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## **Official Report of Debates (Hansard)**

**Thursday 23 November 2006**

## **Journal des débats (Hansard)**

**Jeudi 23 novembre 2006**

**Standing committee on  
public accounts**

2005 Annual Report,  
Auditor General:  
Ministry of Government  
Services

**Comité permanent des  
comptes publics**

Rapport annuel 2005,  
vérificateur général :  
ministère des Services  
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Chair: Norman W. Sterling  
Clerk: Katch Koch

Président : Norman W. Sterling  
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ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

## STANDING COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC ACCOUNTS

## COMITÉ PERMANENT DES COMPTES PUBLICS

Thursday 23 November 2006

Jeudi 23 novembre 2006

*The committee met at 1010 in committee room 1, following a closed session.*

### 2005 ANNUAL REPORT, AUDITOR GENERAL

#### MINISTRY OF GOVERNMENT SERVICES

Consideration of section 3.11, Office of the Registrar General.

**The Chair (Mr. Norman W. Sterling):** Good morning. The committee has decided to ask the Office of the Registrar General to comment with regard to the auditor's most recent report regarding the Office of the Registrar General. Welcome to you, Deputy Minister DiEmanuele. Would you introduce the people with you? And would you like to have an opening statement?

**Ms. Michelle DiEmanuele:** Yes, please.

**The Chair:** Please proceed.

**Ms. DiEmanuele:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. My name is Michelle DiEmanuele and I am the deputy minister for the Ministry of Government Services. I'm obviously here to talk about the Office of the Registrar General. Joining me is Frank D'Onofrio, who many of you may remember from the Ministry of Transportation—he is now our assistant deputy minister for ServiceOntario—and Judi Hartman. Both will be available to answer detailed questions as we go through this.

I'm happy to have an opportunity to speak today because the ministry has, I believe, been responding very effectively to the auditor's report. In fact, during the time that the auditor's staff was in, I'd like to say that I think we were working quite collectively at trying to ascertain the issues and the importance of getting to service improvements. I believe we've made a number of improvements; however, the auditor's report did raise some other issues of importance and we've continued to work on those post the report. I'd like to talk to you about those and update you on the progress to date.

The report made a series of recommendations, and while there is some overlap between the sections, I'll give you an update quickly on where we're at. Each of these recommendations is an important area of business for us, and we're committed to making the ORG and all public services among the best.

The ORG provides fundamental services. When someone can't get a birth certificate, they also can't apply for a passport, driver's licence or social insurance number.

Without a death certificate, you often can't settle estates. Without a marriage certificate, a spouse cannot apply for benefits or insurance. These are real problems for real people, and, as deputy minister, I want you to know I take the responsibility very seriously about being able to respond to these service needs.

We have made significant progress in improving services, with a multi-year plan supported by a \$16-million investment. I can comfortably say that many of our programs are the best in North America and, I dare say, across the world. There are areas that we are still working on, but we have seen enormous progress.

The first set of recommendations focused on eliminating the delays in the registration events, correcting errors and informing people if an event had not been registered and what they need to do. We have addressed these recommendations. In fact, all registrations for births, deaths and marriages are completed within six to eight weeks, and errors are corrected within five days. This is the standard we publish on our website and on our application forms. If a person applies for a certificate where the event has not been registered, the ORG sends a letter telling the applicant exactly what they need to do. This letter is sent three times or until the process has been completed. To make things even easier, the ministry launched a pilot project to allow parents with newborns to register their child's birth and apply for their birth certificate and social insurance number at the same time. We are also working on a plan that will help save even more time by making registration a one-step process. This will improve services and reduce cost to the taxpayers.

The second set of recommendations dealt with delays in issuing certificates, which was the area the public was most impacted by. Backlogs in this area, especially birth certificates, created an array of problems for people. We have been successful in addressing this problem. I have a handout that will show a before and after, for instance, of our Toronto office at Macdonald Block, where, prior to the changes we made, there were significant lineups. I think if you were to go over today, you will see that it is a very effective service that we're delivering and we do not see the delays that we saw previously.

The auditor's report recommended that we provide reliable estimates on turnaround time and tell people if their forms are incomplete. We implemented these recommendations and took a few steps beyond that. We started with an interactive, printable form that helped reduce errors and cut down on the number of frustrating

delays and manual processing that needed to be done. However, this still required people to print and mail their applications. So our next step was to offer end-to-end online applications that, in many cases, eliminated the need for any manual work at all, making the entire process much faster and more efficient.

In fact, since November 2005, the ministry has offered a money-back guarantee for birth certificates when people apply online. You get it in 15 days or it's free, and that's guaranteed. This made Ontario the first government in North America to offer a service guarantee of this type. As of the end of October 2006, about 310,000 people have applied online, and 99.7% of the applications that were eligible for the guarantee met the standard. I want to point out that we've also experienced a year-over-year growth in demand of 20%. It represents a complete turnaround of this organization.

At this time, I would like to acknowledge the hard work of the staff to make this happen. I am proud to be associated with Judi Hartman, our deputy registrar, and the entire team who have led this improvement, not just to fix our problems but to exceed our previous service levels and to meet our customer demands.

But we're not stopping there. We're using this proven system and we're expanding it for marriage and death certificates. Since last July 2006, people have been able to apply for those certificates online and the early results have been equally impressive: 99.5% of online applications are processed within 15 days. We do not yet have a service guarantee that comes with that, but we plan to roll one out in the new year.

The third set of recommendations dealt with improving efficiencies at the ORG, including automated messaging and making more efficient use of staff time. In both of these areas we again have made significant progress. In addition to higher capacity, our new call centre technology has cut the number of calls that get busy signals by 98%. Automated messages give people general information as well as useful tips to help avoid delays.

This system also uses voice recognition technology, eliminating the need for people to listen to long menus before selecting an option on their keypad, making it faster and easier for people to get the information they need. In addition to that, changes in the way staff are deployed have helped make the call centre more efficient by working in smaller teams, with better access to coaching and training, as well as stronger emphasis on quality, that have helped improve productivity.

These measures were part of an overall focus on human resources, which is covered later, in the seventh set of the auditor's recommendations.

The fourth and fifth section dealt with the procurement and implementation of the ORG computer system. As you may have noticed, the ORG's new computer system is the electronic backbone of improvements we've made to date to services over the past two years and will allow us to make future improvements we have planned. Our new computer system replaced a 20-year-old technology, and IT support was not available for it, so this was a

necessity. The new system is extremely robust and has a 99.7% reliability rate. According to our independent third-party review, it is also fulfilling our needs.

We also have a new service to let clients check the status of their application online. More than 700 people a day use that option. For those who do not have Internet access at home, they can also access this service at public libraries across Ontario, including part of the GO library network. In addition, parents can register their baby's birth and apply for their birth certificates and social insurance numbers all at the same time with newborn registration services.

Regardless of the benefits, we recognize the need for thorough and sound planning and, as the auditor suggested, we will ensure that all appropriate approvals are obtained for projects in the future.

In addition, a special task force, commissioned by Minister Phillips in 2004, took a look at large IT projects across the government just like this system. Although not directly related to the auditor's reports, that particular task force set of recommendations has been implemented and is helping us across government to implement more effectively large-scale IT projects.

Chaired by the former Auditor General of Canada, Denis Desautels, the task force looked at ways to make projects more effective, with better planning, stronger executive leadership, host implementation reviews and other initiatives for effective IT implementation. We've implemented these recommendations of the Auditor General, and I know they will help us get better value for money, as well as making us more effective.

The sixth section of the auditor's report made a particular note on human resources. Our hard-working staff are dedicated and capable public servants. They are the biggest reason we are able to eliminate the backlogs, advance our services, and have been able to respond to the Auditor General's report.

We have worked co-operatively with our bargaining agents and with our managers to make this happen. We've addressed the auditor's concerns and have written job specifications for every new position. ORG staff are now working in smaller teams, with better access to training and coaching and a stronger emphasis, as I mentioned earlier, on quality.

The ministry will continue following all relevant legislation directives and policies, while improving training for staff and working closely, again, with our bargaining agents to create a model work environment. In fact, I've met with our employees' union leadership and have made several trips to Thunder Bay to work at continuous improvement.

I would say this is a rich and productive relationship. I should also pause to say that I have overall responsibility for human resource management and take very seriously that we model what we are asking other ministries to do.

Employees are the key to all government operations, and we are putting a high priority on making them the most productive they can be by making sure they are engaged in their work and satisfied with their careers. We want them to have the conditions to be successful.

Again, Mr. Chair, I have a handout that will show that, while we have been decreasing our wait times and other indicators of some of the issues the auditor has raised, you will see the productivity levels increasing.

The seventh set of recommendations raised by the Auditor General was around security. I can assure the committee that this is top of mind for all of us in government operations, especially in the ORG. Ontario is one of most secure birth certificate jurisdictions in North America, and we are absolutely committed to maintaining the highest degree of integrity. The ORG has hired a chief security officer to ensure that the information we're responsible for remains secure and reliable. Our IT staff enhanced the computer firewall protection and implemented off-site record backup systems, as the auditor recommended.

#### 1020

I am very proud of the work the ORG has done. In the past years they have done an outstanding job of transforming an organization, and I believe they are now the poster child for our broad plans to modernize government services. We have made incredible progress, but I know there are still some areas where we have improvements to make. It is not perfect, at least not yet.

I know that many members continue to get calls from our clients who are not able to get through to the ORG call centre. In the Auditor General's report, he noted that 130,000 per day were getting busy signals when they called the ORG for help. Even though that includes automatic redials and things of that nature, there are a lot of frustrated people out there and we obviously have to have a plan to deal with their service needs.

Our approach was tied very closely to our plan to eliminate backlogs for processing registration and certificate applications. That's because most of the people calling were looking for updates on the status of their certificates. In fact, they made up up to 90% of the callers. We believed that by improving the services I've spoken about—eliminating backlogs, providing consistent turn-around times—many of those calls would take care of themselves. That has proven to be true.

We've reduced the number of calls that get busy signals by 98%. That means there are still people getting busy signals when they call, but it also means we've made enormous improvements. Better registration and certificate services account for a lot of that improvement, but targeted changes to the call centre have made it as efficient as possible under its current design. This includes online status tracking of applications: 700 people use that option every day and never have to contact the call centre at all. We reassigned the administrative work of people answering the calls so that they can focus on customer service.

We're improving training so that staff are more efficient and have greater customer service tools available to them. We've created additional capacity so that more people can get access to the system and recorded information, and we've modified our phone technology to

make it easier and faster for people to get recorded information once they get in.

Despite this, we still have too many people who are getting a busy signal or are waiting too long to reach an agent when they call. Clearly, these measures are not enough, but they have been a significant improvement. In fact, we are nearing the end of what we can accomplish within this existing model.

The calls today are fewer, but much more complex. You see, as our current systems were designed to provide information, they were never intended to handle the complex case management calls that we are now seeing with increased frequency as our more general calls are addressed through multiple service channels.

The people who are calling the centre now genuinely need more assistance, so we are now entering into a more focused customer care strategy. Over the next two months, we are going to continue gathering information and analyzing data so that we can have a true picture of the actual number of people calling, exactly why they are calling and how quickly and how well they are being served.

The information is going to help us identify specific ways to adjust our systems and better use our resources. From there, we're going to be able to develop and put in place a broader strategy to continue the transformation of the ORG telephone service into a top-notch call centre that's in line with industry standards. So we have to redesign our physical and technology resources to make them work better for the changing needs of our clients and help them to get the information they need faster.

It's all going to mean new tools to enhance our ability to manage information and develop better backup systems, all while ensuring value for money for the public. This is part of a 12-month plan with precise quantitative standards that the public can hold us to. We expect that this will help us continue to reduce waiting time and time on a call. These are going to be the structural changes that will not happen overnight, but we're committed to being successful in making them happen.

Before I conclude, I would like to take a moment again to thank the members of the Legislature and their constituency staff for their help over the very challenging time with the ORG service issues. They continue to provide a very valuable service to our clients, and the ministry appreciates their efforts.

Mr. Chair, I'm impressed with the accomplishments of the ORG. Again, I wish to thank the staff. They have demonstrated unbelievable resilience and creativity to deliver outstanding service. The investments we've made to support our staff and improve the ORG core services have made an obvious difference. Online service options are proving to be incredibly successful, and there's more on the horizon. Mail service is back on track. In some areas where we were simply unable to keep up, we now deliver better than ever before, and that's guaranteed. This model can be used as a blueprint for future service in Ontario delivery. We will continue to be relentless in our efforts to respond to customer needs.

I know there are people who are still frustrated by the telephone service they receive at the ORG, and to them I sincerely apologize. We have made a lot of progress, and I really think we have turned the corner. We're looking ahead and thinking about ways to continue this progress. In the meantime, our operations will focus on continuously improving registration and certificate processing to help deliver the high quality services the people of Ontario have come to expect from their public service.

Finally, it would be remiss of me not to commend Judi Hartman, our deputy registrar, for her direct, on-site leadership. She has been critical to our success and is a leader in Canada in this area. As deputy, I can tell you first-hand that these changes would not have been possible without her leadership, and I count on her each and every day.

Thank you, Mr. Chair. Frank, Judi and I would like to take questions now.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much. Can I just ask for one clarification? You said that 327,000 people had applied online and got—how many applied online and didn't qualify for the 15-day guarantee?

**Ms. DiEmanuele:** Because something was wrong with the application, or something? It's about 20%—70,000. So for some varied reason, their application would not have been able to be sent through the system without an adjudicative process at that time.

**The Chair:** How soon would they find out that their application was lacking?

**Ms. Judi Hartman:** In 15 business days.

**The Chair:** So it takes 15 days to get back and say, "You didn't put in your postal code correctly"?

**Ms. DiEmanuele:** Or whatever the deficiency is.

**Ms. Hartman:** Up to 15 days.

**The Chair:** But that's a mistake, a wrong postal code? You don't correct that?

**Ms. Hartman:** Just a point of clarification: The online application actually won't let you put in the wrong postal code. It gives you a list to select from.

**The Chair:** So what is a mistake—70,000 mistakes?

**Ms. Hartman:** It falls into three areas: Typically the event isn't registered yet, so parents have a baby and apply for the birth certificate online before the baby's birth is registered; it may be that some information is missing from the application form; or it could be that the fee is deficient for the number of products they've ordered.

**The Chair:** Okay. Questions?

**Mr. Ernie Hardeman (Oxford):** Thank you very much for the thorough presentation. Obviously it took away most of the questions I had. They've already been answered. I do want to commend the ministry for having done a good job in looking after some of the challenges we faced, particularly in our constituency office, a number of years ago.

I have a problem, on behalf of all of my constituents, about fairness and equity—that everyone get the same service from our government. Two areas: One is the issue of the MPP's office that looks after the inquiries, that

come from my office and the auditor's. The report I have here speaks to there being some unfairness in that. People who call the MPP get better service than people who don't. I just can't see a justification for that. I think we should be looking at a level of service—not that I want less service in the office.

The problem I'm seeing with it is that, in fact, the number of requests in my office is growing dramatically. In fact, we have a person who works almost full-time. She does a wonderful job, but she works almost full-time dealing with people who know they can come to our office and get birth certificates more expediently than if they do it themselves, particularly a lot of the people who are not very well-versed—like myself—with using the online process. We, as a government, then tell them, "Yes, if you do it online you can get it guaranteed in 15 days. If you do it by mail, it can take six to eight weeks." That's not equitable service to our people.

What are we doing to make sure that we improve the service but make it equitable to everyone? Because these same people are coming into our office now and the lady in the office does the online application for them. It works very well, but then again, the system isn't supposed to be set up so that the MPPs' offices become a sub-office to the Registrar General to do the processing of applications. I wonder what you're doing to solve that equity problem.

1030

**Ms. DiEmanuele:** Thank you for the question, sir. Let me first start out and say that MPP offices are an important source of information, whether it's for our services in the ORG or any government services. It is a backbone for the public to access their government through their elected official, and obviously that is an important thing to maintain, and the integrity of that.

The other piece of information I would just offer up is that we also have to recognize that an MPP can be a guarantor in the process. They're actually integrally part of the process by virtue of the trusted security measures that we have put in place, of which that is one. So they have a role to play from that perspective.

Having said that, what we are trying to do is create, as you would do in any service channel, multiple access points. Prior to the work that we had done, you would mail in your application. Now we have an online service. That obviously presents some issues for those who wouldn't have access to electronic services, I think of Ms. Martel and the area that she represents, for example. That's why we've expanded our GO libraries program. That gives people additional points of access, to go in and go online in our GO libraries program, fill out the form, print it off, fax it in, mail it in etc. Our 60-plus ServiceOntario counters across the province are another access point.

What we are trying to do, through our multi-channel approach, is respond to the different ways that people will want to access services. What I would suggest is that rather than think about it as one-size-fits-all, we're trying to produce a set of channels that responds to the unique

ways people want to access. Having said that, I believe that to the extent we advance our success with respect to the multiple channels I've described, I would hope to see some of that decrease happening in MPPs' offices, but I think they will always be an important source of contact for the public.

**Mr. Hardeman:** I just want to continue on that one, just another question. I just want to be assured that as we're moving into the electronic age and providing a higher level of service, that's not at the expense of the people who cannot avail themselves of it. One of the concerns I have in the auditor's report is that the actual length of the written application going in and the time it takes to return has increased—before all this electronic stuff started. That time has increased. I think it was four to six weeks, and now it's six to eight weeks. If I send in an application, and I want to make sure that it isn't moving resources from the old system into the new system without—

**Ms. DiEmanuele:** A couple of last comments on that. To the extent that we can drive many to the electronic channels, it also frees up staff to be able to work more effectively on those who are mailing in through the other avenues, and meet our standard. That's why in fact we've been able to rectify many of the issues and meet our standard of six to eight weeks. That six-to-eight-week standard has been consistent. It has not changed. That has been our published standard, and the 15 days is our more recent standard. Obviously, there is a difference, but it also deals with the amount of processing time. If you're filling out online, you're taking away a whole series of steps that occur when you mail in.

**Ms. Shelley Martel (Nickel Belt):** I'd like to follow up on that, because I'd like to be clear about what the steps are. To go from 15 days for an online to six to eight weeks for something that goes in the mail—I appreciate that staff have to input, but what are the rest of the steps that take us to a six-to-eight-week delivery time on one that's mailed in?

**Ms. DiEmanuele:** I'll start that off, but Judi knows that much more effectively than I do. The example that she used is a good one. When you're applying online, there are certain things that, when you put them into the fields, if they're incorrect, they get automatically dealt with, versus when somebody's mailing in, it's going through a whole adjudicative process—validation process is a better term. Judi, maybe you can walk them through some of that, and where we've seen the efficiencies.

**Ms. Hartman:** Sure. Just to give you a high-level understanding of processing paper applications, we spend resources receiving the mail or the faxes, cashing the money, depositing the money every day, turning the paper file into an electronic image of a file—that's scanning—and then data entry, transcribing the information from paper into an electronic file. We then try to let automated processing take over, but as the deputy mentioned, there is a percentage of those where they fail to be completed automatically. They require an adjudication, so decision-making.

For example, if somebody has applied for a birth certificate that they're not eligible for, a person who's not a parent is applying for a child's birth certificate, that will stop and it has to be manually adjudicated or reviewed before it can be completed or a letter sent out to the applicant.

Once the file is completed, it is printed. It has to be put into our distribution system. We use a courier company to deliver these things, and then it's handed off to the courier company.

Now, electronically, we miss all those first steps: mail-handling, handling the money, doing the scanning and creating the data entry file. We skip all of those and go right to automation. The parent, sitting at home or at a library, fills in some information and sends it. The system will take the money, will do an automated search, match and print the record, most often the next day. Then it goes right into distribution and out to the courier.

In terms of processing time, minutes, keystrokes, it's the comparison of 16 minutes of processing keystrokes versus six minutes. Now that's not elapsed time. There are a number of activities that are going on in the office on any given day. That's where we come to six to eight weeks.

If I could just add one other thing: Six to eight weeks is the service standard. At different times of the year, we're performing better than that standard. For example, right now it's considerably shorter than six weeks. It's down into the two-week range. It happens based on the cycle of applications. There are times in the year when it's higher or lower, that sort of thing.

**Ms. DiEmanuele:** Ms. Martel, if I can just remind you, we've also had a 20% increase in demand. So the efficiencies have been occurring while we've also seen a spike in demand in the program.

**Ms. Martel:** A couple of things: I checked with my staff this morning and they tell me regular birth certificates without any problems are still six to eight weeks and that they're being told that by our MPP contact. So we're not seeing a two-week mail-back of anything.

In telling me that it takes 16 minutes to input versus six minutes, then I'm questioning even more, to be honest with you, the processing time. Maybe I'm missing something. I'm trying not to be obtuse here, but frankly if that's the difference in time to manually input it, I'm having even more trouble figuring out that delay of six to eight weeks. I hear you say you have to deposit money. Someone who does an e-mail or does it online is doing that as a credit card, so there's still got to be some checks there and something has to be done with that credit card money as well. That has to be deposited somewhere, does it not? Not physically, but you're dealing with much of the same checks and balances, as far as I can see.

**Ms. Hartman:** Actually, the credit card transaction is automated as well. So human beings on the ORG side are not involved, unless the credit card is rejected, and then we have to get in touch with the client.

In terms of the 16 minutes and the overall volumes, you need to understand one other number, and that is,

600,000 certificates or documents were issued last year. When we say 16 minutes, it's times 600,000 things or the percentage of those that are paper. If there was only one application to be produced or processed on a given day, it would only take 16 minutes.

**Ms. Martel:** But of the 600,000 certificates that are issued, did you not say that 325,000 birth certificates are done online?

**Ms. Hartman:** Yes. Let me give you that working backwards: 600,000—604,000 actually; 300,000 of those were done online, so the balance are the ones that take 16 minutes. Again, at different points in the year, the turn-around time, the performance level fluctuates. The maximum it goes to is eight weeks. We don't advertise two weeks, for example, right now because that will change over time. We're just starting into our busy season again for the fall and winter travel season. But we actually measure every day how many we're processing, how many are going out the door and how long we've had them. That's how we know that.

**Ms. Martel:** So if we talk to our contacts, our agents, if it is two weeks, why would they tell us six to eight?

**Ms. DiEmanuele:** Because that's our published standard, and so that will always be our standard. Obviously, there are times in the year when we are able to surpass that and times when we've crept up a day or two, maybe, over that standard. But I think what Judi is saying to you is, we've just come through a period which tends to be a bit more of a downtime for us and we're heading into travel season. I suspect we will spend the next three to four months quite close to that threshold of the six to eight weeks.

1040

**Ms. Martel:** Can I go back to your volume—600,000 certificates, which would be different than events. Can you give me the breakdown for last year? The most recent year we have is 2004. What would be the events that were registered? You've given us the certificates.

**Ms. Hartman:** I don't have the exact numbers for 2005, but the numbers that are average: 135,000 births are registered every year; about 65,000 marriages; about 85,000 deaths; 1,500 adoptions; 800 stillbirths; 8,000 to 10,000 name changes; and about 3,000 delayed registrations. If you add it all up, it's roughly 300,000 events registered every year.

**Ms. Martel:** So that has remained constant?

**Ms. Hartman:** It's a relatively stable set of numbers. It's gone up 1% to 2% a year, but it's fairly stable.

**Ms. Martel:** So what has really changed are the certificates issued, because in the auditor's report of 2004, it would have been 400,000 and now it's up to 200,000.

Let me check something again around—I'm sorry, I'm going back to this—the registration for births, for example. Are there some security checks that you would say would delay that process? And are those security checks different for someone emailing in their application form versus someone sending that in by mail?

**Ms. Hartman:** Our security measures are uniform across channels. The security level that's applied is uniform.

**Ms. Martel:** So no difference in terms of timing if you're mailing something in versus doing something online?

**Ms. Hartman:** That's right. Between paper and electronic, there's no difference. We do have differences by age, so children eight and under don't require a guarantor, for example; nine and older do. That's the main physical difference to the outside world.

**Ms. Martel:** One other question that I wanted to ask right now has to do with amendments and corrections. My staff told me this morning that corrections and amendments to birth registrations are taking 22 weeks. Can you explain that process to me?

**Ms. Hartman:** They are two different things, actually, and we sometimes see people using the terms interchangeably. A correction, if I could say, is equivalent to a typo. If we've registered an event—and registration is still happening via paper—and we've created a typographical error, we'll correct that in five days. As soon as a parent tells us, we'll correct it in five days. An amendment is when—

**Ms. Martel:** Hang on. Just before you go there, do you send them a letter that tells them something has to be corrected and it's their responsibility to send the corrected information back to you?

**Ms. Hartman:** It actually happens the other way. We send out a notice to the parent saying, "We've completed your child's registration. Here's what it looks like." The parent has an opportunity to review that and they tell us if there's a typographical error. Typically, the spelling of names is what we see.

An amendment is a different process. It's set out in legislation. There are a number of different types of amendments you can do. It basically refers to any kind of change to an original registration, so it can happen any time after a birth is registered, for example. We keep birth records for 95 years, so at any time in that period a person could come forward and say, "The name of the hospital is wrong" or "The father's name is wrong" or "I forgot my middle name" or "My birth date is wrong." It could be any kind of change to a record.

Legislation is very prescriptive about how we handle records. Legislators in the past very consciously set up a system where we do not just go in with an eraser or whiteout and modify a record. These need to be kept in perpetuity and they need to show a complete chain of events, a chain of history. So to complete an amendment, the applicant—it could be the child or the person named on the record, such as parents, other informants, legal representatives; it could be any number of parties—needs to provide an application form specific to the change they want to make. They need to provide evidence. We don't, unfortunately, just take people's word for it when they want to change a record because of the ramifications. Evidentiary requirements vary depending on the type of thing you want to change. We do know that a lot of our

clients have difficulty getting evidence, especially older folks, older records. There are also fees associated with the different types of amendments, and I think there are approximately six different types of amendments. This would include things like a change in sex designation, a re-registration related to an adoption, and those other examples I gave you. It's a wide variety of circumstances.

There are very few of these done every year in Ontario. It's quite a tiny number, less than 3,000.

**Ms. Martel:** We must have them all in our office, then. That's a big part of our work.

**Ms. Hartman:** That is a value-add, by the way, that we see from constituency offices. Oftentimes your staff becomes so experienced in working with us and clients that they're able to actually assist the client in ways that we can't through paper.

So there are all these different requirements layered on. The client's personal situation is different. All of these things contribute to this lengthy turnaround time. We're always balancing resources, trying to ensure that we're getting certificates out, getting events registered, getting amendments and name changes and things like that done. Amendments, right now, are sitting at 23 weeks.

**Ms. Martel:** Just on that, my staff tell me that this is the problem they see. The package gets sent in, usually through our office. Something is missing, so it comes back. Whatever has to be changed is changed, and it goes in again; it starts the process again. I'm wondering why, if there hasn't been a first glance at it—there must have been some work done on it—when it comes back in with the corrected information, it can't be expedited in terms of going into a separate group to say, "Now we have the correct change and let's go."

**Ms. Hartman:** It's a question that comes up quite often, actually. The reason we do that is that some customers take a long time to return the package. It can be years. So if we were to keep a spot for them in the queue, it would make managing all of the other applications that come in subsequently that much more difficult.

**Ms. Martel:** What if you put a timeline on it of six months: "If we send the package back to you, there's something wrong. If we don't hear from you in six months, you start again"?

**Ms. DiEmanuele:** Ms. Martel, I think you're raising an appropriate issue. It's one that I have to say has not been raised to me in the way that I'm hearing it from you, where we see it as being a huge service problem. So I think it's appropriate that I take it away and actually spend a bit of time looking at it.

As I said, this has been a journey, a kind of working a way through this. We know we still have work to do on telephone systems. If part of that journey means that we have to look at ways to take existing legislation and modernize—I don't mean a legislative change, but modernizing our service to have the intent of the legislation carried out so that it would in fact meet a service

demand that may be there. So I certainly will take it away and look at that.

**Ms. Martel:** I appreciate that.

**The Chair:** As I understand what you've said, once the record is transformed from a written application—16 minutes and it's on the screen—from there on, it's the same as if somebody had applied through e-mail.

**Ms. Hartman:** That's correct.

**The Chair:** Any further questions?

**Mr. Jean-Marc Lalonde (Glengarry-Prescott-Russell):** I have to say that there have been some big improvements, but I wish our office could speak to some of your people once in a while—we're just working with the fax at the present time—and that we get someone to call back the following day.

Ms. Martel just brought up a good point. If there are errors, how long does it take before you advise the applicant that there was an error?

**Ms. Hartman:** Depending on which service we're talking about, it's always within the service standard. So if somebody has provided a paper application, the service standard is six to eight weeks. Either you'll get a certificate in six to eight weeks or you'll get a letter saying, "Here's the problem."

**Mr. Lalonde:** In six to eight weeks.

**Ms. Hartman:** Yes. If it's an online application, the service standard is 15 days. You either get a certificate or a letter in 15 days.

**Mr. Lalonde:** I'm just a replacement here this morning, and I wish I would have known that I was coming here because I have files. At one point, I myself spent five hours one day on those. My staff is working on them up to 40% of the time, going back a few years. But right now, my staff at the Hawkesbury office especially is bombarded with applications because March is coming and Christmas is coming, and that is the time—we put an ad in the paper every year at Christmas and in March if you don't have a birth certificate. But now they will require a passport as of the end of January.

I do fully agree with Ms. Martel. When this is sent back with the correction that you've required, I just can't see why it would take so long to get processed. I have some—I wish I had known—from March 2005 at my office. I just got a call at 9:20 this morning, and I wish I had known what was going to be discussed here. I'm going to call when I get back at noon to find out what it is. It's been a year, and now they're going to Florida. They said, "We need your airline ticket to get an urgency." There's no airline. They're driving to Florida. So what would you require instead of an airline ticket?

**1050**

**Ms. Hartman:** Two comments I would offer: If you have a series of files, we'd be happy to talk to you afterwards and get that information.

There are a number of ways to access service. We've talked about regular paper. That's six to eight weeks. There is something referred to as expedited service that we can provide in 10 days. That's where we do require proof of urgency. Typically, it's things like airline travel

or tickets. If somebody is driving on a vacation, though, we can work with a hotel reservation.

**Mr. Lalonde:** There isn't any. They have a mobile home down there.

**Ms. Hartman:** Okay. Sometimes there is an event they're attending. We're looking for something—

**Mr. Lalonde:** They don't have that. They're just going there and they'll be with their parents or in the mobile. I have that very, very often.

**Ms. Hartman:** I'd be looking for something from their parents' address, the place they're going to visit.

The reason we ask for proof of urgency is because we are expending additional resources without any additional fee, and we want to make sure it isn't abused. We do offer the online with the 15 days. We do have emergency service: two business days with proof of urgency and an additional fee.

**Mr. Lalonde:** With proof of urgency?

**Ms. Hartman:** Yes. We actually do that as a matter of fairness.

**Mr. Lalonde:** You just said that you reduced the busy calls by 98%, but the waiting time is still there, though.

**Ms. DiEmanuele:** Absolutely. A couple of additional pieces of information: Prior to the changes we made, we had 22 phone lines that were available to call in to, but we didn't have our tracking, we didn't have some of the shortcuts I spoke about in my opening statements, and you had to work your way through the whole recorded message to get the information you needed, etc. I believe it was understood that the wait time was an hour and a half or so.

Today—right now—we have 50 lines open. So we've gone from 22 to 50 and we have built in all of that customer service component online: the online tracking, the targeted messages, the better messaging so you can kind of cue yourself off and don't have to wade through.

I talked in my opening statement about staff multi-tasking. We've now focused them on the phone lines, so that's increased our productivity upwards of 15%. All these things have led to us going from about an hour and a half to—Judi, remind me—are we at 20?

**Ms. Hartman:** Twenty-five.

**Ms. DiEmanuele:** Twenty-five minutes, but 25 minutes is too long, to Mr. Lalonde's point, and that's where I spoke about what we're now doing: trying to get some additional data to really understand how the case has changed. We've gone from kind of an information call centre to a case management call centre, which means those calls will take longer, and we're now looking at what interventions we need to make to improve service even beyond what we've done to date.

I do not want to leave the impression that we have solved this, but I do want to acknowledge that we have made huge progress toward a more sustainable solution.

**Mr. Lalonde:** I was just saying before you came in that the only people who could wait that long are people who are either retired or on social assistance; otherwise, waiting 20 minutes on the line is impossible.

**Ms. DiEmanuele:** I can tell you, sir, that I spent some time at the call centre recently, watching the staff field calls and speaking to the staff afterwards, and when you have an average of 25 minutes, I don't want to be remiss in saying that there are people waiting longer than 25 minutes. There are also people waiting less than 25 minutes. I can tell you that, sitting in that call centre, I saw both of those things occurring.

**Mr. Lalonde:** You also mentioned—

**The Chair:** Mr. Lalonde, I have three more speakers and we're going to get short of time, so could you sum up?

**Mr. Lalonde:** Two quick ones.

**The Chair:** Okay.

**Mr. Lalonde:** Have you gone ahead with the registration—when you register a newborn—that they receive the certificate instead of reapplying for a birth certificate?

**Ms. Hartman:** We've introduced something called the newborn registration service, which allows parents to complete their registration form, get a birth certificate application form completed and a social insurance number application.

**Mr. Lalonde:** They have to apply?

**Ms. Hartman:** It's one transaction for the parent, but three things happen behind the scenes: birth certificate, birth registration and SIN card.

**Ms. DiEmanuele:** We're in the process of rolling that out.

**Mr. Lalonde:** My last one, which is going to be quick: They get their money back if they don't get the report in 15 days, but if your ministry makes an error, people are complaining. They send it back, they do the correction, they didn't get it in 15 days. They were after our office to get their money back. I never called your office back. I said, "Well, you got it in 15 days. I know there was an error. Nobody's perfect." Are they entitled to get their money back because of that?

**Ms. Hartman:** Yes, sir. Maybe I could get the name from you afterwards.

**Mr. Lalonde:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** Ms. Matthews.

**Ms. Deborah Matthews (London North Centre):** The first thing I want to do is say congratulations. I think this is an astonishing turnaround of government service. I know this was a real team effort, and I just want to say congratulations to you. I asked my staff what they wanted me to say to you or ask you about, and the response I got was, "Just say thank you." You are doing an outstanding job, giving them outstanding service. I tell you, the contrast from what it was maybe in the first year or so that I was in office to what it is now, the number of calls of support we're getting, is a dramatic turnaround. I wish I could say that for every ministry. I sure can say it for yours.

So, on behalf of my staff, my constituents and, I'm sure, many others, thank you. You've done a terrific job, and I think you've identified where you need to go. It's not perfect, but it sure is a lot better and sure is closer to the standard we should expect from our government.

My question is: Now that you have a system that really seems to be working well, is there an opportunity to sell that system and the training to other jurisdictions?

**Ms. DiEmanuele:** First off, let me just say thank you for your very kind words. I will certainly relay those to the staff of the ORG, who obviously have been the root of our success. I can also say we are not declaring victory, and I want to be very clear about that. Obviously some of the comments I've heard today, but also what we know to be true and where we need to move forward, will continue to be the result of relentless efforts to get at this.

I also believe this has an enormous amount of learning for us working with other ministries on how we take a methodology and actually work at driving very consistent customer experiences across the board for public services. So we are not declaring victory at home yet, but also equally trying to look at where we can expand it within our own government as a whole with other kinds of transactional services that this would lend itself to.

I have had the opportunity, with the secretary of cabinet, to meet with other delegations and people both in North America and across the world. It is something that people are interested in. I can't say I've thought about the commercialization component of it, but I certainly will be now. I think that's an excellent sort of thought process. I believe this is a best-in-class product that we have developed, and certainly our initial focus will be on what we've learned around customer experience, creating a much more retail environment so that people are able to get services.

I just want to come back to the remote areas. That is an area where I don't think we've got the model where we need it yet. People just don't have access to online in the way that obviously is consistent across the province, so we have to be relentless in looking at other ways in which we can do that. The GO libraries is one example. There are other things we can start looking at.

It will be a continuing journey, but it's an interesting thought.

**Ms. Matthews:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Matthews.

I was looking at your ORG lines before and after, that we've been provided with, for those people who might be reading Hansard: the ORG waiting room and the hallway outside in June 2004 and then the same area—the hallway and the waiting room—in the Toronto office in November 2006. I just want to be absolutely certain that the picture where there are no people waiting wasn't taken on a Sunday.

**Ms. Hartman:** No, sir. It was taken yesterday at 11 a.m.

**The Chair:** Mr. Hardeman.

**Mr. Hardeman:** Actually I did want to refer to the picture and appreciate that the lineup is gone. I want to understand that the main reason for the lineup not being there would be that most of the people who normally would have come to the Toronto office are now doing it online.

**Ms. DiEmanuele:** Or mailing in and getting effective service.

**1100**

**Mr. Hardeman:** Talking about faster service, I'm just a little curious, because if there's nobody there, who is waiting to be served? If it was a smaller line, I'd accept that. But with nobody there, I wonder whether the office is open.

**Ms. DiEmanuele:** That's a fair comment.

**Ms. Hartman:** It's a smaller line and it doesn't come out and go down the hall anymore.

**Mr. Hardeman:** Okay.

**Ms. DiEmanuele:** Sir, I walk by that office probably once a day in the Macdonald Block and I—

**Mr. Hardeman:** That must be you in the picture.

**Ms. DiEmanuele:** That's me—and keep an eye on it because it's obviously an indication that we'll be reducing our space.

**Mr. Hardeman:** Seriously, I want to go back to the 16 minutes and the six minutes. Recognizing my earlier question about equitable and fair service to everyone, once my written application comes there, and the extra 10 minutes is added and it is now on the screen, why is it that, beyond that point, it takes longer for that application to be processed than the one that came in online? We've got it done. We've got the extra two days for the mail to arrive, opened and be processed to get to the screen, but once it's on the screen, shouldn't they all be equal?

**Ms. Hartman:** They are. The extra time actually happens receiving the mail and getting to the same point that the online applications arrive at. That's where all that extra time is spent.

**Mr. Hardeman:** So is it a totally different group of people that would deal with that to get it on the screen rather than the person who is receiving the screen?

**Ms. Hartman:** Yes.

**Mr. Hardeman:** Why is that?

**Ms. Hartman:** When the online applications come in, human beings don't touch them unless there's something wrong with them, unless they're deficient and they stop processing. The majority of applications that come online are processed completely in an automated fashion. Humans don't touch them until the certificate prints the next day and then goes out to the courier. The bulk of the people who work in our service delivery area are working on paper applications or adjudicating either paper online where they're deficient.

**Mr. Hardeman:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** Ms. Martel.

**Ms. Martel:** Can I just raise a question that's related to your newborn registration service? The problem I have with the service is not so much that it's faster; it's that the parents still have to pay their fee to the municipality. If they either can't afford to do it or forget to do it—I'm more concerned about the ones who can't afford to do it because in some municipalities it's not an insignificant amount of money, and then that child is not registered. They may apply for a birth certificate and they can't get it because that birth hasn't been registered with the

municipality. I don't know if you have a way to track that, because I heard you say that for some of the things that come in, you can't move forward on the birth certificate because the birth hasn't been registered. What are those numbers? Are you systematically trying to get at that information? This matter of children not being registered is a really serious issue.

**Ms. Hartman:** We agree. We're absolutely focused on trying to reduce underreporting for all kinds of reasons: for parents, for the children, for the statistical information that's lost.

The newborn registration service that we launched in March of this year is the first phase. Right now, parents still go through the municipality. In the next phase, which is planned for 2007, we will have the parents submit directly to the ORG and bypass the work that happens at the municipality. That means the municipalities won't be spending money on helping, and they'll be able to not charge a fee. They won't be involved at all. That's the long-term plan. It will take two to three years after we roll out next year to make sure that all municipalities are involved. We can do it hospital by hospital.

In terms of numbers, if I'm recalling correctly, of all the online applications we get every day, about 12% of those not eligible are because the births aren't registered. Part of the online application is a question to parents if they indicate a recent birthday of the subject, so something in the last four to six months. The online application pauses and says, "Have you registered the birth yet?" It actually asks the question, so the parent hopefully goes, "Oh, yeah, did I fill out that piece of paper? Did I send it off to the municipality?" If they answer yes or they skip over it and carry on and we get their online application, the system will try to automatically match that. If it can't, we'll wait a period of time, a number of weeks. We've got this calculated or scheduled based on the average length of time it takes to register a birth. If we still don't have it, at that point we'll send a letter out to the parents that says, "We got your application. We can't complete it because we don't have a registration. Please go to fill out your form and send it in."

We'll put that application on hold again for another few weeks. We'll check again. We'll actually do that three times, and we will send a letter out to parents three times to try to ensure that the registration happens. Parents have up to 12 months to register the event before they incur something called a delayed registration of birth, which is a lot more difficult to deal with. That was in direct response to a recommendation the auditor's staff made to us.

**Ms. Martel:** When you say you check three times and they have up to 12 months and then it becomes delayed, is that also for an application that's mailed in, or do those prompts only get generated with an online application for a birth certificate?

**Ms. Hartman:** No, it's for all applications: paper, in person, online.

**Ms. Martel:** Okay. So 12%: What would that be in real numbers? Sorry. I was never good at math.

**Ms. Hartman:** Twelve per cent of 310,000.

**Ms. Martel:** If you can get back, I would appreciate that.

**Ms. Hartman:** Absolutely.

**Ms. DiEmanuele:** Some of the other numbers that you've requested today, we'll make sure we confirm.

**Ms. Martel:** If I can just say this, this is more of a political decision than it is a bureaucratic decision. I was at the minister's announcement on the service and raised my concern that the real problem for a number of parents is the fee. Those would be the same parents who probably wouldn't be applying online either, unless they go to a library and do it there, because they probably wouldn't have that kind of access to that kind of service. I said this in the House as well, that the real key will be to make sure there is no fee for this service, and then I think you will see a dramatic change.

**Ms. DiEmanuele:** Well, Ms. Martel, I think your principal point is that, again, we have to think about the 12 million people living in Ontario as having very different experiences and coming from different parts of the province with different access issues, etc.

What we've really tried to do in beginning the work that we've done to date on solving some of these problems is to look at a customer experience that's much more diverse than I think we previously had. I think we've not only fixed some of the biggest problems, but I actually think we've created a much stronger culture, frankly, in the organization and in the work we're doing around dealing with the array of problems that restrict access. We'll continue to do so.

**The Chair:** Ms. MacLeod.

**Ms. Lisa MacLeod (Nepean-Carleton):** Just very quickly, of that 12%, how much of it has been that the municipality hasn't completed the paperwork properly, hasn't notified the parent or hasn't notified the province?

**Ms. Hartman:** I don't have a statistic for you, but my experience is that it's a very small number. Municipalities have been long-time partners with the Office of the Registrar General and are very good about forwarding to us the registration documents in a very timely fashion, even the larger ones. On a weekly basis, we get their registration documents. My experience is that we don't have any unnecessary delays happening there.

**Ms. MacLeod:** Just a quick follow-up. Is it common practice that they don't notify the parents? I represent an area where we have the highest birth rate in Canada, and this is—as in probably everyone else's riding here—the largest percentage of calls that I get. We're finding that there seems to be a disconnect between the municipality and the province in some instances.

**Ms. Hartman:** I don't know how many municipalities reach out, and whether they do it by telephone or letters. I know that a number do. The current birth registration process is antiquated. It's a paper process; it's two parts. It involves the hospital, the parent, the municipality and the province. Parents today, because of the age demographic—this just boggles their mind. It is completely arcane, which is why the newborn registration service has been designed and developed the way it has, because it

speaks to their specific needs and where they intuitively go to do things. Once we have that rolled out, we won't have a problem with any municipality or any parent not knowing what they need to do, or being able to do it in a quick fashion.

**Ms. DiEmanuele:** The more we eliminate all of the touch points, the less chance there is for error.

**Ms. MacLeod:** Excellent.

I also wanted to echo Ms. Matthews's comments. You guys are the only ones that my staff will tell me I have to leave the office for, because they have to take an important call and it's not for me. So thank you all very much.

**The Chair:** Can I just get something straight? In terms of registering the baby's birthday and getting the birth certificate, is there now a process where you can do both at the same time?

**Ms. Hartman:** Yes. There's a caveat. Right now, in the current phase we have, you do all three transactions—register the birth, fill out an application for a birth certificate and fill out an application for a SIN—in one transaction online. Parents still have to in this phase

print the registration form and mail it to the municipality. Next year, we'll do away with that. They just have to hit the "submit" button.

**Ms. DiEmanuele:** And, Mr. Sterling, this is consistent with how we also rolled out some of the changes on certificates, going from the first phase, getting the technologies right etc., and then the full integration.

**The Chair:** I presume municipalities charge different amounts for the registration of birth, correct?

**Ms. Hartman:** Different municipalities charge different fees. They set their own fee.

**The Chair:** Do you inform the person who is doing it online what that fee is?

**Ms. Hartman:** Yes. We have a table in the application process that points them to their municipal fee.

**The Chair:** Thank you. Any other questions?

Thank you very much for coming to the committee. I think the committee feels that there is significant progress being made on this file.

The committee will now go into an in camera session.

*The committee continued in closed session at 1107.*





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