inform you and your work with the SBT? I'm just interested in what your outside volunteer work will also bring to this job.

Ms. Julie Gill: Through working with Community Justice Alternatives way back in 2009 and 2010—I tend to work with vulnerable people that are dependent on social benefits—and right through to youth justice, you will find there was a lot of youth that would come through that didn't have supportive families and were on their own. Then to now, when I'm very active in the Durham Elder Abuse Network, and we have—specifically in Durham region, which I can speak to—an awful lot of issues with homeless seniors that are reliant on or can't get social benefits. They don't have the right ID. It's just working with all the different cases individually.

I just think I've had a lot of exposure to the point where I understand finances, and I understand the mediation process and the arbitration process. It's kind of a nice tie-in. It was a weird way to get to where I am today, but I think I bring a lot of different things that I can roll together to help people have that voice.

Ms. Laura Smith: I have to say, I applaud you. I've never seen that transgression, to go from BMO over to that other life. It's very interesting—

Ms. Julie Gill: It's not a direct route.

Ms. Laura Smith: I understand—in my previous life, it was—it is a very interesting route to get there.

Is there any specific volunteer work that you've done within your community, outside of the social network in your community that you want to highlight?

Ms. Julie Gill: I have sat on Big Brothers Big Sisters' board of directors; I'm the Chair of FDRIO right now. Anything I can get into ADR, so anything where I can help my community, I tend to—people will say it's the underdogs, so whether it's the youth, or the seniors, people that are going through crisis in their family—whether it's separation, divorce, elders and POA issues. I do a lot of pro bono work, as well, through any of the organizations or when there's outreach from the community.

Ms. Laura Smith: Thank you so much. I appreciate that.

Time?

The Chair (Mr. Will Bouma): Two minutes and 40 seconds.

Ms. Laura Smith: I'll pass my time over to my colleague MPP Amarjot Sandhu.

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

Mr. Amarjot Sandhu: Thank you, Ms. Gill, for being before the committee.

The parties appearing before the SBT don't always have legal representation and this can create some challenges. How will you work with them to ensure they have a fair hearing even if they can't understand the procedural minutiae?

Ms. Julie Gill: The majority of my work through Families First Mediation is self-represented, so I would say in excess of 80%. I'm normally working with clients that are not represented by legal counsel. It's drawing a line and finding that balance between ensuring that they're participating in the process and they understand the process and they can have a voice while maintaining my neutrality, which is a balancing act. But it's making sure that people mainly understand how they can have a voice and they understand the processes they're involved in—because sometimes they don't even know how they got there, or what the result of this could be, or where to go with this. Somebody may have informed them in this case to appeal, but they don't necessarily know what that means. It's kind of setting up that framework to make sure they understand the process they're in and that they're actively participating.

Without being part of the tribunal, I couldn't say what accommodations would be made, until I'm onboarded, to make sure that everybody can actively participate.

Mr. Amarjot Sandhu: Thank you.

The Chair (Mr. Will Bouma): Thank you. A minute and 10 seconds left: Any further questions? Member Harris, go ahead.

Mr. Mike Harris: Thank you, Chair. I'll have to try and do this as quick as possible.

I was wondering if maybe you could give us a bit of an example of—and scrub the names, scrub the situations, whatever you feel comfortable with, but give us maybe a little bit of an example of something you have mediated over the last few years and that you think would show the benefit that you would bring to the tribunal.

Ms. Julie Gill: I have to say, I was prepared for that question and, respectfully, I just can't. The foundation of any mediation and arbitration is confidential. I couldn't even give you a fake example where somebody may think that it applied to them and I was speaking out of turn. I just couldn't come up with it, and I really did try, because I thought I would get this. I just can't breach any—even—

Mr. Mike Harris: That was the right answer.

Ms. Julie Gill: Okay.

Mr. Mike Harris: You passed the test.

Ms. Julie Gill: And it's still early for me. Excellent.

Mr. Mike Harris: That's good.

Listen, Chair, I don't think there's really enough time for any fulsomeness on that, so we can move into the next round.

The Chair (Mr. Will Bouma): Thank you very much.

Turning to the opposition: You have 15 minutes. Member Begum, go ahead.

Ms. Doly Begum: Good morning, Ms. Gill. Thank you so much for being here. I always start with my gratitude to the appointees who come forward for this opportunity, because not always do we get this opportunity. We wish the government side would make it possible for us to have more hearings. Unfortunately, we don't always see eye to eye for some of those requests, so we do appreciate this, because it allows us to actually know the fantastic list that you've just highlighted, the past experiences that you have and the motivation behind doing this. It allows us to know that we are appointing someone who has that credibility and allows us to ask them questions to understand how you would solve some of the issues that we are facing with tribunals.

One of the things that I'm sure you will know with a few of the tribunals in our province, especially the one that you are applying to with social benefits, is that there have been delays—a lot of delays. In fact, the Ombudsman received about 1,100—over 1,100—complaints about Tribunals Ontario in 2021 and 2022, between those years. There have been a lot of cases where they felt that people did not get justice, because that's essentially what it is about.

What are your thoughts about the delays, and are there ways that you feel you can bring in efficiency within the tribunal that you're getting appointed to?

Ms. Julie Gill: Thank you. Sadly, I do have experience from when I was doing accident benefits. There was a great backlog of cases that needed to be dealt with, so we were a bit behind things there. I was able to step up and manage my caseload and my timing and work within that framework, which is what I would do with social benefits.

I don't know, other than what everybody can see in the media, about the backlogs. If I was appointed, I would be one more resource to help move files along, and I would look forward to the onboarding and making sure that I was prepared to manage my caseload.

Ms. Doly Begum: Thank you very much. A lot of people actually don't answer that question and just say, "We haven't been part of the tribunal," so I actually appreciate the fact that you see yourself as an asset to the tribunal to make that process efficient.

In your role as a mediator, have you been faced with resolving social benefits disputes between parties in the past? And how would your experience as a mediator impact your role in this?

Ms. Julie Gill: Directly mediating issues with social benefits, no, I have not. I have had parties that were part of another process, whether it was a POA dispute or a separation or divorce, who relied on that as income and that factored into things. That was the first part of your question, and—I'm sorry; the second part of your question, if you could repeat that?

Ms. Doly Begum: That's okay. It just says, "How would that experience impact this role?"

Ms. Julie Gill: Yes, sorry. So no experience.

Ms. Doly Begum: I appreciate the honesty.

In 2019, an annual report by the Auditor General found that there is a high variation in tribunal members' decisions, especially to grant ODSP. Are you aware that 85% of appeals to the tribunal pertain to whether an individual meets the definition of a person with disability under the ODSP Act?

Ms. Julie Gill: I can say that I understand. I'm not currently a member. I understand that there's a rigorous onboarding process where I expect to learn what I would do about issues like what you've described and how I would manage them.

0930

Ms. Doly Begum: Thank you very much. Honestly, the consideration is that we have a lot of people who are struggling. We know affordability is a big problem right now in general. People who are on disability are struggling a little bit more. We have raised this issue in terms of people getting clawbacks on their disability benefits as well.

And having that understanding—you talked about evidence and the importance of evidence and credibility, as well, which I think would be very important to this, because without any medical background, you will have to assess certain situations when it comes to those ODSP claims. Do you think that you have the necessary experience to determine if an individual meets that criteria to be considered a person with disabilities under the ODSP Act?

Ms. Julie Gill: Again, through the onboarding process, I would understand what my boundaries were. As an arbitrator, I have to apply evidence to the legislation, and I would do that as an adjudicator in social benefits. I understand that systems aren't perfect and that people aren't perfect, and I understand the challenges with access to justice. I also have some experience, to your point, doing statutory accident benefits. It was the same thing: I do not have a medical degree; however, trained well enough, I could manage what met the criteria and what didn't meet the criteria and then write reasons why a decision was made one way or another.

Ms. Doly Begum: I appreciate that. The government has been under fire for appointing unqualified people to

fill tribunal spots, which is one of the contributing factors to the growing wait-lists. You can see why we are extra uncomfortable and tough on the questions, because we want to make sure that we do get people who are qualified, who do care about the tribunals and who want to make sure that there is justice for people across this province.

What are your thoughts on party loyalists being appointed ahead of qualified candidates?

Ms. Julie Gill: I have no thoughts other than to say I am here today to talk about my credentials, my experience and my skills, and that doesn't apply to me.

Ms. Doly Begum: Fair enough.

Chair, how much time do we have?

The Chair (Mr. Will Bouma): Just under nine minutes.

Ms. Doly Begum: The SBT, the Social Benefits Tribunal, hears appeals from people who have been refused social assistance or who disagree with decisions affecting their social assistance. The backlog facing this tribunal leaves people without help for months and even years. What do you think the solution to this backlog is?

Ms. Julie Gill: I think any solutions would be policy-driven or at a much higher level than a part-time adjudicator. However, if I had the opportunity and it was appropriate, I would happily share my feedback with the tribunal as a member on anything I could see. But other than that, I don't have any insight into the decision-making or the policy-making for the tribunal that I think would help any of the backlogs.

Ms. Doly Begum: One of the things I noticed—and I do like the fact that you bring in a lot of experience from your previous work, volunteering and the trajectory you have taken. How would you balance your existing commitments as an arbitrator and mediator at Families First Mediation with your part-time appointment for SBT?

Ms. Julie Gill: I appreciate the question, because I do wear several hats. The easiest answer would be—what do they say? If you want something done, give it to a busy person. I am better when I'm busy and I'm going.

But honestly, I have an administrator who is absolutely fantastic, who helps me manage Families First Mediation. I do see a lot of my clients in evenings and weekends. As chair of FDRIO, my two-year term ends next month, so that does free up a lot of my volunteer time to do something else.

And I manage my own schedule, because it's my business. So I can manage when I see clients and when I don't and manage my caseload, and I think I can do that with a part-time role.

Ms. Doly Begum: Beautiful. Thank you very much.

My final question before I pass it off to my colleague is: Did anyone ask you to apply for this position?

Ms. Julie Gill: No.

Ms. Doly Begum: So what motivated you to look for this position?

Ms. Julie Gill: I work in the ADR field, and this comes up all the time. I know people, I'm on boards with people and I network with people regularly who have applied or want to or have sat on a tribunal. I think this was just a culmination of all my skills. I've looked to the openings and I just really think this is something I would be passion-

ate about and I would be good at. I think that the tribunal is in need of and would benefit from my skills.

Ms. Doly Begum: Not a lot of women would openly say “I would be good at this,” even when they are, so I appreciate your conviction and I appreciate you coming forward and doing this. Thank you so much, Ms. Gill.

Ms. Julie Gill: Thank you.

Ms. Doly Begum: I’ll pass it off to my colleague MPP Harden.

The Chair (Mr. Will Bouma): Thank you. Just under six minutes.

Member Harden, go ahead.

Mr. Joel Harden: Thank you, Ms. Gill, for appearing here today. I want to join my colleagues on all sides who appreciate the fact that you take an interest in people who are marginalized in our province: seniors, people whose family experiences are very difficult, a lot harder than others. I appreciate that work. It takes an intention, so thank you for that.

I have some quick and uncomfortable questions, just because we have to do our job as the official opposition. Have you ever been a member of the Progressive Conservative Party provincially?

Ms. Julie Gill: No.

Mr. Joel Harden: Have you ever been a member of the Conservative Party federally?

Ms. Julie Gill: Yes, I am now.

Mr. Joel Harden: How long have you been a member?

Ms. Julie Gill: Since the end of summer, end of July, beginning of—

Mr. Joel Harden: They have a very assertive promotion campaign out there. It’s good to know that you’re taking an interest in getting active in politics.

Have you donated to the Conservative Party under the name Julie Gill?

Ms. Julie Gill: I have not.

Mr. Joel Harden: Okay. Have you ever worked on a Conservative election campaign?

Ms. Julie Gill: I have not.

Mr. Joel Harden: That’s it for me, Chair. I will just give Ms. Gill the opportunity, perhaps, given everything you’ve heard from members of this committee, to elaborate on what you see as some of the challenges for people filling this role in the province of Ontario. My colleague from Scarborough Southwest talked about the people our staff in the constituency offices have to work with on a regular basis who are having a very hard time with income adequacy, delays, applying for benefits.

Clearly, you’re a mission-driven person. You wouldn’t be doing this work if you weren’t a mission-driven person. But having heard the questions you’ve heard this morning and looking at this role, what do you see as your major items on a to-do list, beyond going through the ropes of learning the position, being onboarded to the job? What would you like to accomplish in this job?

Ms. Julie Gill: I have done well, I believe, in the last 14 years not having opinions on things, as a neutral dispute resolution professional, which is also why I haven’t been part of a political party. It’s only that there’s something happening in my riding right now—and I’m new to this

riding—that I’ve even participated in that. That’s not normal.

I think, respectfully, there are government processes across the board that are not as user-friendly and not as accessible as they could be. That is a generalization of certain things that lead to other things, and I think it’s not speaking out of turn. I think they’re well-known. There are certain processes that I’m involved in—even going through this process to get here, it was: You get to one step and then you find out the next step. At some points, I felt like, I’m sure, the people that would come to these tribunals going, “Okay, I’ve got a hearing. Now what? I’m waiting for a decision. Now what?”

It’s kind of like you go step by step and sometimes you don’t know the whole picture, and I think that disadvantages some people.

Mr. Joel Harden: Chair, that’s good for me. Thank you very much.

The Chair (Mr. Will Bouma): Thank you for the questions. Ms. Gill, thank you very much for joining us today in person. I very much appreciate that. You are free to go, or you can stay and observe our deliberations as we move forward. Thank you for your time today—very much appreciated, on behalf of the committee.

We will end there. Thank you very much for your presentation. Thank you for the questions, colleagues, on both sides. So we move on to concurrence. We will now consider the intended appointment of Julie Anne Gill, nominated as member of the Social Benefits Tribunal. Do we have a motion? Member Coe.

Mr. Lorne Coe: Thank you, Chair. Through you, I move concurrence in the intended appointment of Julie Anne Gill, nominated as member of the Social Benefits Tribunal.

The Chair (Mr. Will Bouma): Concurrence in the appointment has been moved by member Coe. Is there any discussion? Seeing none, are the members ready to vote? All those in favour? That is unanimous. Thank you very much, colleagues. That’s carried.

Committee members, the deadline to review the intended appointments of Andrew Brander, Katlyn Harrison, Brett Bell and Georgina Blanas, selected from the September 8, 2023 certificate, is October 8, 2023. Do we have unanimous agreement to extend the deadline to consider the intended appointments to November 7, 2023? I heard a no.

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And the deadline to review the intended appointment of Kenneth Audziss, selected from the September 15, 2023, certificate, is October 15, 2023. Do we have unanimous agreement to extend the deadline to consider the intended appointments to November 14, 2023? I heard a no.

Member Begum, go ahead.

Ms. Doly Begum: I’m just wondering why we cannot have an extension if the appointee would like a different date to come forward for the hearing. We just had a really great hearing. I think that this was really fruitful. We had a chance to ask someone some excellent questions and we got some excellent responses, and we actually had a unanimous decision in making that process.

I'm just very curious as to why the government is so reluctant. Is it because only the good candidates come forward and we get to ask them questions, and the ones the government is maybe a little bit worried about, they don't want those to come forward? They don't want those to be asked those questions? They don't want those to be getting into a little bit of a difficult situation where they hear those uncomfortable questions and are asked about their motivation?

I'm just very curious, Chair, because we have a responsibility to represent our communities, to represent our province—and it is our job. It is our duty to make sure the people who are in these—by the way, these tribunals are having so many delays. There are thousands of people—there are about 40,000 people right now waiting to get hearings, waiting to get their justice, so we need these appointments to be done in a fair and good process, because fairness is the way to go. We need to make sure that people are qualified, and they are appointed in these roles.

I'm just very curious. I just don't understand, Chair, why we cannot have the extension, should an appointee not be able to appear on the day they have been requested to appear. Why can't we have the extension? What is so difficult about that?

The Chair (Mr. Will Bouma): Any further business? Member Harris.

Mr. Mike Harris: I wanted to bring up something. You make reference to a lot of the people who are waiting and languishing on lists. This specific tribunal, according to the report that was just published by Tribunals Ontario, no longer has a backlog. I know you had mentioned that several times, that there were backlogs for this specific tribunal, but there aren't any.

Interjection.

Mr. Mike Harris: There aren't any. We've just gone through one today. It does not have a backlog any longer. It's been able to clean it up, thanks to the hard work of this government. I'm hopeful that Ms. Gill will have an opportunity to help expedite a lot of those. We heard from a great candidate today.

It's imperative that we make sure that we get the right information to the public in Ontario, the folks who are watching here today, to understand that the Social Benefits Tribunal does not have a current backlog. This is not information that's coming from a partisan government group. This is from Tribunals Ontario itself.

I just want to put that out there for everyone's consideration. I don't necessarily want to go back and forth and debate on this, but I do think it's important that we do have the facts before us.

The Chair (Mr. Will Bouma): Any further business? Member Begum.

Ms. Doly Begum: I just want to get clarification, respectfully to my colleague, that the vote that we're doing is for a future appointment for a future appointee who would be coming forward. This committee on government agencies meets for different tribunals, including tribunals like the Landlord and Tenant Board, which has almost 40,000 people waiting for hearings.

This week, I had a student tell me, Chair, that they have been asked to pay for the third month even though they don't live in that room anymore. They're sharing with six people in a basement apartment. Then, I had a landlord tell me that they had to pay \$6,000 to a tenant just to ask them to leave. These are the types of tenants and landlords and the struggles they're facing—and there are almost 40,000 people waiting.

So, I will not take any lessons from the government side telling me that there aren't wait-lists. Yes, one tribunal has done a fantastic job because of the adjudicators and because of the work of that team, trying to get through the backlog. But, Chair, we're here also voting on appointments for future dates so we can have the same process that we did right now. We want to make sure that we have the ability as members of all sides to ask the questions that we just did. Then, we voted unanimously for an appointment, because we found that the appointee was actually qualified and had a good set of experience and qualifications.

Isn't this the point of this whole process, Chair? Isn't this the whole point, so that we can have the licence tribunal, for example, like we had last week, or the Landlord and Tenant Board tribunal—all of those have delays, and there are a lot of issues with those tribunals, which is why we need to have people who are qualified, who are willing to come forward just for a few minutes. It's not even an hour, the process.

Tribunal Watch has been calling on this committee. They have written multiple letters now. They have done press conferences. Tribunal Watch Ontario, for those who are watching, is an independent body. It's a watchdog that actually watches over what's happening with committees like this one. They are very concerned. A lot of people across the province are very concerned. What happens in the committee on government agencies is actually on the news because of the way appointments are taking place without any such hearings, the way we should.

That's all, Chair. Thank you very much.

The Chair (Mr. Will Bouma): If I could just make a clarification: A unanimous consent is not a vote. We're just looking for unanimous consent to extend appointments. It's not a vote. It's not a recorded vote. If someone says "no," then we don't have unanimous consent, just for clarification.

Any further business for the committee? Yes, member Begum?

Ms. Doly Begum: So the unanimous consent would require everyone's vote?

The Chair (Mr. Will Bouma): It would require either silence or for someone not to say no. If one person—

Ms. Doly Begum: And we just had a government member say no. I just want to understand clearly.

The Chair (Mr. Will Bouma): Yes. I heard a no, just like in the House.

Ms. Doly Begum: Thank you very much, Chair.

The Chair (Mr. Will Bouma): Any further business for the committee? Thank you. That concludes our business for today. This committee now stands adjourned.

The committee adjourned at 0948.

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