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**Standing Committee
on Heritage, Infrastructure
and Cultural Policy**

Municipal Accountability
Act, 2025

1st Session
44th Parliament
Friday 4 July 2025

**Comité permanent du
patrimoine, de l'infrastructure
et de la culture**

Loi de 2025 sur la responsabilité
au niveau municipal

1^{re} session
44^e législature
Vendredi 4 juillet 2025

Chair: Laurie Scott
Clerk: Tanzima Khan

Présidente : Laurie Scott
Greffière : Tanzima Khan

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CONTENTS

Friday 4 July 2025

Municipal Accountability Act, 2025, Bill 9, Mr. Flack / Loi de 2025 sur la responsabilité au niveau municipal, projet de loi 9, M. Flack.....	HE-37
Mr. Wayne Olson	HE-37
Ms. Jennifer Korstanje; Mr. Bob Gale	HE-40
Ms. Veronica Charrois; Niagara regional council/The Women of Ontario Say No; Ontario's Big City Mayors.....	HE-48
Ms. Haley Bateman	
Ms. Marianne Meed Ward	

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

STANDING COMMITTEE ON HERITAGE,
INFRASTRUCTURE
AND CULTURAL POLICYCOMITÉ PERMANENT DU PATRIMOINE,
DE L'INFRASTRUCTURE
ET DE LA CULTURE

Friday 4 July 2025

Vendredi 4 juillet 2025

The committee met at 1004 in the DoubleTree Fallsview Resort and Spa, Niagara Falls.

MUNICIPAL ACCOUNTABILITY
ACT, 2025LOI DE 2025 SUR LA RESPONSABILITÉ
AU NIVEAU MUNICIPAL

Consideration of the following bill:

Bill 9, An Act to amend the City of Toronto Act, 2006 and the Municipal Act, 2001 in relation to codes of conduct / Projet de loi 9, Loi modifiant la Loi de 2006 sur la cité de Toronto et la Loi de 2001 sur les municipalités en ce qui concerne les codes de déontologie.

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): Good morning, everyone. I call this meeting of the Standing Committee on Heritage, Infrastructure and Cultural Policy to order. We are meeting here in Niagara Falls, Ontario, to begin public hearings on Bill 9, An Act to amend the City of Toronto Act, 2006 and the Municipal Act, 2001 in relation to codes of conduct. The Clerk of the Committee has distributed today's meeting documents with you virtually, via SharePoint.

To ensure that everyone who speaks is heard and understood, it is important that all participants speak slowly and clearly. Please wait until I recognize you before starting to speak. And as always, all comments should go through the Chair.

Are there any questions before we begin?

MR. WAYNE OLSON

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): Seeing none, I will ask our first presenter, Wayne Olson, who is kindly ready and at the table, to begin. Just state your name, Wayne, and the magic people to the right are going to turn your microphone on.

Mr. Wayne Olson: My name is Wayne Olson. Can I begin now?

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): Yes.

Mr. Wayne Olson: Thank you, Chair. I was surprised to see myself sitting here by myself today. I thought there might be some other presenters.

Anyway, I want to welcome everybody to Niagara, because this is a great place to be in the summertime. I

know that some of you already live here, but I want to say thank you for coming to us.

I want to begin by telling you who I am. First of all, I'm a member of the regional council of Niagara, municipality of Niagara. I've been a chartered accountant for 50 years. I've been a soldier and I've been a farmer for all those years as well—well, not a soldier, because they retire you at a certain age.

Over the years, I have learned how to operate businesses and do a number of things. The priority that I've come up with at the end is I've learned to prioritize human rights and individual rights first over everything else. I've been exposed to lots of money and lots of dealings with businesses and mergers and acquisitions, and billions of dollars. The primacy must fall on human rights; that's where it should be.

I'm so pleased to see everybody here today because two of the things that are important are claiming rights and defending rights, and I look to this committee to be part of doing that. It's important to me. We belong to a profession, as politicians, where responsibility is not a burden for us. We share that. I just believe that this is important for that reason.

To the issue at hand, the code of conduct, I'm pleased to see that we have a uniform code of conduct that relies on education primarily because I look at this as that the perfect human being has never been born and neither has the last fool been born yet. We need to have help in education.

I'm supporting this because I think the role of the integrity commissioner—my dealings with him have always been very pleasant, very informative and very helpful. They've been right there on the spot. We don't have to wait. If we have education, a code of conduct and mandatory training, which the bill calls for, I think that is going to be a great addition to the knowledge and skills of members of council all over the province.

Of course, human rights compliance requires enforcement. The provision of an enforcement mechanism is a great thing, along with the four tests of whether or not a compliance has been made. I think the integrity commissioner, once again, is the proper vehicle for this.

I do, however, want to point out a couple of threats to the whole process. If the integrity commissioner is chosen as a vehicle to deliver the program, I worry of delay, whether delay can be created just simply because of

volume of protest, I guess is the word. And I worry of it being under-resourced. If it doesn't have the resources, it can't do the compliance job.

My solution to that is to suggest perhaps there's a diverting mechanism so that we can get away from the cost of integrity commissioners and move into a more informal process, as some councils use as they go along these days, because I think that is something that avoids—the cost of an integrity commissioner sometimes diverts people from asking a question of them that they should ask because the bills get pretty high. Regional councils and municipal councils are very, very cautious of the cost of things, and they must be because of the cost of living and the stresses that we're all under. I think that's the route to get the appropriate responses to an issue that does exist, and I'm pleased that we're talking about this today.

I also approve of the idea of the Ontario Integrity Commissioner making a recommendation and going back to council and requiring unanimous consent for somebody to be removed from office. I don't think that this is something that should be taken lightly because the elector should not be deprived of their rights of representation, if we remove somebody from a council because of inappropriate behaviour or conduct.

1010

In other words, I'm in support of this bill. I think it's a great thing and it's time for it. And to tell you the truth, some of the activities I've read about, heard about, are kind of embarrassing, because we don't have the—we hold ourselves to a higher degree of—

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): You have 60 seconds left.

Mr. Wayne Olson: That's the time?

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): In 60 seconds; you have one minute left.

Mr. Wayne Olson: Okay. I'm finished. Thank you very much.

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): Okay, thank you. Sorry to interrupt your thought. Just because you're just one presenter this morning, we're going to do a rotation of six and a half minutes each for—do you guys want to start? The official opposition—MPP Burch to start, and then we'll go through the parties. Thank you.

Mr. Jeff Burch: Sure.

Thank you, Councillor, for coming today. We appreciate your giving your opinion and your feedback. These committee meetings are—bills that go to committee, we encourage that, obviously, as the opposition, because it gives the community an opportunity to help us improve the bill. So if there are changes—and you've talked about a number of things here—we want to get that feedback, and hopefully the government is open to changing parts of the legislation we may not all agree with. This is one piece of legislation that all parties in the House actually voted in favour of and are in favour of sending it to committee for that purpose, to help improve it.

One of the things that is in contention, or the main thing, is the process of removal for a councillor, so I'm interested in your opinion with respect to that. Most experts,

along with the Integrity Commissioner in Ontario, have favoured that final step for removal not going back to the council because a lot of folks feel that politicizes it. Rather, after it goes through the process—and this is a two-step process—it goes to an independent judge who can then look at the process as it's occurred, determine that it's been fair, objective, and then they make the decision, rather than it going back to council.

I've been a councillor myself here in Niagara, and as we all know, we declare conflicts for things. When you're sitting beside someone and you're the final judge for a serious complaint, I think there's a pretty strong argument there's a conflict there. So that's maybe the one part of this bill that everyone isn't really in agreement with. There are different opinions, and so I'd be interested to hear what you think about that.

Mr. Wayne Olson: Yes, thank you.

Through you, Chair: I agonized over this myself because I don't think one politician making decisions about another politician is really—probably not the right thing. Because we're used to conflicts—conflicts of interest and that type of thing—but there are occasions when I can see a vote might go a certain way just because of something that happened in the past or some policies that somebody believed in. I think that is something worth addressing because, as I said, one politician judging another politician is probably not right.

Mr. Jeff Burch: I would agree with you there. And you did say that if it does go back to council, if that is the way this legislation goes, unanimous consent is required. But a lot of folks, and I just actually talked to the new Integrity Commissioner of Ontario a few weeks ago—that's a really high bar, because as you know, councils rarely have unanimous votes. I mean, sometimes they do, but it's pretty tough, especially when it's personalized.

So that's a really high bar. It goes through two steps and then goes back to a council, and you're asking a council to make a determination, and you require unanimous consent. That's a really, really high bar to remove someone, and we're talking about really egregious incidents of—it could be sexual assault, things like that. So what are your thoughts on that?

Mr. Wayne Olson: Through you, Chair: Yes, it seems to me that there's no doubt that's a high bar. I think it's probably an impossible bar, because there will be some people that I will never vote against, and there will be some people that I always vote with. So it just seems that the way we think about things, it coincides, and we align just about perfectly. If our council is 32, I'm bound to have somebody there out of 32 people that I would vote with always and never vote against. So, just to be frank, it's probably too high a bar.

Mr. Jeff Burch: Okay.

How much time do I have left, Chair?

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): Two minutes.

Mr. Jeff Burch: Two minutes? Oh, great.

So, you raised a couple of other issues, and one of them was cost. There are two things I would be interested in your opinion on. One is—I had a private member's bill

myself on this subject that was lost when an election was called, but my bill was very similar to this piece of legislation. It had some assistance for smaller municipalities, because they came forward through the process and said the cost can be prohibitive. You touched on that.

And also, if you could talk about the cost of filing a complaint. We're here in Niagara Falls, and actually, one of the contentious issues in Niagara is that it costs \$500 here in Niagara Falls to lodge an integrity commissioner complaint. That's against the advice of most folks, experts, who say that that's prohibitive, someone may not have \$500 to file a complaint and it will discourage people from filing legitimate complaints. Can you talk about those two issues?

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): In 40 seconds, if you can.

Mr. Wayne Olson: Yes, I can deal with the cost first. I approve of the idea of somebody supporting the cost for smaller communities. I also question the integrity commissioner about the charge for \$500 for filing a complaint. I've heard the comment that there should be no barriers. I think \$500 is too much, myself. I think it should be something in the order of \$0 for the first complaint, and maybe \$25 or something for the second and third complaints. I think \$500 is a lot of money for a lot of people.

Mr. Jeff Burch: Great. Thank you very much.

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): Thank you very much. We'll now move to MPP Watt for six and a half minutes.

MPP Tyler Watt: Councillor, thank you for coming here today. It's a pleasure to be in Niagara Falls, and I thank you for being a part of this important process and also advocating for human rights. I think, at the end of the day, that's what we're all here to do. That's why we saw unanimous support for this bill in its first passing.

One of the themes that I've heard over yesterday in London and here today is the issue about the unanimous removal. Right now, as the bill stands, every councillor needs to be there and vote in favour of removal, and if even one person is not present, it falls. Other alternatives that we've heard from other people was a two-thirds super majority vote for removal and a judicial process for removal. I'm not saying I have an opinion on either, but I'm curious as to what your thoughts are on those two alternatives.

Mr. Wayne Olson: Thank you. Yes, I think the step of removing somebody from office really punishes the wrong person. The voters should not be deprived of their representation in any way. There's got to be a mechanism of some kind for people to—like in our situation, I served with two people on a ward, and there was always somebody there—and if there could be something like that. But if it can't be assigned to somebody else, this is where the waiting comes in. It's a pretty desperate thing, I think, when we have to remove somebody from office. That would colour my thinking on the vote for the unanimous vote. That would be something that I would look very strongly at as something that shouldn't happen. Nobody

should be deprived of their rights. So, that's the way I would approach it.

MPP Tyler Watt: Now, the other thing that you discussed was a concern for delays in training delivery, and possibly it being under-resourced. We know every municipality has different amounts of funding and resources available to them, so I'm just curious as to what some potential barriers are that you may be facing here in Niagara for the implementation of this bill.

1020

Mr. Wayne Olson: Well, the councils that I've served on—I came on board mid-term for the region, but at the local council, we had training sessions and indoctrination sessions. At that point, that would be where the training would take place. I think that's well within the resources of just about every municipality, because that's just a smart thing to have a proper training and indoctrination session.

I think that there was a one-hour session on the integrity commissioner, so we knew who to talk to and how to speak to them and how to get in touch. That could be expanded to some greater degree, and I think that would be the beneficial thing.

MPP Tyler Watt: Thank you. Something that we discussed yesterday, as well, was having a standardized training and education across the province. This may be something that actually helps with those resources and funding. So I'm wondering what your thoughts are on having a standardized approach to every council and municipality across the province.

Mr. Wayne Olson: Well, I think that's the right thing to do, because we're talking about a uniform code of conduct. I think how we train about the code is a logical thing, and I think it's a way to reduce costs. I'm pleased to see also that it's a mandatory training as well. That's the other thing I would add: It's mandatory.

MPP Tyler Watt: Thank you.

That's all for me.

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): Thanks very much.

I'll now go to the government side. MPP Anand, please begin.

Mr. Deepak Anand: Thank you, Councillor, for coming. I truly appreciate it. I was looking at your background in farming, accounting, military—you're really a fighter. With your reappointment in March 2025—congratulations, sir.

A quick question on this: I was looking at this, and then if you really look at our Bill 9, the changes that we're proposing will help to strengthen municipal governance and establish a more consistent level of accountability across all Ontarian municipalities. If passed, the bill will enable a new standardized municipal code of conduct and integrity commissioner process, as well as require code of conduct training for members of council and certain local boards, as well.

You've been elected in the by-election and then appointed again in 2025. Could you share with us, with the team here, what training you have previously received on the code of conduct at the onset of your term or throughout the term?

Mr. Wayne Olson: Through you, Chair: Do you mean what training I have had over the years?

Mr. Deepak Anand: On the code of conduct.

Mr. Wayne Olson: Well, to begin with, the military has a uniform code of conduct, and I practised that. I actually instructed people in that. But that is something that an officer in the Armed Forces takes very seriously.

The institute of chartered accountants has a lot of ethical training and a lot of different things, but my field of work was in mergers and acquisitions and bankruptcies. Something that everybody knows about is lean manufacturing; that was one of my specialties.

But my work was also in Sweden and Asia. I owned a company in Sweden and had to live and abide by the rules of the country of Sweden, which are different. They may be seen as very different, but at the basis of everything, it always comes out to human rights. That's how I arrived at the conclusion that we have to prioritize this over all other things when it comes to the bottom line, because it's more important than money. It's more important than so many things. That's the conclusion I came to. I never met a farmer who didn't love his animals, and even that was embedded in me from that.

Mr. Deepak Anand: Having said that I see that you've been through the code of conduct all through your life at various stages as well. As we know, this bill provides a regulation-making authority that would enable the creation of a standard integrity commissioner process. I did notice that you already spoke a little bit about it.

Is there any other important consideration for an effective integrity commissioner inquiry process that you would like to share?

Mr. Wayne Olson: I consulted the integrity commissioner about a few things when I was in doubt about what my position should be about something. I got advice that was not only, I think, tremendous advice, but I think it was delivered in a friendly, welcoming way as well. It was not a contentious thing at all. The experience was a good one and it led me to call again a couple of times for different things. The answers were over in about five minutes or 10 minutes and then we talked about other things. That led me to think that that was the proper way to do it.

Every individual municipality appoints an integrity commissioner or uses the ombudsman as their integrity commissioner. They always have access to this, and it's quick and it's fast.

I just think that there's so many things that could be avoided with education and having that consultation in a uniform code.

Mr. Deepak Anand: Thank you.

That's it for me, Chair. MPP Babikian will be taking over.

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): MPP Babikian, you have two minutes.

Mr. Aris Babikian: Just quickly: The intention of this bill is to create a code of conduct so that everyone can adhere to how to conduct themselves during their official roles. What do you think will be essential to consider to be

part of this new bill of conduct? What means can you suggest to us?

Mr. Wayne Olson: Through you, Chair: I suppose the answer would be that the really egregious things that we've spoken about and that have been mentioned here, of course, would be part of the code of conduct. I think I'd classify some of those events as emotional-type events that happen in the moment.

But if we had the warning in advance of what the consequences are of certain actions, and we standardized on that—and I don't want to in any way downplay them, but there are other things that happen. There are things that just basically don't go to that level, but they are offensive in terms of human rights. There should be a mechanism to address them as well.

I don't know how the committee is going to arrive at how you come up with a description, but that is certainly going to be a task for you and for the legislation to have the code of conduct. I hope that you will be doing the work—

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): Thank you. It's okay; we're just out of time.

Mr. Wayne Olson: Okay.

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): Thank you very much.

We don't have any more presenters till 11, so we'll just take a short recess and resume at 11 o'clock.

Thank you very much, Mr. Olson, for coming and for your thoughts and presentation. And thank you, members, for your questions.

Mr. Wayne Olson: Thank you, everybody. Have a great day.

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): Thank you.

The committee recessed from 1029 to 1103.

MS. JENNIFER KORSTANJE

MR. BOB GALE

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): Thank you, again. We'll resume the meetings. I'm sorry; I'm just a few minutes late. I apologize for that.

We have two presenters, and they're kindly already here. Jennifer and Bob are with us.

I'll just do the quick reminder that, each presenter, you have seven minutes for your presentation. After we've heard from all the presenters, the remaining time slots will be questions from the members of the committee. You can have, if you wish, two rounds of six and a half minutes for each side.

Just before you begin your statement, just state your name. If we want to do the order, Jennifer, you can go first, if you don't mind, please.

Ms. Jennifer Korstanje: Thank you. My name is Jennifer Korstanje. I'm a town councillor in the town of Grimsby for ward 3. I'm a long-time local. I'm a full-time caregiver for a son with an intellectual disability. I'm a human rights advocate, a litigation guardian at the Human Rights Tribunal on behalf of intellectually disabled athletes. I've started a non-profit track club for kids with

disabilities, volunteer as a literacy tutor for adults with developmental disabilities—so, very much a disability advocate, very much a community person. I'm also a full-time student at Niagara College in Welland for recreation therapy. I'm in my first term of council.

Chair and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today, not only as a sitting municipal councillor, but as someone who has lived through the very gaps that Bill 9 seeks to address. My purpose here is straightforward: to offer suggestions that I believe can help strengthen this legislation so it better supports democratic accountability, transparency and trust in due process across Ontario's municipalities.

Before I was elected, I was a resident who experienced a serious breach of privacy by a sitting councillor. In retaliation for raising a concern about equity in bylaw enforcement, this individual released confidential and personal information into third-party groups with the deliberate intent of targeting me. What followed was an orchestrated nationwide campaign of harassment, one that was calculated, putting both myself and my family members at serious risk. I pursued resolution through the proper channels, but the tools available are simply not adequate. I was left exposed, unprotected and repeatedly retraumatized by a system that offered no clear resolution.

It was this experience that drove me to seek elected office. I ran out of resolve to defend democratic integrity and to build a more accountable civic space for others who may one day face similar harms. Though that councillor was not re-elected, the campaign against me did not stop. For three years now, I have been subjected to his intentional campaign aimed at forcing my resignation, with unrelenting defamation, disinformation and a fuelled public hostility. It is clear he intends to return to that council table, alongside those who also participate in or enable this conduct. That's why I believe Bill 9 should include strong guidance around protecting the privacy and safety of residents and elected officials. It should also introduce a duty to report serious breaches that affect the well-being of others. These aren't just personal matters; they are matters of public trust.

Bill 9 introduces serious grounds for the potential removal of an elected official. Terms like "egregious misconduct" and "serious contravention"—these are important tools, but they do require further clarity. I would recommend the committee incorporate formal definitions or criteria that outline what constitutes an egregious act. Ambiguity breeds inconsistency. Defining clear criteria ensures accountability is applied to the conduct that compromises public integrity, not to the inevitable friction of democratic debate. Without clarity, municipal integrity commissioners could apply inconsistent standards across Ontario. Councils could face uncertainty when interpreting violations. The public may lose confidence in disciplinary decisions if they're seen as subjective or politically motivated. Drawing on well-established standards from the Human Rights Code, workplace conduct code and administrative jurisprudence can help shape objective

criteria that strengthen due process and disciplinary measures, strengthening the independence of oversight.

Municipalities rely heavily on integrity commissioners to assess conduct. It's critical that these roles are qualified, consistent and independent. I respectfully suggest the province consider establishing minimum qualifications for integrity commissioners, ideally requiring legal licensing and standing with the Law Society of Ontario, and creating a centralized oversight or support for integrity commissioners to ensure fair, transparent and accountable processes, especially when decisions carry consequences. This would give councillors and residents more confidence in the process and ensure integrity commissioners have the support they need to do their job right, ensuring natural justice and fairness.

When serious allegations are made, due process must be protected. In emotionally or politically charged environments, it is risky to leave removal decisions to councils. I recommend the province consider assigning such decisions to a neutral adjudicative panel or independent body. This would reduce conflicts of interest, preserve impartiality and help ensure justice is seen to be done.

Some final thoughts: education and prevention. Prevention is just as vital as enforcement. I encourage the introduction of a standardized mandatory training for all councillors, including modules on harassment, equity, privacy and conflict resolution. When councillors understand their roles and boundaries, it prevents escalation and promotes healthier, more respectful governance.

Bill 9 is an opportunity to restore public trust, strengthen democratic accountability and create safer, more transparent municipal environments. Thank you for your time.

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): Thank you very much for your presentation.

I will now go to Bob Gale. If you would begin—again, state your name at the start—that would be great.

Mr. Bob Gale: Thank you, Chair and members of the committee. My name is Bob Gale. I appreciate the opportunity to speak today on Bill 9, the Municipal Accountability Act, and to share both support for its objectives and some personal perspectives on why the legislation matters.

First, to identify myself—because it is somewhat pertinent on this—I ran an oil company for 40-some-odd years. When my daughter took it over in 2014, I ended up running for politics—good decision. She took over the company. She sold it about two months ago. Since I was elected on regional council in 2014 out of Niagara Falls, I became chairman of the Niagara Regional Police Service for four years and was on the board for many years after that. As well, now I'm the Niagara Parks chairman and their main integrity officer. I've taken numerous courses, and when I say "courses" I mean three-hour courses or things like this, not months, on integrity commission.

1110

I understand that Bill 9 is designed to make the integrity rules and codes of conduct more uniform throughout the province. As someone who has served as an elected official, I've seen first-hand the challenges and inconsis-

tencies that can arise under the current paperwork and patchwork of local codes of conduct. I've had a few integrity complaints filed against me over the years. Thankfully, I've never been ruled against, but these experiences have taught me just how fine the line can be between standing up for your constituents and being accused of crossing some invisible line of conduct.

Too often, these complaints are used as a weapon to try to silence or intimidate elected officials who are simply doing their jobs, advocating for the people who put them in office. I've experienced this myself, and in my case, the integrity officer ruled in my favour. But I can tell you, for someone less experienced or less confident, just the threat of an integrity complaint can be enough to shut them down for the rest of their tenure. That's not healthy for democracy and it's not fair for the communities we serve.

That's why I believe it's important to have clear, consistent rules across Ontario. It will be a relief for elected officials and the public alike to know exactly what's right and what's wrong, and to have a standard process for dealing with allegations.

But I also want to stress the need for a fair and transparent appeal process. Let me give you a personal example. My daughter once faced a conflict of interest when she was on the Niagara Parks Commission. Her private company—my old oil company—had done just 0.3 of 1% of sales with a company that did business with the commission, and it was ruled that she couldn't participate in debate. Yet in another case, the provincial integrity officer ruled that a police board member in Hamilton could participate in wage discussions, even though her son was a Hamilton police officer, because that conflict was considered miniscule. It's not balanced.

If we're going to have integrity rules, they need to be applied consistently and fairly, not subject to interpretation of local politics. Otherwise, we risk undermining trust in the very system that we're trying to protect.

This brings me to another concern, the cost of integrity investigations. In one instance, I advised the integrity officers to stay in Toronto rather than come down and investigate me in person. I offered to apologize, whether I was right or wrong, simply to have the taxpayers save thousands of dollars in legal fees. I did the math: Coming from Toronto—two people—my lawyers were charging me \$600 an hour. I figured four hours on that, so that was about 4,800 bucks they were going to charge to have me come down and say "I'm sorry" on something. They accepted my apology, and the region of Niagara was spared the expense.

But not everyone will have that option. We need to be mindful of the burden these processes can play on municipal budgets. That's why I'm encouraged to see Bill 9 is not just about punishment; it's about strengthening municipal governance and accountability in a balanced, responsible way.

The legislation introduces a single province-wide standard for municipal codes of conduct, integrity commissioner processes and penalties for misconduct. It also requires code of conduct training for council members and

certain local boards, so everyone understands the rules from day one. That's paramount: from day one, that you would do training for everybody elected.

Importantly, the bill creates a role for the Ontario Integrity Commissioner in municipal matters, and establishes a mechanism to remove and disqualify members of council for the most serious violations, but it does so with safeguards to prevent abuse. This will help ensure the process is rigorous, impartial and democratic. This is not about playing politics or scoring points; it's about protecting people, building public trust, and creating safe, respectful and professional workplaces for everyone involved in local government.

It is my understanding that this bill is the result of extensive consultation with municipalities, the Association of Municipalities of Ontario and the Integrity Commissioner. It's a collaborative, consensus-based response to the needs of our communities. Kudos to you all for doing this.

Ultimately, Bill 9 is about restoring and strengthening public trust in local democracy. By holding all municipalities to the same high standards, we can enhance the transparency, consistency and legitimacy of local governments across Ontario.

In closing, I support the intent of this legislation, but I urge you to ensure that the rules are applied fairly and that there is a robust appeal process. I could expand so much on appeal. I was always raised that laws are laws, but as long as there's an appeal, it's a democracy—because not everybody is fair, but as long as you have somewhere to appeal to. And that we remain mindful of the costs involved—only then we can protect our community, support our elected officials and ensure a strong, accountable, and democratic home for all Ontarians.

Thank you very much.

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): Thank you very much for your presentations, both of you.

We're going to start the questioning with MPP Watt, please.

MPP Tyler Watt: Thank you both for coming here today and being part of this really important discussion.

My first question is going to be for Councillor Korstanje. Did I say that right?

Ms. Jennifer Korstanje: Yes.

MPP Tyler Watt: Okay. Thank you for sharing your story and how you got involved. I'm sorry to hear that you have faced quite a bit of adversity; however, it will be beneficial in helping inform what we're doing here today. Now, you had mentioned that you were seeking help throughout this, and I'm wondering if you can expand on what barriers you've faced going through that process.

Ms. Jennifer Korstanje: Thank you. Through you, Chair: When I was a resident, I had reported the incident to the mayor and the CAO at the time, and I spoke with the clerk. I had gone to the councillors and asked—so, basically, I sent an email to just council and the mayor. The email's contents, word for word, were then distributed onto the Internet, and then I was targeted, attacked and harassed. I had questioned everybody about who had done

this and stuff like that. I had gone to everybody. I had gone to the police. Nothing was done on any avenue—I'm one of those people; I peruse every avenue possible relentlessly. I couldn't get any help, nothing was ever done, and here I am.

What this did: The cost of doing nothing is high, because this person then created a social media news channel, and this follows me around. There will be a video of me today speaking at this, and this has been happening regularly for three years. There was nothing in place. Still to this day, I try to combat this as an elected official, and I have gotten nowhere.

This bill is super important to protect residents but also elected officials. I'm sure everybody at this table has faced some sort of harassment at some point in time, and we have no recourse, whether that's from the public or that's from each other. This bill will protect us from that to some degree.

MPP Tyler Watt: Thank you for sharing that. Something I've heard over today and yesterday when we were in London is the concern about this process being weaponized and politicized. That brings my next question; I'll ask both of you. I'll start with Councillor Gale. Right now, the way that the bill is designed is, in order to remove someone, it needs unanimous consent from the entire council and everyone must be present instead of going through a third-party, independent judicial process. I'd like to know what your thoughts are on that final step in terms of the removal of the councillor.

Mr. Bob Gale: If it's a political strike against someone, then unanimous vote doesn't work, because they can team up. I look at the cost on everything as soon as you put it out somewhere else—we're talking thousands of dollars. I've been through tough ones and I've been through easy ones. I'm kind of in awe of it; that's why people are paid the big bucks to make the decision. We'll give you the information and go from there. Sorry, I didn't answer your question fully there, but if the person is the smartest person in the room that's making the decision, that's all I care about.

MPP Tyler Watt: Thank you. I'll ask Councillor Korstanje as well.

Ms. Jennifer Korstanje: Thank you. Through you, Chair: I agree with Mr. Gale in the sense that I actually don't believe it should go to council at all. Council will be compromised in one way or another, or somebody wants you up to avoid that vote. You have quorums behind the scenes; you have pressure from residents. I have been pressured by residents to vote in certain ways, and that happens on a regular basis. I think that would actually take away from the process.

I believe it should go to an independent body. If it goes to an independent body, there is public trust in the process and that is the most important part. Once you lose public trust in this process, you lose the process, and it's not seen as a fair and equitable system. I believe it should go to an independent body. As a councillor, I would not want to be in that position. And I agree, I don't think you would get

unanimous support just because there are too many factors that would discredit the process of it going to council.

MPP Tyler Watt: Thank you.

Councillor Gale, did I understand you mentioned you have experience being an integrity commissioner?

1120

Mr. Bob Gale: Well, I'm the integrity officer for the Niagara Parks since I'm chair, so therefore I had to take the course on that.

MPP Tyler Watt: Okay. That's a cool, unique perspective to bring into this, and I'm wondering, have you experienced any barriers or positive things that we could take into the implementation of this bill to make sure that it's successful?

Mr. Bob Gale: I've had a number of commissioners come to me and say, "What do you think? Can I rule on this?" And we do the common-sense angle on it, but I always say to them, "If you don't agree with my decision, you can go to the Ontario commissioner on it. But I'm not laying a complaint if you follow my advice on this." And I don't mind that. Common sense comes into play a lot, and I always use the line, "A police officer doesn't write you up for one kilometre an hour over the speed limit, even though it's against the law." So there is common sense on everything you do.

MPP Tyler Watt: Thank you.

That's all for me.

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): Thank you very much. To the government side: MPP Sandhu.

Mr. Amarjot Sandhu: Thank you to both the presenters for being here and for your presentation and thank you for sharing your insights and the important feedback on this bill. Also, thank you for sharing your story.

I would say that everyone deserves a safe and respectful workplace, and as you mentioned, this bill not only—it's a very important bill. It not only protects the residents but also the elected officials.

So I would direct my question to Councillor Korstanje. This bill would create a new penalty of removal from office for serious violations of the code of conduct. In your view, what is the appropriate balance between respect for the democratic process and accountability?

Ms. Jennifer Korstanje: Thank you. Through you, Chair: I think defining egregious acts which would constitute removal is very important. For myself as an elected official, I never received code of conduct training. I never received conflict resolution training. So I walked into being an elected official believing it was a workplace. Without any of this, it's not really a workplace, because you don't have workplace protections. So I think if we adopted things similar to workplace protections—and the things in a workplace that you would get fired for should be very similar to what an elected official could be democratically removed for, and that would be sexual assault, that would be harassment to the point of harm, assault. I think it needs to be defined and it needs to be clear, and when you are elected and you sign that oath, you agree to those terms, that I know that if I commit this act,

I could be democratically removed, and I think that would be a fair process.

I also believe there should be a duty to report, though, because what I have seen is somebody may report something informally to staff that may never go to the council table or to the integrity commissioner. So if staff also have a duty to report egregious acts to the integrity commissioner, that protects the public and that protects the other elected officials, as well.

Mr. Amarjot Sandhu: Thank you, thank you. This is such important feedback, and that's why these hearings are very important. That gives the government—it helps us make informed decisions when we, especially—create these bills.

In what ways do you think stronger penalties will encourage councillors to adhere to the code of conduct?

Ms. Jennifer Korstanje: Thank you. Through you, Chair: I believe accountability is key. Currently as an elected official on the municipal level, there's very little accountability. There's public opinion, but like I said, I explored every single avenue, right down to police, right down to legal, to lawyers, to council, to motions, and I have not had any movement to be able to deal with the things that I have to deal with to protect myself and to protect my family. So I think signing that oath and agreeing to that accountability will make all the difference in the world.

Mr. Amarjot Sandhu: And what other elements would you believe are essential to be covered in this standard code of conduct?

Ms. Jennifer Korstanje: I would say, very similar to Human Rights Code: workplace respect, the way we treat each other. I mean, any workplace—I've worked in hospitals, I've worked in long-term care, I've worked in retail. I've coached—actually, really good code of conduct training through coaching in Ontario. Those are the things we need to implement. It's basic common decency. It's basic workplace rules. I don't know why, as government officials, as representatives of the people, we don't have that already. And I think if it's standardized and we're aware of that and we sign in agreement that I'm going to follow this, then that would make all the difference in the world.

Mr. Amarjot Sandhu: Thank you, Chair. That's all the questions I have.

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): Thank you very much—

Interjection: How much time do we have?

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): Two and a half minutes.

MPP Saunderson.

Mr. Brian Saunderson: Thank you to both presenters today. Your comments about training are interesting to me.

I come from the municipal sector as well. I worked for eight years in the town of Collingwood in upper-tier government.

Unfortunately, Collingwood went through a judicial inquiry about many of the things that are included in codes of conduct. So we had mandatory training for council

members at the outset on the procedural bylaw and on our integrity codes of conduct. In fact, we went through a fairly lengthy process working with our integrity commissioner to amend our code of conduct, and it was a very public process.

The idea of standardization to me, which is one of the keys of this process, is very important, I think, because—you mentioned the cost, Councillor Gale. When you have 444 different codes of conduct, they may have the same intent and cover similar provisions, but if the wording is different, every infraction has to be weighed separately.

So a standardization, in my experience, would help lead to consistency, lead to better-informed councils and also reduce the costs. If the integrity commissioners are dealing with the same issues with the same code of conduct across the province, I think it would be helpful.

But you raised an interesting point to me, Councillor Korstanje, about the training and background of the integrity commissioners. This act is proposing that the Integrity Commissioner of Ontario will have some oversight, will be in charge of education, will be compelled to provide any municipality with the training, background and qualifications of any integrity commissioner in the province. They'd have to be registered.

To me, that's a big part of the puzzle because this is a two-step process in the egregious context. It has to be decided by the local integrity commissioner, and if it does meet that threshold locally, then it will go to the provincial Integrity Commissioner.

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): Thirty seconds.

Mr. Brian Saunderson: So given your comments on that—maybe we'll have to pick this up in the next round—I'm interested in your thoughts on that process. Because when we look at, ultimately, who is going to be making this decision, the way the whole code of conduct mechanism was decided, these are elected officials, so they're not really employees of the municipality.

How do you then govern that relationship if a municipally elected official oversteps when they're not an employee? Putting that fence around and then deciding how we're going to determine that, I think, is an important part of this puzzle.

What's the time left?

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): None. So you can pick that up in the next round, maybe.

Mr. Brian Saunderson: I've said my piece. In the next round, I'm going to pick it up.

Thank you very much.

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): MPP Burch, for the official opposition.

Mr. Jeff Burch: Thank you both for appearing. As a former city councillor from St. Catharines for a couple of terms, I've been on both ends of this issue, so I know where you're coming from.

One of the things I wanted to bring up that hasn't been raised yet is the process of filing complaints. What I found helpful in one of the things that I was involved in was a mediation step because a lot of these complaints can be resolved without going into a formal process. A lot of

codes that exist now have a step where you can meet with the CAO or an independent person and try to resolve it before it becomes an official complaint. I'm wondering if that's something that you think is useful.

Maybe you could both also comment on how here in Niagara Falls, as I brought up earlier, there's a \$500 cost to filing an integrity complaint. That can be seen as prohibitive for people. I understand, because of the issue that Bob actually raised, that you want to discourage frivolous complaints, but at the same time you don't want to discourage people who have a complaint and may not have the money.

So could that mediation step help? And do you see that consistency with integrity commissioners as a solution to that cost? Because requiring somebody to pay \$500 to file a complaint I think is very prohibitive.

I'll just kind of open it up for both of you. Maybe Jennifer first and then Bob—if you would comment on that.

Ms. Jennifer Korstanje: Thank you. Through you, Chair, in the town of Grimsby, I believe it's a \$200 cost to file an integrity commissioner complaint.

Yes, finances are always a barrier. If there is zero cost, you could get a lot of frivolous complaints, which then cost you that much more in integrity commissioner fees. I think finding a balance is good, or having some sort of—for Grimsby, if you file, it's \$200, but if you actually win and the integrity commissioner takes the complaint, you get that money back. So sometimes it's having something like that in place.

1130

Where I'd say the biggest cost barrier is for a councillor is that some people have access to a lawyer to fight these complaints with the integrity commissioner and other people do not. And then Grimsby changed the code of conduct to actually take away access to a lawyer or reimbursement of legal fees, so as an elected official, I would not be able to cover the cost of a lawyer to defend myself in a complaint. If you're just a regular person going up against somebody who does have a lawyer or a lawyer is the integrity commissioner, you're creating an equity issue, basically. So back to your original point, finding a balance in that cost—\$500, to me, would be steep, and the average resident, especially right now, probably would not be able to pay that.

I absolutely agree with mediation. Everything that takes away from going straight up that—it's a learning process. It's like a workplace, right? You have a verbal warning, you have a written warning and then you have a termination. Those steps, especially for conflict resolution and learning, are really important.

Mr. Bob Gale: I agree totally with her comments on the monetary factor of it. Whether it's \$500 as a number—that seems a bit steep, but there should be something, because they could be flippant complaints, and the people should get the money back if they're successful with their complaint on that.

As far as mediation, that's a definite. Everyone should go to mediation anyway, unless the integrity officer finds

that there's no hope for it, because that also discloses some facts. It also gives some opinions from the officer. I don't think it should be mandatory mediation—in other words, you live by what he says on that—because you should always have the right, if you didn't agree with that, to go to another body.

One thing I go back to in my original notes is that there has to be an appeal process, and you said there was oversight over it. Those are words that I love to hear: There is an oversight process over all of us on this, that if I disagree—I think the system was skewed or whatever—I have a way to go to a higher authority.

Mr. Jeff Burch: Thank you. Just following up on that, with the appeals process and the entire process—and this follows up on a question that MPP Watt asked earlier—the whole purpose of this committee is to hear from the public and then to determine if the legislation can be improved and fine-tuned.

In the legislation now, after a pretty serious process, you get to the point where there has to be a final step and it goes back to the council. Not only does it go back to the council, where it could be politicized, but it requires unanimous approval from the person's colleagues on council, which I think almost everyone agrees is not the way this legislation should go.

So I just want you to confirm: Do you agree that it should go to some kind of independent judiciary? Something that's been proposed by, for example, the municipal managers' association and others is that it go to an independent judge for a stamp of approval, to determine that the process had been fair and objective, rather than going back to council, where it could be further politicized. Would you agree with that?

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): Forty seconds left to answer that.

Mr. Bob Gale: I don't agree that council should be a unanimous choice. The voters put you there for a reason. You have four years or three years, whatever the term is, and they'll vote you out if you don't do right. Certainly in heinous acts or whatever, then something should happen there on it. But I don't agree that a unanimous vote of council to get somebody off there is what you're looking for.

Mr. Jeff Burch: Jennifer?

Ms. Jennifer Korstanje: I agree. It needs to be decided by an independent party. This way, you'll maintain trust by constituents and also other council and staff in the process.

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): Thank you.

MPP Watt, if you want to go for another round, you're more than welcome to, for six and a half minutes.

MPP Tyler Watt: Jennifer, thank you for discussing your thoughts on codes of conduct and standards earlier. Right now, it is up to the minister to decide what those will be. The examples that you gave are great because we don't need to start from scratch. There are already some pretty amazing frameworks out there, right?

I come from a nursing background. We have the College of Nurses and our 200-plus professional standards

codes of conduct. So there are definitely things out there that can help us with this process. I just wanted to comment on that.

Now, this tool is a very serious accountability tool. A concern that has been brought up is the ability to weaponize and politicize this. We need something like this, absolutely, but if a councillor brings up a problem against a councillor for political reasons, that's a concern. So, I'm wondering—I'll ask both of you—what safeguards should be in place to ensure that this power is used judiciously and not subject to political pressure or misrepresentation.

Ms. Jennifer Korstanje: Thank you. Through you, Chair: I think having clear, defined egregious acts will help. Having councillors sign an agreement with their oath will help: "You understand I'm agreeing not to commit these acts." Mediation will help, because we want to repair relationships. We often get into friction with co-workers. The idea is to work together, and so taking those steps to repair those relationships is really important.

I think having the independent body decide will absolutely take a lot of the weaponization away from it. I see policies weaponized in my community all the time. It's public pressure, and it's loopholes, and it's different codes of conduct and the ways that things can be changed and stuff like that. So, it's making a clear-cut, standardized, "This is the way it's going to be. This is what you're signing."

We put ourselves in this workplace. We agree to these standards. So when you decide to run, when you get elected and you sign that oath, we're agreeing to these terms. I see that as a very positive—I'm very excited about this bill because I think it will bring that accountability and respect to our workplace that we probably all want.

Mr. Bob Gale: Yes, and especially in the last year, before an election, it becomes political. No matter what you do, it becomes political, and some people hop on one side, some people hop on the other side. So I think an independent body has to get involved, and I agree with what Jennifer says.

MPP Tyler Watt: Thank you. And I think part of this bill is we want to have it implemented by May, if I'm remembering correctly, which is good timing for nominations and all that, starting before the next municipal elections that will be happening across the province. It seems like this will be a useful framework for all of that.

Now, Bill 9 charges the Integrity Commissioner of Ontario with education and training of local integrity commissioners, and I think having that standardized approach will be helpful not only financially but helping to just have that consistency across Ontario. But not every single area is the same as others, so I'm wondering, what resources, training or support do you think should be provided to your local integrity commissioners in order to help them do their jobs effectively?

I'll start with Jennifer, or—

Mr. Bob Gale: In the region of Niagara, we are all invited to a course, and we sign off that we took this course on it. Even two hours—we were probably four hours, having him talk to us with a lot of questions. I think the

integrity officer at that time came back for another one, talking to us. Anything is beneficial. When Jennifer said that she didn't have one at Grimsby, that's wrong. You have to have some type of course, and I say that for the agencies too. Niagara Parks commissioners, we invite them to take it. If they don't, I sit down with them. That's my duty. Is that good enough? Probably not, but at least it's one step in the right direction so they have an idea of what's a basic conflict, because some people would even say to me, "If my daughter benefits from this, is it a conflict?" "Yes, it is. You didn't know that?" So, I presume everybody has an idea, but they don't.

Ms. Jennifer Korstanje: Thank you. Through you, Chair: I agree. I think most of us want that training when we start, especially if you're a new councillor and you're walking in not knowing or not understanding. For a repeat councillor, maybe it's having that refresh or—codes change, and so having that updated is important as well, too.

I think that having access to training is important, and if we say mandatory training, then what do we do if somebody does not come? That needs to be thought about. We had a situation like that, where somebody didn't attend what was mandatory training. So then what happens after that? That's something that needs to be considered.

Training nowadays, you can have in person, you can have online. It can be tracked through the computer to see if people do it. We do WHMIS training. There are little tests after to see if you've actually been paying attention. I think it's pretty easy to implement.

MPP Tyler Watt: Thank you both very much.

That's it for me.

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): MPP Saunderson for the government side, please.

Mr. Brian Saunderson: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I've forgotten my question the last time. It's tough to remember.

So what we ended up talking about at the end was the need for consistency, but also then the ultimate decision-making, so I'd like to tug on that thread a little more, if I can. We talked about the need for an objective third-party lens on this. Would you agree with me that your local integrity commissioner is an independent arbiter in these issues?

1140

Mr. Bob Gale: I'd say yes.

Mr. Brian Saunderson: And you?

Ms. Jennifer Korstanje: I disagree.

Mr. Brian Saunderson: You disagree. You don't think the local integrity commissioner is a third-party arbiter?

Ms. Jennifer Korstanje: Sorry, through you, Chair: I think it becomes dangerous when an integrity commissioner is hired by the municipality, and then when you have sort of a running quorum at council that maybe—it could affect the hiring and the maintaining of the contract of the integrity commissioner. I've seen our integrity commissioner—not to say he's compromised whatsoever; I'm not going there. But they can make a lot of money off the municipality, so I don't feel like it's independent.

I think if you were to have an integrity commissioner that was not hired by that municipality come in and make that decision, then that would be truly independent. But when there's a work contract or there's any sort of interest there, then it's not independent.

Mr. Bob Gale: If I can expand on my yes: I'd go back to my appeal process. If you don't like what he says, you have someone else to turn to of a higher authority.

Mr. Brian Saunderson: So assuming, then, when we're talking about an egregious circumstance—and I take your commentary on potentially the questionability of the independence of the local integrity commissioner—when it comes to an egregious situation, it then goes up to the provincial Integrity Commissioner. Would you consider that person to be an independent arbiter?

Ms. Jennifer Korstanje: Thank you. Through you, Chair: I would. And as long as that person is regulated by another entity—that's why I say Law Society of Ontario, because when you have a lawyer, they're bound by rules of conduct of that organization. So as long as you have somebody that is bound by rules of an organization that they're accountable to, then you have independence.

Mr. Brian Saunderson: Would you agree?

Mr. Bob Gale: My answer is, eventually, you have to have some faith in the system. You can't just keep going up. Eventually, it's over. So I would have faith in the provincial integrity officer.

Mr. Brian Saunderson: Okay. So we can agree, then, on the provincial Integrity Commissioner being an independent arbiter that's looking at cases of egregious conduct, and any recommendation, then, by that independent arbiter then comes back to council for council's review.

I was interested in your comment about politicization, because everything you do at that council table is political, yes? And you face some very difficult decisions in terms of budgets and roads and infrastructure and multi-use facilities—everything that touches your residents' lives on a day-to-day basis. You'd agree on that?

Ms. Jennifer Korstanje: I do.

Mr. Brian Saunderson: And those are tough decisions, yes?

Ms. Jennifer Korstanje: Yes.

Mr. Brian Saunderson: And so then, when I talked earlier about these decisions under the codes of conduct being a municipal public process to hold elected officials accountable—because they have been elected, so they're not employees. There is a distinction there.

The intent of the codes of conduct was that any recommended discipline under the current system comes back to council for a decision, and that's because it's really a decision by a jury of your peers; other councillors are deciding on the fate of a council member, and these are difficult decisions.

So I guess where I'm headed with this is I'd be interested in your commentary, then, about why this very important decision is categorically different from a very significant decision you're making locally about budgets, provincial or capital allocations and those sorts of things

that really touch our residents on a day-to-day basis? I'll start with you, please.

Ms. Jennifer Korstanje: Thank you. Through you, Chair: I think part of it will come from—you have different municipalities with different councils of different sizes. When you have a large council, that might be a little bit easier and there's not as much pressure, but when you come from a smaller municipality—I mean, we only have nine on our council. There are some with less. Then it becomes a lot more personal, then it becomes a lot more controversial, and then there's a lot more pressure.

I don't like the idea of making the decision of removing a democratically elected official. At that council table, you develop relationships, so it's not an unbiased decision, regardless of how we like to feel about it. I think also you would lose public trust because there's always—like I said, I have a whole social media channel dedicated to just defamation, disinformation about me every day. That puts out a public opinion. As soon as you lose that trust in your process, you lose your process. What is more important than us deciding is maintaining the public trust in the bill that you are creating. I think, from the fact that you have all these issues with pressure—not necessarily politicization, but it's residents coming after you, threatening you and saying, “You better vote this way or you're done,” stuff like that. I get that—to vote certain ways when it comes to integrity commissioner complaints—because it looks better if everybody votes the same way.

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): Forty seconds.

Ms. Jennifer Korstanje: Aside from that is having the public trust in your process, and I think having an independent body, you would maintain that.

Mr. Brian Saunderson: Mr. Gale.

Mr. Bob Gale: Everything is political. Everything we do is political. You're doing the right thing here by making steps here on making this act better, making it more consistent. It's not going to be perfect. We have to live with what you do, and then you'll review it a few years from now and see where we erred, if you did at all, on this. So I'm very happy with this.

What I learned today is Grimsby doesn't have integrity courses and that. These are things you have to adamantly instill in every council out there and probably the agencies, as well, that they have to, they have to sign off that they've taken it, and that's your due diligence on this. Then at least they know on this, but it's not going to be perfect on this.

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): Thank you very much. We're out of time—sorry—on this side. We'll go to MPP Burch.

Mr. Jeff Burch: Most of the technical questions I had have been asked and discussed, but I thought I would bring us back, maybe, for a question for Jennifer, to kind of the impetus for this bill, which were some pretty serious situations that occurred in Ottawa years ago that most of us are aware of, egregious incidents of sexual assaults and harassment against women. Of course, this discussion has been happening since 2021. It's been out there for a long time, so we're all happy this legislation is finally coming forward.

When I first started to put together a private member's bill and then work with the government on this legislation, I worked with a group of women, The Women of Ontario Say No, and the issue was keeping or creating a safer environment for women in politics, because if you look across the province—and sadly, it's probably becoming worse—it's not a safe environment for anyone in some municipalities, but especially women. So I thought I would ask for your perspective on how important this legislation is to create a safer environment for women, because we all want to make sure that women feel comfortable in entering the public arena and they're not discouraged by incidents of harassment and even assault from getting into politics in the first place.

Ms. Jennifer Korstanje: Thank you. Through you, Chair, I agree, and I think what is important about this bill is it not only protects women but any marginalized demographic to come forward. I think when you have trust in your elected officials that you are going to be treated with respect and the dignity that you deserve, you're more likely to come forward and you're more likely to want to be a colleague. I think that this will go far in saying that everybody is welcome in government.

Do I feel safe as an elected official? Absolutely not. Do I feel safe that there are things and processes in place to protect me? Absolutely not. Would I recommend my daughter run for government? Absolutely not, and I'm a first-term councillor, so if that tells you something right there, this is why we need this bill.

I can only speak from the perspective of a woman. There are many other marginalized demographics that maybe feel the same way. We have a duty to make sure this is a safe, protected environment that people want to be a part of. I'm a good voice. I do good things for our community as a councillor. I've made great strides for different communities. We need people like me at the table, but we want them to want to be there as well.

Mr. Jeff Burch: Thank you very much. That's all for me, Chair.

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): Okay. Thank you very much. I believe that's the end of the question time. Thank you so much to both of our presenters for your time and your answers. I really appreciate that. You're welcome to stay, of course, for the afternoon session, but I will now stand in recess—this committee—until 1 p.m., so thank you.

The committee recessed from 1151 to 1302.

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): Good afternoon, everyone. I'll call this meeting of the Standing Committee on Heritage, Infrastructure and Cultural Policy to order. We're meeting to resume public hearings on Bill 9, An Act to amend the City of Toronto Act, 2006 and the Municipal Act, 2001 in relation to codes of conduct.

To ensure that everyone who speaks is heard and understood, it is important that all participants speak slowly and clearly. Please wait until you're recognized by the Chair before speaking. As always, all comments should go through the Chair. As a reminder, each presenter will have seven minutes for their presentation, and after we have

heard from all the presenters, the remaining 39 minutes of the time slot will be for questions from members of the committee.

This time for questions will be divided into two rounds of six and a half minutes for the government members, two rounds of six and a half minutes for the official opposition members and two rounds of six and a half minutes for the third party. So I will start the questions and answers after the presentations with the government side in this round.

MS. VERONICA CHARROIS
NIAGARA REGIONAL COUNCIL/THE
WOMEN OF ONTARIO SAY NO
ONTARIO'S BIG CITY MAYORS

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): Thank you for being at the table already. We welcome our three presenters for this afternoon. Just before you start, just say your name, and a reminder that you have up to seven minutes. I have the order here as Veronica, Haley and Marianne. Is that okay, to go that way? Okay. Veronica, I will ask you to begin please, and they'll turn it on from here.

Ms. Veronica Charrois: Good afternoon. Thank you, Chair and committee members, for the opportunity to speak with you today regarding Bill 9. My name is Veronica Charrois, and I serve as a first-time councillor, representing ward 3 in the town of Grimsby.

I appear before you today as an independent voice, and the views I express are my own, based on lived experience as an elected municipal official. The town of Grimsby retains an integrity commissioner who also serves 22 other municipalities. Since the beginning of my term, I have been the subject of six formal complaints submitted to the integrity commissioner: one by the mayor, four by a councillor closely aligned with the mayor, and one jointly filed by two anonymous members of the committee chaired by that same councillor.

Each of these complaints resulted in a finding that I had violated the code of conduct. These decisions were made through processes that I believe misapplied and manipulated the intent of the procedures of local bylaws; for example, complaints were bundled together; their scope was expanded months after filing to include new allegations, such as council decorum; and new standards were applied retroactively.

I also became aware of an email sent by a prominent community figure closely associated with several Grimsby councillors. This message, distributed to all members of council, the CAO and the editor of our local newspaper—but notably excluding me—criticized two councillors for not supporting a motion to double the integrity commissioner's recommended suspension of my remuneration to the maximum allowable of 90 days.

The email suggested that a unanimous vote would have sent a stronger public message and concluded by encouraging councillors to persuade me to resign. Unsurprisingly, shortly thereafter, the local newspaper published an

article calling for my resignation under an inaccurate and defamatory headline.

This year-long campaign has caused me significant reputational, financial and emotional harm. The financial impact alone has exceeded \$14,500, and the toll on my physical and mental health has been substantial. Yet I continue to serve my constituents with integrity and dedication. I believe the repeated use of the integrity commissioner process by some council members has been a calculated effort to silence and discredit me for political reasons. While my experience may appear unique, I have spoken within several other women serving in municipal government across Ontario who have encountered similar targeting. My intention today is not to revisit the individual complaints but to highlight how the current integrity commissioner framework is vulnerable to misuse.

I support the goals of Bill 9 in principle. I agree that municipalities should adopt and enforce standardized codes of conduct. However, I urge the committee to proceed with caution and consider key amendments before enacting this bill into law. The bill proposes mechanisms for the potential removal of sitting councillors based on findings by an integrity commissioner. While accountability is vital, so too are fairness, impartiality and safeguards against political abuse.

I will outline my recommendations under five key concerns.

(1) Subjective language and risk of political weaponization: Bill 9 proposes that a councillor may be removed if their conduct has resulted in harm to the health, safety or well-being of another person. This language is dangerously vague and open to subjective interpretation. Without precise definitions, this clause could be exploited in politically divided councils. For example, in my case, a high volume of minor or politically motivated complaints could be misconstrued as constituting harm.

Recommendations:

—clearly define misconduct that warrants removal, for example, criminal convictions, harassment or acts of danger;

—require a higher evidentiary threshold than the current balance of probabilities when an integrity commissioner reports that a violation of the code has occurred;

—explicitly state that political disagreements or minor breaches of decorum do not qualify as grounds for an integrity commissioner complaint or removal.

(2) Flawed removal mechanism: The proposed process for removal lacks sufficient safeguards to ensure fairness and neutrality.

Recommendations:

—the initial investigation may be conducted by the municipal integrity commissioner;

—if removal is recommended, the case should automatically be escalated to the Ontario Integrity Commissioner for independent review;

—if removal is recommended, a final decision should be rendered by an independent, non-partisan panel of integrity commissioners, all being practising members of the Law Society of Ontario, from different firms from On-

tario, none of whom are affiliated with the municipality in question;

—under no circumstances should final authority rest with the original integrity commissioner, municipal council or elected peers to avoid conflicts of interest or political retribution.

(3) Accountability of integrity commissioners: Currently, there are no minimum professional standards for serving as an integrity commissioner. In my own case, I dealt with individuals who were not practising lawyers in Ontario and therefore not subject to oversight by the Law Society of Ontario. This distinction left me without a meaningful avenue for recourse. When I considered a judicial review, our municipality had passed a bylaw preventing councillors from receiving financial support for such a challenge. At a time when my council pay was already suspended, this made judicial review prohibitively expensive and inaccessible.

Recommendations:

—require all integrity commissioners to be practising members of the Law Society of Ontario or mandate that all reports be reviewed and signed off by a qualified lawyer who is;

—mandate that municipalities cover the legal costs of any councillor seeking a judicial review of an integrity commissioner's decision, including all filing and legal fees;

—establish formal legal accountability mechanisms for integrity commissioners to prevent misuse and misconduct.

(4) Consistent standards and appeals: There is currently no formal appeals process noted for integrity commissioner decisions.

Recommendation: Bill 9 should include a clearly defined, accessible appeals process for councillors subject to findings or penalties under the code of conduct.

(5) Standardized training for all stakeholders: At present, there is no standardized training for integrity commissioners, councillors, CAOs or municipal clerks. In Grimsby, our code of conduct has been amended multiple times in a single term, creating confusion and inconsistency. Requests I made for clarification from the integrity commissioner were met with vague responses, leaving me uncertain about my obligations as an elected official.

Recommendations:

—develop and mandate standardized training modules for integrity commissioners, councillors, clerks and CAOs to ensure understanding of the code of conduct across all Ontario municipalities;

—require all parties to declare their comprehension of the rules and expectations.

My final thoughts: Bill 9 should aim to enhance ethical conduct in municipal government, not to empower political factions to remove dissenting voices. I fully support the principles of accountability and integrity, but these must be balanced with fairness, due process and safeguards against political weaponization. Thank you.

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): Thank you very much for your presentation.

And now, Haley, if you would like to, again, state your name and proceed.

1310

Ms. Haley Bateman: Absolutely. Sorry, my voice is not where it should be. We had a council meeting last night. We were up late.

My name is Haley Bateman. I'm a councillor with the region of Niagara, representing the city of St. Catharines. I am also a big supporter of the unpaid work of The Women of Ontario Say No. For the past two years and eight months, I have been aligned with the work of The Women of Ontario Say No. Our only request is that elected officials be responsible for workplace violence and harassment, just like every other working Ontarian. This is not a controversial request. It is basic. People need to feel safe at work, and municipal workers, elected officials and residents need protection within the Municipal Act.

I am a survivor of a registered dangerous offender. As an employee of our local women's shelter, I was part of the advocacy to get amendments to the Occupational Health and Safety Act, Bill 168, to define "workplace violence" as:

"(a) the exercise of physical force by a person against a worker, in a workplace, that causes or could cause physical injury to the worker,

"(b) an attempt to exercise physical force against a worker, in a workplace, that could cause physical injury to the worker,

"(c) a statement or behaviour that is reasonable for a worker to interpret as a threat to exercise physical force against the worker, in a workplace, that could cause physical injury to the worker."

I'm reading these to you because it's a small portion of the legislation that already exists around workplace safety.

We knew then what we know now, that there is a gap in this legislation. It excluded municipally elected officials. It's time to close that gap. Our workplace is not just council chambers. It is our community, it is the boards we sit on, it is the places we volunteer, and the staff who execute the work upon our direction. I do not need to remind you of the many public cases of workplace violence and harassment bestowed upon staff in our community by elected officials: allegations of abuse, domestic violence, property damage, threats of violence and the entitlement to do so because there is no deterrent. It is simply part of the dangerous sport that politics has become. Without this legislation, our work and our communities suffer.

I spent yesterday watching the committee hearings and I am so pleased that many of you have chosen to participate. It is also clear to me that those elected at the provincial level to represent constituents also care deeply about closing this gap in legislation. After reviewing the previous delegations, I thought I would focus on a few key points I feel need to be addressed.

At yesterday's hearings, as well as today, delegates spoke of the need to include some form of forced mediation in this legislation. I hope you understand how deeply problematic that would be. This legislation is proposed to

deal with the most egregious forms of violence and harassment. These occurrences cannot and should not be mediated. Asking a survivor to mediate with their abuser does not prioritize the rights, needs and dignity of the individuals impacted by crime or harm in all interactions and responses. Forcing mediation will also apply undue pressure and stress upon the survivor.

We are at the third iteration of this legislation in my first term as a councillor, so you are all aware of and versed in the advocacy around Bill 9. We need to get this right, and we can. We must remove council from the decision-making process; there is no way that we can remain impartial. Personally, I would not be satisfied with the discussed two-thirds majority rather than a unanimous vote of council for removal. This legislation can and must go to an impartial party for review and determination. Doing so avoids local political interference.

As currently written, Bill 9 requires that after both municipal and provincial integrity commissioner boards recommend removal, a unanimous vote by council, minus the accused member, is needed to actually remove them. This set-up gives local allies the power to block accountability, something one councillor could easily do. Think about that: All of this effort could be blocked by one person. I would add that if the decision to remove a councillor is in the hands of the council, they are now vulnerable to abuse, harassment and undue pressure. That cannot happen. That is exactly what we're trying to prevent.

It would prevent undermining by local relationships. I propose the replacement of a council vote with an arm's-length panel of ICs to render the final removal decision. This aligns with best practices. The Women of Ontario Say No have advocated for a province-appointed IC board following international and organizational best practices. This board would make impartial calls, subject to judicial review, rather than local voting. It needs to be entirely out of the hands and influence of municipalities.

This would also ensure consistent seriousness and fairness as well as create precedents. Under Bill 9 as drafted, even clear cases of harassment or assault could end in limbo if local politics stall action. They argue the unbiased, centralized model would be fairer, quicker and safeguard public trust.

Address the removal of a councillor, if they contravene this legislation, would preclude them running in the next election. This is an important point and must be included in the legislation. We understand that this process may take some time. A councillor may have been found to have contravened this legislation at the end of their term and may be re-elected immediately. At a prior council meeting last night, our solicitor spoke about legislation and unintended consequences of changes to the Municipal Act. This could be one.

Very little has been mentioned about egregious actions between councillors. We work hard to be elected, and we deserve to feel safe and protected at work. I deserve to feel safe and protected at work when working on behalf of my community. While this legislation will not ensure my

safety, it will ensure accountability, and there is power in that.

I will end my remarks by stating that I have and will continue to give my all to ensure that this non-partisan piece of legislation becomes part of the Municipal Act. This advocacy has been part of my life for 15 years. As a survivor, I am confident that we can agree on the best approach to improve political engagement and hold people in my position to the same standards of every other working Ontarian.

I thank you for your work and the opportunity to contribute to making this bill legislation.

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): Thank you very much for your presentation.

Yes, you're next.

Ms. Marianne Meed Ward: Good afternoon, everyone, and thank you, committee Chair Laurie Scott. Thank you to the Vice-Chairs, Guy Bourgouin and Tyler Watt. Thank you so much for giving us the opportunity to speak and to be here. I also want to thank my fellow co-presenters for their thoughtful words.

My name is Marianne Meed Ward. I am the mayor of Burlington. I am here today in my capacity as chair of Ontario's Big City Mayors' caucus. To ensure a complete conversation, if you ask me questions that have not been a subject of discussion at OBCM, I will distinguish my remarks personally. I'm happy to share some additional thoughts from my personal perspective, but today I'm here primarily to represent our caucus, who has taken a position on this very important matter.

Just for context, we are the 29 largest municipalities in Ontario—over 100,000—representing over 70% of the Ontario population and 30% of Canada's population.

I am here, obviously, to speak to Bill 9, and we as a caucus of 29 mayors have been very strong in advocating for strengthening municipal codes of conduct in Ontario for the reasons that you've heard already during your process but even just a few minutes ago.

We have passed multiple resolutions calling on the province to introduce legislation like this, including a joint motion with our mayors and the Mayors and Regional Chairs of Ontario, another organization called MARCO.

We've written to the minister and Premier reiterating our approach for stronger municipal codes of conduct, and many of our members individually have passed resolutions and have also requested changes and strengthening of the act.

We've worked alongside organizations such as AMO and AMCTO as well as the work of community groups such as The Women of Ontario Say No, who have done such incredible work.

We've supported calls from individual municipalities who have said there are gaps in the legislation, and I think we all wish we didn't have to be here. We wish that people would simply behave in respectful, professional, dignified, human-centred, community-centred ways. Unfortunately, there are too many instances where that simply doesn't happen. This kind of legislation is to address the fact that people aren't behaving the way that they should,

and that is a serious deterrent to people working in elected office. It's a deterrent to staff wanting to work in the municipal sector. That hurts us all.

1320

Fundamentally, this is an issue of democracy, of how we are going to function, because if people don't feel safe in their workplace, they won't go to work anymore—they won't run for office; they won't want to work in the municipal sector. And that will deprive us all of the talent, time, energy and passion of people in our community, so we have to get this right. We need to do something. Leaving things the way they are is simply not an option.

Currently, of course—as we know and why we're here today—there is no process to remove a councillor from office for the most egregious types of behaviour, which we also have unfortunately seen. Municipal governments do not have the adequate tools to enforce compliance with codes of conduct already in place, and it does occur that these can be politically weaponized. How many times have—I can tell you, I've heard people say, "If that behaviour was by a member of our staff, they'd be gone." So there's an understanding that there's expected, appropriate behaviour, and there's a further understanding that it isn't followed as it should be by elected officials because there is no consequence.

We are really pleased to see this moving forward. We want you to get something passed. There are good discussions, I know, happening around what the threshold of voting should be. Ontario's Big City Mayors has not taken a position on two thirds versus unanimous. It should be a high bar, I think we all agree—it's a big deal—but at the same time, the question of whether this should even go back to councils is a very valid and legitimate one that needs thoughtful consideration, because as soon as council members are being asked to weigh in and measure their own council colleagues, as much as that accountability is important, it by nature politicizes a process that should be depoliticized. It is about dignity. It is about human behaviour and treatment. It shouldn't run the risk of people being silent and not speaking up about the abuse that they are facing because they are concerned about political weaponization, nor should it be used as a tool to go after adversaries, and certainly we've seen all of that happen.

I can tell you my personal experience, if you wish, during questions, but I'm here to really speak in support of the legislation and speak in support of making sure that there is that ability, by an appropriate process, to remove somebody from office. That is absolutely the consensus of our mayors.

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): Sixty seconds left.

Ms. Marianne Meed Ward: Thank you.

I will conclude with that. Please, please give this tool to the municipal sector and work with communities to make it the most appropriate process to use that tool. Thank you.

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): Thank you very much for the presentations.

We're now going to start with the government side: MPP Babikian.

Mr. Aris Babikian: Thank you to all of you for coming and testifying your experience. I believe that you have a very valuable insight into what has been transpiring for a long time in our municipal levels of government, because you bring the added benefit of being, on one hand, a victim and, also, as an elected official. That's why it is very important for our committee to listen to you.

We, all of us, agree that in a society like Canada, it is intolerable to see such denigrating approaches from certain members towards other colleagues or employees in our society. That's why we want your input and we value your input, so that we can move forward and bring a policy code of conduct where it will be proof seal—that these kinds of incidents will not happen.

Now, my first question is related—and any one of you can jump on answering. You're welcome, all of you, to answer it. First of all, are there any measures that we can implement to prevent these incidents before they happen? I mean, it is fine, we will put the code of conduct, but these are all addressing the issue after it happens. But before that, are there any measures that we can take to prevent those incidents from taking place?

Please feel free to answer any way you want.

Ms. Haley Bateman: I'm happy to jump in.

I think that there are measures. I think that we should have more training as councillors. Our role at the region is very big. Our budget is massive. We have to work with 12 local area municipalities. It is absolutely not a part-time job, although it is referenced as one and paid as one.

That being said, the responsibility is huge. So that training at the beginning and understanding how to respect one another in personal relationships and understanding the dynamics of disagreeing with somebody but still moving on from that and finding ways to communicate is very, very important. That, I think, would be very, very helpful, but in doing so—that does not negate the fact this legislation needs to come.

People at my age, who are at the age where they can be elected, very well know right from wrong, and they know what would be deemed egregious or could be deemed egregious behaviour.

I know other people have spoken about IC complaints and it was talked about previously that there is some concern around frivolous and vexatious complaints and the outrageous cost of \$500 to file an IC complaint for the city of Niagara Falls. That's not what I'm here to talk about. Allegations of rape, assault, property damage, power and control—these are all very recent instances of egregious actions by a councillor to staff, to the community or to a colleague, and that needs to be dealt with.

So to your point—I'll just be concise—we need training. We need support in the beginning. We need to understand the role of the Integrity Commissioner. We need to understand how to minimize IC complaints. But we do need this legislation.

Ms. Marianne Meed Ward: Thank you for that really, really good question. I would answer it in three ways.

The first is we can lead by example. So all of us in elected office that want to create a respectful environment,

please go to the Elect Respect pledge that I've created with other Halton women, saying we need to not only ask the public to treat us with respect, but we need to treat each other and other elected officials with respect. So that is leading by example. That is committing ourselves to an appropriate standard of behaviour, and all elected officials are being invited. I know Justine has been a supporter of this and many others—and bring resolutions to your council.

There is a resolution online to commit yourselves as a council to respectful behaviour, because once you say, "This is what I believe and this is what is important to me," then the public can hold you to account for that. So it starts with leading by example. It starts by pledging ourselves to this respectful behaviour.

I agree that there is an opportunity to explain to folks what their obligations are under the act. More than respect in the workplace, there's conflicts of interest. There's understanding the rules around confidentiality. There is, how do you present disagreement with an opinion and not be seen as causing harassment or misrepresenting or slandering? I think there is room for that kind of expectation, but I also think there's room in the integrity commissioner process to take council members aside for those lesser types of—

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): You have 60 seconds remaining.

Ms. Marianne Meed Ward: Yes—for those lesser offences, to say, "Did you know that this is offside, and can you self-correct your behaviour?" and do that in a way that we would with a staff member. Explain to them what the expectations are. There isn't really that process—or if there is, under integrity commissioners, it's not well understood or well used at all. Thank you.

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): There's 30 seconds left.

Ms. Veronica Charrois: Thank you very much.

I agree with all the points mentioned, so standardized training being very important. I think there also needs to be specific training for the chair for council meetings. If things get heated or they are offside, maybe that's the opportunity to make sure that the chair is responsible and possibly calls for a five-minute recess. Something to do with that would be fabulous.

1330

There's personality testing, possibly; if in the beginning there's some kind of a training, so we know how to communicate with each other in respectful way; and I would say a duty to report for egregious behaviour—if something is an informal complaint, that there is a duty to report that.

Lastly, I would say if people are up for mediation—if both parties are—then I would like to see that, as well, if both are in agreement.

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): Thank you very much.

Over to MPP Burch, official opposition, please.

Mr. Jeff Burch: Thank you all for being here. I really appreciate it.

I wanted to start off, first of all, by thanking The Women of Ontario Say No, who have been working on this issue for years now. It's been since 2021, I think, that we have been talking about this legislation. You've worked with the government; with myself, with my PMB; with the Liberal Party, MPP Blais, with his private member's bill; and you've worked with pretty much anyone who would work with you to finally get this legislation brought forward, so I want to thank that group and Emily McIntosh and everyone who has worked so hard.

I also just wanted to get it out there—and you don't need to comment on this, Haley, but as a representative from Niagara, I wanted to make sure I addressed what happened at Niagara Falls city council the other night, when The Women of Ontario Say No asked for some speaking time, as they do often, to address this legislation coming to this meeting, and were denied the chance to speak because of something that was happening within that council. Some unfortunate events followed that, and it was clearly because council made a bad decision in not allowing The Women of Ontario Say No to speak. So that was regrettable, and I hope the city does better in the future.

And then, I wanted to turn to the purpose of these committee meetings, because the legislation is out there. It's to improve the legislation. That's why we're here, and to hear from you. The one thing that is in contention the most—Mayor Meed Ward brought it up—was the final step of the removal process: moving back after a pretty high bar already, moving back to council for a decision, rather than going to an independent judiciary, for example, to kind of put that stamp of approval on the process in an objective way. I was hoping that I could get a comment from each of you on that, which is the most contentious issue.

Maybe we'll start with Mayor Meed Ward.

Ms. Marianne Meed Ward: Thank you. I think there's a role here for an independent body to make that decision. If it goes back to a council, whether the threshold is unanimous or two thirds, it divides councils, it divides communities and it really leaves a decision that is moral, ethical and human to a political calculation. It puts everyone in an impossible situation, the person who has brought the complaint most of all.

We would never put to a vote of colleagues a staff member who is abusing another staff member. There would be an independent review, there would be a finding and then there would be action taken. We have models that exist, including in the municipal sector on the administration side, for how to deal with inappropriate staff behaviour. This is a workplace safety issue, as Justine so eloquently put it. This is what it is, and we have the tools that could be embedded in legislation to address that from that perspective.

And independence here is key, so that you're not debating whether it should be two thirds or unanimous. We're losing sight of the main issue, which is that the workplace should be safe for all elected officials and staff.

Mr. Jeff Burch: Thank you.
Haley?

Ms. Haley Bateman: Thank you for the question. Through you, Chair: We've spoken about democracy and the go-to for democracy as well. Somebody was voted in, and that's democracy. Democracy is also feeling safe at work. Democracy is also participating in democracy. I have to tell you, if my councillor was a convicted anything, I would not feel safe in participating. So we have to look at it from two perspectives, and I think our systems fail us, and it is systemic that we do not look at or approach things from a victim-centric approach, and I think that needs to change. So we all have to pause and think about engagement, and especially with elected officials. Well, they were voted in, but they may not have been voted in by me, and my safety matters in all of this.

So, nobody is above the law. These positions, I feel, are very, very sacred. We work very, very hard to get them; we work hard to keep them. Hopefully we work really, really hard during our term, and we don't please everybody, but the person in question has a huge responsibility, and the onus is on them. The onus should not be on the survivor to come forward; the onus should not be on groups like Women of Ontario to dedicate years of their life in unpaid work, to take days off to come to the Legislature to meet with people. We need a victim-centric approach.

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): It's okay; 60 seconds left.

Ms. Veronica Charrois: Thank you. I think most of the points were covered. I would just say that the main theme is that there is typically a bias on council. There are alliances that form, not that that happens intentionally in the beginning, but it does happen. We're talking about a removal of a democratically appointed official, voted in. So we want to make sure that, although this bill has that potential to remove, we are not removing politicians that are doing their job and they're representing their constituents to the best of their ability, well intentioned. We're talking about removal for egregious acts.

If it was me, with my minor complaints, I was ticking the boxes—tick, tick, tick. Does that mean I'm going to be removed? Because if that came to my council, I can guarantee you, I would have been removed. So those are the things that I would like you to look at, from that lens, that we are removing only egregious acts.

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): Thank you very much for that.

MPP Watt, you're up next.

MPP Tyler Watt: Hello to the three of you. Thank you so much for being here today, for advocating for this important cause and being a part of this discussion.

This is our second day; yesterday we were in London. It's great to be here in Niagara Falls, and I think—I counted—we've spoken in person with about 13 people, of which I would say almost all of them agree that this should not be left to the council members for that important final decision. It should be in the hands of an independent judicial body.

I know we've asked this question already, but I'm going to put it into a scenario for you all. Let's imagine someone from your council is—we've hit that spot. They've gone through the local integrity commissioner, it's gone to the provincial one, the vote has now come back. In order for that person to be ousted—to be fired—every single person needs to vote in favour and every single member must be present. So even if one person is not there, it falls, and then there are no consequences for this thorough process that's already happened. So let's say you are a part of this vote. Would you trust all of your colleagues to make a purely, 100% objective, non-biased vote to oust that member? And I will start with Veronica.

Ms. Veronica Charrois: I would say absolutely I would not feel comfortable with that at all. I provided my experience. There are parties that are even outside of council, so I got that email where the councillors that did not vote for my reprimand—for suspension of pay—they were pushed; they were suggesting that this would have been a lot stronger if it was a unanimous vote. So this does happen. At no time should council make that decision. It's not a fair process.

MPP Tyler Watt: Thank you, Veronica.
Haley?

Ms. Haley Bateman: Through you, Chair: No. We have 32 people sitting on Niagara Regional Council, and I don't believe we've ever had 32 people present at Niagara Regional Council.

MPP Tyler Watt: Thank you.
And Marianne?

Ms. Marianne Meed Ward: Thank you. I think we have to keep the end in mind: What are we trying to solve? We had a situation where a member released confidential information. There was an integrity commissioner report. There was a finding. There was a recommendation back to council to dock the individual five days' pay. Council did unanimously support that. But I can tell you, this was a highly political situation. Everyone lost sight of the fact that an independent reviewer had come to this conclusion. The individual in question justified their behaviour, and the community was split because they felt the individual was releasing information that the rest of us on council were hiding. It was a very challenging situation.

1340

The right thing eventually got done and we met the unanimous threshold, but the political fallout of that has meant that there are people that are very reluctant now to speak up when their colleagues are behaving in an inappropriate way. There are occasions where the process is used to try to score political points. I've filed a complaint with the integrity commissioner, and it may go nowhere, but the mere mention of that starts to destroy reputations. You know that, in the elected environment, your reputation is as important as the skills you bring to the table. If it had been left at "an integrity commissioner has made this recommendation based on an independent finding of facts," we would not have been in that political disaster that has now created a chilling effect on behaviour that is really inappropriate and continues behind the scenes

in some cases. So this has to be depoliticized if our goal is to protect both the complainant, the integrity of the process and the outcome.

MPP Tyler Watt: Thank you for sharing that. I agree. This process cannot be politicized, and if it's going to a vote by the councillors, it is by nature politicized. As a nurse, we follow codes of conduct. We have over 200 standards of practice. If someone lodges a complaint against a nurse, it goes to the College of Nurses of Ontario, an independent governing board whose mandate it is to protect the patient. If a complaint was lodged, the vote wouldn't come down to the floor of nurses to vote in favour or against their colleague, right? Just a different perspective of looking at it.

Sorry, how much time do I have left?

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): A minute and a half.

MPP Tyler Watt: Okay. All right. We're doing another round. Okay, I will come back to a different question. I will say I did ask the minister yesterday who provided the idea of the unanimous vote. This has been in the works for years and a lot of consultation. So, still not fully sure where that is, but I'm certain that there will be amendments put forward to help address this because it has come up in every single conversation. So thank you for your time and I will pass it along.

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): Thank you. Last round for the government itself: MPP Saunderson.

Mr. Brian Saunderson: I want to thank all of our deputants today for your appearance and for sharing your experiences, some of which has been very difficult, so we appreciate your input. This is the second day of our hearings, and we have, I think, at least three more scheduled across the province because we want to hear from municipalities of all sizes, and from experiences across the province.

I'm going to start off with just some fundamental stuff to see if you—I take from some of your comments you do support most of this, but I just want to be clear. So as it stands right now, it's left to the municipality to create their own code of conduct. We essentially have 444 codes of conduct across the province, or up to that many. While the provisions may be the same, they have different wording. So every time a complaint is heard, the local integrity commissioner is essentially starting from scratch.

I take it you support the idea of a uniform and consistent code of conduct across the province. Is that fair? Go ahead, please.

Ms. Marianne Meed Ward: Yes-plus. I think there are also circumstances where a municipality may want to add some elements that are important to that community. So I think there should be some basic standards, yes, but that shouldn't prevent a municipality from articulating. So we have, in our code, which is unique, some commentary around the obligation to curate social media feeds and to reflect a decision of council in an accurate way. I haven't seen that in any other code, but it's very important to us, as a for-example. But there should be some minimums, for sure.

Mr. Brian Saunderson: Anyone else want to comment?

Ms. Veronica Charrois: I believe that it should all be standardized across the province. I don't want to leave that up to interpretation for each individual municipality. I've seen that misused in our own municipality. Like I had said, after complaints were filed, we had councillors bring up motions to amend the codes of conduct and they were retroactively applied. I don't want to put any councillor in that position again where it can be misused. So, in any of these situations, I'm hoping that you're always going to be looking at the lens of, how can we prevent this from being used as weapon? Because even if it's happening in just a few municipalities, that's too many. I would like to see it standardized, where I can later go to my council member and say, "What does this mean?" Somebody would know the rules, and there's no interpretation; it's clearly defined. Thank you.

Mr. Brian Saunderson: Thank you for that. I know you mentioned in your discussion today, Veronica, the concern you had about consistency amongst integrity commissioners and oversight for integrity commissioners. And actually, the legislation is proposing that the provincial Integrity Commissioner would have the ability and some oversight for the local integrity commissioners for education, keeping track of their certification and their backgrounds so that their municipality could write to the Integrity Commissioner to ask about a specific integrity commissioner and would be entitled to get that information, and also for training. So it seems to me that the corollary to having a consistent code of conduct across the province is having some consistency in our integrity commissioners because I think, from my personal experiences, it's a large range and I think you've noticed that as well.

I would get your thoughts, then, on having oversight over the integrity commissioner and some standardization, education, monitoring, and you had mentioned in your own comments about concerns about that. So, thoughts on that—and I will start with you, Veronica.

Ms. Veronica Charrois: Thank you. Through you, Chair: Standardized as far as—I would like to see modules and videos so that there's nothing that could be left for interpretation. I think, for everybody across the province, it should be standardized, the training, because I've even seen in our own municipality—like I said, our integrity commissioner represents 23 different municipalities and what is potentially seen as a violation in ours might not be a violation in another. It's just a very confusing process for everybody involved so I would like it completely standardized.

Mr. Brian Saunderson: Any other comments? Sure, go ahead please.

Ms. Marianne Meed Ward: I would agree there needs to be standardization and also protection for the people that bring forward a complaint. I'm particularly thinking of a situation that we had where a staff member complained about behaviour from a council member and because the process was political and was public, this individual's name was made public, and it was very

difficult for this person to continue to work in the office. As these things happen, people take sides, they take positions, and it made a situation worse for this person and that then has a chilling effect on anyone else wanting to come forward to say, "This behaviour is inappropriate, and it needs to stop." So people either leave the sector or they suffer through with the inappropriate behaviour, neither of which is good.

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): Sixty seconds left.

Mr. Brian Saunderson: How many, sorry?

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): Sixty.

Mr. Brian Saunderson: Okay. Just going to ask you a follow-up question: Do you have whistle-blower protection in your municipality?

Ms. Marianne Meed Ward: Not for this. The requirement that we understand is that when there's a finding, it's a public report and goes to council, and that's the exact issue that we're facing—and that the complainants' names are made public.

Mr. Brian Saunderson: Okay. Go ahead, please.

Ms. Haley Bateman: I know I have to be quick. With respect to a whistle-blower policy, I believe that Niagara region has one. I'm saying "I believe" because it's not something that's brought up regularly. I think if you don't know that you have a whistle-blower policy, it's an ineffective policy. There should be some support around making that—maybe every two months, something goes out to talk about the whistle-blower policy so that we know that we have it and we are in fact protected by it.

Mr. Brian Saunderson: I want to thank you all of you for your contributions today. Thank you.

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): Thank you very much. We'll now go to MPP Burch for your final round.

Mr. Jeff Burch: I just wanted to give each of you an opportunity to address the issue of—obviously, this legislation is important to make the municipal arena, if you will, safer for everyone, but obviously women have a special place in that and the concern that we all have. I asked a councillor earlier about this, and they said, "Would I recommend to my daughter to get into politics? No, I wouldn't." That's really the tragedy here.

1350

I just thought I'd give each of you an opportunity to talk about the importance of making this workplace safe to make sure that we make politics something that women feel comfortable getting into.

Ms. Haley Bateman: Thank you. Through you, Chair: I'm happy to start. Thank you for the question. I was present when that councillor was speaking, and I can fully appreciate where she is coming from as a mother of three: two boys and a daughter. I would encourage them to become activists, find things that are important to them and engage politically. I think that is very, very important. But it is also very important that they recognize that their safety and well-being is paramount to any job, any occupation, any advocacy. I think that it takes a certain type of person, truly, to participate in this way, in this form, in this system. So I would encourage my kids—I say

that now, but should the day come I might change my mind. But I think that encouragement is important.

I will just say—this is probably the last time I’m going to speak—how important it is, through you, Chair, that you’re all here listening, you’re taking time to hear us, and I believe it’s in great faith. I’ve followed politics for quite some time. This is truly a non-partisan piece of legislation, and I think that is something that we can all be very, very proud of. So it can happen, true political discourse can happen, and we can all come to an agreement.

Thank you, Chair.

Ms. Marianne Meed Ward: First of all, I want to say apologies to Haley for calling her—the actress—Justine. My apologies.

It would be hard to encourage my two daughters to go into this, and this was what caused the Halton elected representatives, the women of Halton, to create the pledge and pledge ourselves to respectful behaviour.

Men do get harassed; men do get death threats too. But I will say this: Politics is still a man’s world. There are only about 20% of mayors across this country who are women—20%. And while we’re approaching parity at upper levels, not at the municipal level.

I’ve been told many times that politics is a blood sport. So women are expected to join what has been a man’s game for a long time under the terms that have been allowed to exist, which is that it is a blood sport. We are saying, why? I can play that; we can operate in that. We can exist and have our voices heard and power through. Every single one of the women that you have heard from that are still in an elected office are strong and capable and brave and courageous, and we are also saying, “Change the game.” It doesn’t need to be a blood sport; it shouldn’t be a blood sport. Just think of the imagery of those words.

I have been threatened with physical violence. Blood sport: It is not that. It is democracy; it is serving our community, and I know that every single one of you around this table feels that way. So let’s change the rules—enough. It’s over. It’s done. Let’s have a safe workplace for women and men and everyone who wants to go into it—and protect our democracy by doing so, because if we do not, that’s what’s at stake. People will leave, people won’t participate and then what do we have?

Mr. Jeff Burch: Thank you. Veronica?

Ms. Veronica Charrois: Through you, Chair: Thank you. I would say, in my own personal experience, similar to one of the councillors who spoke previously, I am subjected to a lot of personal attacks. I’m sure there will be a video about the two of us here speaking. It’s the daily nonsense that has emerged, and it’s just progressively gotten worse. Unfortunately, I’m trying to do damage control for six complaints that have come prior, so that’s a whole other thing.

But while this is happening publicly, community members—really great female community members—are watching this. I’ve encouraged them to step up for the next term, and they say, “I’m not doing that,” because they’ve had their own experiences, either as a committee member—but they see the torment that many of us get on a

daily basis. And is it worth it for them? They’re choosing not to, which is terrifying—

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): You have 60 seconds.

Ms. Veronica Charrois: Okay. Thank you.

Honestly, if I were not a female, I don’t know that I would be doing this, because I don’t know that the need is as great, but I feel women are just leaving politics at a rapid pace. That terrifies me because I do have a daughter, and we need to have equal representation. That’s why I’m here and that’s why I deal with the torment. I’m not going anywhere.

But like Marianne had said, this is a blood sport, and it should not be that way. We can have disagreements, we can vote different on different topics, but ultimately, we want to do the best for the community, and we just want to make sure it’s a safe environment for everybody.

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): Thank you very much.

We’ll now go to MPP Watt for the final round of questions.

MPP Tyler Watt: I wanted to bring everyone’s attention to a particular part of the bill: section 160.0.1, specifically (3) and (4). This is about timing. In this section here, if a complaint is raised during an election period, since there are specific rules for election times, no recommendation can be made by the integrity commissioner during the election period. I’d like to know what all of your thoughts are on how we can ensure that bad actors don’t get off scot-free on a technicality.

Ms. Marianne Meed Ward: Well, we’re back to depoliticizing the process. I can tell you, as the recipient of a number of complaints that were dismissed as frivolous and vexatious, that it is a process that can be and does get and is weaponized by people for political gain.

So there does need to be some kind of protection around an election period, without allowing people to behave in a way that is egregious. It is not a get-out-of-jail-free card for six months leading into an election. If there’s a process that is depoliticized, it can deal with that and must, because people shouldn’t be allowed to continue to behave in the ways that they are, despite the fact that there is an election coming.

But we need a way, an independent body, to distinguish a complaint and deal with a real complaint, and not have those other politically motivated ones really damage somebody’s reputation in an election period.

Ms. Haley Bateman: Through you, Chair: Excellent question—ahem. Sorry; you’re losing me.

I think it is really important that we don’t stall the process. That would be something that I hope you will all consider as well. Again, we are not dealing with “somebody didn’t reply to my email or was crass in my email.” These are egregious actions and they need to be dealt with swiftly. I think any delays are harmful to all involved.

I know Mayor Marianne was speaking about a staff member who was, I guess for lack of a better word, being harassed and intimidated by a councillor, and that needs to be dealt with swiftly. They are not safe at work. They are not safe doing their job. How could anybody work under that pressure? Something like that is dealt with swiftly in

the workplace and should be dealt with swiftly at council, no matter the timing.

Ms. Veronica Charrois: Through you, Chair: Thank you. I would agree that if we're dealing with egregious acts, that time frame is fine. I would ask that it would be a private matter, just in case this was not necessarily what was being accused, because I don't want somebody's reputation to be damaged in that way, especially before an election. Those are my two.

MPP Tyler Watt: Thank you.

I think one of themes that I've noted through all of this is that we want to make sure that we keep the spirit of this bill, which is to hold bad actors accountable, without it becoming politicized. It could very well be used to weaponize against political opponents and things like that, so thank you for bringing that up.

I don't have any further questions. I do have two minutes left, so if anyone wants to make a final comment, I will give the floor to you all.

Veronica?

Ms. Veronica Charrois: I'd be happy to start. Thank you.

Through you, Chair, I'm just asking that, whatever is proposed, you are always looking through the lens of how we can avoid removing a very good-intentioned councillor. Again, I support—egregious acts and bad actors, 100%, I would ask for that removal and support an impartial body. But I would never suggest that you ever put that on your council again, not just for the reasons of it being—often, there's an alignment that has formed. But even just the fact of asking somebody to make such a difficult decision with a co-worker and then expecting you to walk away and then work for the next however many years are left in your term is a very difficult thing to do.

I thank you for bringing this bill forward. I'm very excited about making this change so that future activists or

anybody that's community-minded who wants to do this feels safe and they can make a difference.

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): There's about 60 seconds left.

Ms. Haley Bateman: I'll just jump in. Through you, Chair: Thank you for the time. I'll be quick.

Our council has supported this legislation twice. I'm happy to bring it a third time but I hope we don't have to. We are in full support of the government making decisions based upon these committee hearings, and I thank you for your time today.

Ms. Marianne Meed Ward: And I would add that the big city mayors are unanimous in our support for legislation. We do hold ourselves to a high standard. We expect everyone should hold themselves to a high standard.

Keeping the end in mind, what's the best way to protect people who complain and make sure that we get to a process, which is changed behaviour? Hopefully at the outset, this will be a deterrent, that people think twice before they engage in inappropriate behaviour, that this could be the penalty. And make sure that there's an independent process so that it's not weaponized and it does achieve the outcome, which is to change behaviour and protect people who complain about really inappropriate behaviour.

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): Thank you very much, everyone. The time for presentations and questions is over, so thank you all again for coming.

If you would like to submit any written materials to the committee in addition to your presentation, the deadline for written submissions is 2 p.m. on Monday, August 18, 2025.

There being no further business, this committee is adjourned until 10 a.m. on Thursday, July 17, 2025, in Ottawa, Ontario. Safe travels, everyone.

The committee adjourned at 1403.

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