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

Municipal Accountability
Act, 2025

1st Session
44th Parliament

Thursday 31 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

Jeudi 31 juillet 2025

Chair: Laurie Scott
Clerk: Tanzima Khan

Présidente : Laurie Scott
Greffière : Tanzima Khan

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

**STANDING COMMITTEE ON HERITAGE,
INFRASTRUCTURE
AND CULTURAL POLICY**

**COMITÉ PERMANENT DU PATRIMOINE,
DE L'INFRASTRUCTURE
ET DE LA CULTURE**

Thursday 31 July 2025

Jeudi 31 juillet 2025

The committee met at 1002 in Delta Hotels by Marriott, Thunder Bay.

**MUNICIPAL ACCOUNTABILITY
ACT, 2025**

**LOI 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 First Vice-Chair (Mr. Guy Bourgouin): Good morning. Bon matin, tout le monde. I call this meeting of the Standing Committee on Heritage, Infrastructure and Cultural Policy to order. We are meeting here in beautiful Thunder Bay. Nous sommes à Thunder Bay pour la rencontre—Thunder Bay, 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. As always, all comments should go through the Chair.

Are there any questions before we begin?

MR. CHRIS LEAHY

The First Vice-Chair (Mr. Guy Bourgouin): Seeing none, I will now call on Chris Leahy. He's not here—he's virtual. He's on audio.

As a reminder, each presenter will have seven minutes for their presentation. 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.

Welcome. Please state your name for Hansard and you may begin.

Chris, you can start speaking.

Interjection.

The First Vice-Chair (Mr. Guy Bourgouin): You might be muted because we can't hear you.

Mr. Chris Leahy: Okay.

The First Vice-Chair (Mr. Guy Bourgouin): There we go. We can hear you now.

The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Tanzima Khan): No, he unmuted himself.

The First Vice-Chair (Mr. Guy Bourgouin): He unmuted himself?

You're good to go.

Mr. Chris Leahy: How about now? Can you hear me now?

MPP Lise Vaugeois: Yes, but very badly.

The First Vice-Chair (Mr. Guy Bourgouin): Keep speaking so we can try to adjust the sound. We can't hear you very well.

Mr. Chris Leahy: Oh, okay. Can you hear me now?

The First Vice-Chair (Mr. Guy Bourgouin): Yes.

Mr. Chris Leahy: All right.

My name is Chris Leahy. I'm a regional councillor in Whitby, Ontario. Thank you to committee members from all sides of the Legislature for allowing me the opportunity to speak to you and offer my thoughts and suggestions on Bill 9—

Failure of sound system.

The First Vice-Chair (Mr. Guy Bourgouin): You're breaking up.

Mr. Chris Leahy: Can you hear me?

The First Vice-Chair (Mr. Guy Bourgouin): No, you're still breaking up.

Mr. Chris Leahy: Better? How about now?

The First Vice-Chair (Mr. Guy Bourgouin): Keep speaking, so we can see if it's still breaking up, because right now you're breaking up as you speak.

Mr. Chris Leahy: All right. I'll try again.

As you may know, there are 2,860 municipal elected officials in Ontario currently, according to the Association of Municipalities of Ontario, and that does not include elected school trustees. Over the past few years, there have been several widely reported and serious incidents involving municipal councillors in places like Ottawa, Brampton and even in the nearby municipality of Pickering.

Each of these reported incidents were very different and with different results. In the case of Ottawa, the councillor did not run for re-election and had to forgo over a year-and-a-half's pay. That's a pretty hefty fine. In the case of Brampton, the councillor was defeated by a close 300 votes, and prior to that had to forgo 90 days' pay. The Pickering situation is still playing out; the end result is uncertain, but that councillor has been ostensibly docked a year's pay.

Given that none of these cases have ever gone to criminal trial or had the evidence tested in the same way one would in a criminal, or even civil, case should give us all pause. In my opinion, the victims did not get justice, the councillors did pay financial fines in the form of withheld paycheques. Importantly, the taxpayers did not necessarily get the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth.

We need to protect employees and members of the public from predatory politicians and those that would undermine the institutions of democracy that we value so dearly.

Back in 2021, I called on the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing to make changes to the Municipal Act in order to remove elected officials from the code-of-conduct investigation process. There is no other court in the country where the victim, the witness and the subject of an investigation and all of their co-workers get to decide on the penalty for someone found guilty.

I was, at the time, the subject of a code-of-conduct investigation in the town of Whitby. When I communicated with the Whitby integrity commissioner about my concerns around conflicts of interest, he assured me that all members of council were legally allowed to vote, even if they were witnesses, complainants or subjects of the investigation. Provincial legislation allows for this to happen.

Most residents wonder why politicians are the only professionals to have this type of privilege. If a nurse had a complaint filed against him or her at the Ontario College of Nurses, they wouldn't get a vote on their own punishment. It wouldn't be allowed for teachers, lawyers or engineers.

Local taxpayers have witnessed political interference in investigations in the past. In 2020, the Durham District School Board fired their integrity commissioner because she asked them to stop interfering with their investigation. Then trustees reprimanded the one trustee who blew the whistle on their bad behaviour. It was the very worst example of political interference. I know the Education Act dictates the code-of-conduct regulations for school boards, but they suffer the same inherent conflicts of interest.

I wrote to then-Minister Steve Clark about my concern and offered possible solutions, which could include establishing an arm's-length provincial body. All municipal taxpayers would save money and have a fair, unbiased system.

Section 223.2 of the Municipal Act requires municipalities to create codes of conduct and establish a process for investigating code violations to an appointed integrity

commissioner. Bill 9 would be strengthened if it removed the politics from the process.

I have to make a personal confession: I was financially sanctioned by the integrity commissioner for daring to say that my colleagues treated one of our colleagues differently than those who were not of an Asian background. I had 60 hours of video evidence. It was the truth. Principles Integrity said in their report that the truth was not a defence, so I received a financial fine. The town of Whitby did not investigate discriminatory behaviour. Instead, the mayor of Whitby launched a complaint against the victim of the discrimination and the witness who raised it. This is how Bill 9 would play out in Whitby. This is how Bill 9 can play out in any one of the municipalities in Ontario if we are not careful. The bill should differentiate between an alleged sexual assault by a councillor in an Istanbul hotel on a city trade mission and a councillor who rises on a point of privilege to state a fact with proven video evidence.

1010

There is inherent conflict in the design with the strong-mayor powers: the ability to select the budget and to select the CAO, who selects who the integrity commissioner is. Whoever pays the piper calls the tune. There are inherent issues that we have within the current regime, and we need to take the politics out of it if we're truly going to have an independent review and make sure that justice is served at all times, whenever there's a complaint, no matter who it's from. Thank you.

The First Vice-Chair (Mr. Guy Bourgouin): Thank you, Mr. Leahy.

This round of questioning—oh, not right away.

The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Tanzima Khan): No, you can. We don't have Kathy.

The First Vice-Chair (Mr. Guy Bourgouin): And we can start with the questioning? Okay.

So this round of questioning will start with the government, then the official opposition and then the third party. MPP—

Mr. Brian Saunderson: Saunderson.

The First Vice-Chair (Mr. Guy Bourgouin): Saunderson, sorry.

Mr. Brian Saunderson: Thanks very much, Chair. I want to thank Chris for taking time this morning to join us and for your presentation.

Chris, I'm wondering if you could, through the Clerk, arrange to send your script to us—if you have a script, or your notes—because some of the presentation was difficult to hear. So hopefully you can do that; work it out with the Clerk to send your script so we have the benefit of the full submission.

I appreciate your experience. Just so I'm clear that I understand what you were telling us—and you can just say yes or no to these early questions—my understanding is you support the idea of a unified code of conduct, but you have some concerns about the implementation. Is that what you're telling us?

Mr. Chris Leahy: Yes, absolutely. We definitely need a unified code of conduct. It will make it easier to imple-

ment it across the province. I completely agree with that concept.

The challenge is taking the politics out of the process, because right now, as you know, if one councillor doesn't like another councillor and everybody else votes against them, they can make the complaints with the integrity commissioner and [*inaudible*]. If we truly want independence, if we truly want [*inaudible*] justice, we really should take the politics out of it and not have it done by politicians.

Mr. Brian Saunderson: Okay. So, to me, a very big corollary to having the standardized code of conduct is also having supervision of the integrity commissioners themselves. As you know, in this legislation, it's proposing that the Integrity Commissioner of Ontario, who oversees the members of provincial Parliament, would be the overseer and will publish information about each of the individual integrity commissioners across the province and would also be responsible for training. I take it from your submissions that you think that's a good idea too.

Mr. Chris Leahy: Yes, I agree that would be a good approach. Agreed.

Mr. Brian Saunderson: Just so you know, I served in municipal council for eight years. I was the deputy mayor and then the mayor of Collingwood and served on regional council as well—we have an upper-tier government in Simcoe county—so I know that world well, and I know the dynamics around the table. To me, what we're really trying to do here—and this would be, I think, a first in Canada—is have an ability to—and you said in your statement that you see a need to protect the public and the taxpayers from predatory politicians. So I take it from that that you agree with the idea that somebody who oversteps the boundary in a very significant way, potentially into the criminal sphere, ought not to be in office. Do you agree with that?

Mr. Chris Leahy: Completely agree.

Mr. Brian Saunderson: Okay. So then it comes down to the mechanics about how we would implement that. As you know, the intent of provision 223.2 of the Municipal Act is to allow elected officials to, on the recommendation of an integrity commissioner, be the judges. So in other words, it's elected officials who are going to be the judge of or vote to accept or not accept the recommendations of the integrity commissioner.

So it's the integrity commissioner making the recommendation, and in the case of a really serious offence, it goes from the local integrity commissioner, if the recommendation is to remove that person from office, up to the provincial Integrity Commissioner, who then supports that or doesn't support that, and then it comes back to council.

So it's gone through two independent arbitrators, if you will, and then it comes back to council, because the intent of the integrity commissioner under the Municipal Act, initially, was that it would be a jury of your elected peers who would ultimately make the decision. In this case, this legislation is proposing that it would be a unanimous vote. And you and I know, having served in that sector, that that's a very high bar that would decide the fate of the

politician, if it's recommended that they be removed. So this would be a first, really, in Canada, to have a recall like that.

There have been discussions about doing it politically, through a vote. Under the Municipal Conflict of Interest Act, there is a provision for a judge to remove a politician, but that is a long process, and it has to be initiated by a taxpayer at their own expense. So this is a way to try to make accountability accessible to the public and the taxpayer, who we agree should be protected.

I would like your thoughts, then, on what you think would be the appropriate threshold or mechanism, if you don't agree with unanimity of council.

Mr. Chris Leahy: I appreciate what the government is trying to achieve, and I agree in principle. The challenge I have is, again, taking the politics out. As you know, as you sat on council—let's say they're making a complaint about two councillors or three, and then what if it's everybody else on council who disagrees with their position or their policy and there's a unanimous vote? The bar might not be high enough.

The people are the ones who decide to put the politicians as elected officials in there, and for the most part, they should be the ones who remove—even though I understand that there are two steps to the process and your objective is to take them [*inaudible*].

My other fear is, what marks that high bar? Right now, it's words that are interpreted differently by multiple different integrity commissioners. And as we heard from the testimony of Mr. Guy Giorno, we're seeing a very uneven application of the code of conduct across the province.

So I'm hopeful, with your new process, that everyone will be able to train the same and not [*inaudible*] application of the code of conduct, but my fear is that it won't be even, as you're still interjecting the politics of the people who may not always agree with each other on council—deciding the fate, of removing them from office. So I still have some concerns about that. I wonder if there's a way to include a mechanism with the judge as well, even if it's with the Ontario Integrity Commissioner—a way to capture that.

The First Vice-Chair (Mr. Guy Bourgouin): We're going to go to the official opposition for six and a half minutes. MPP Vaugeois.

MPP Lise Vaugeois: Thank you, Mr. Leahy, for your presentation. I also struggled to hear some of it. But I think, from your responses, I am hearing quite a bit better now.

As I understand it, you think that the politics should be taken out. I have to say I agree that the likelihood of getting unanimous agreement from council to remove one of their own members, I think, is actually highly unlikely, and by the time you've—so I wonder, am I expressing your concern about that correctly?

Mr. Chris Leahy: Yes, that's my concern. I agree with the concept. I agree with the need. The concern is just on the mechanism of how we're going to remove people out [*inaudible*]. Yes.

MPP Lise Vaugeois: I believe you also expressed concern about the strong-mayors act putting too much power in the hands of the mayor to actually choose who the integrity commissioner is going to be, so that—there's already bias and imbalance built into the process. Did I understand you correctly on that?

Mr. Chris Leahy: I 100% agree on that one. The strong-mayor powers diminish the impact of council, for sure. And even mechanisms there, where you need a super majority of council to override the mayor's budget, we now—when we ask for things at council, we're not asking for a recommendation; we advise the mayor to make recommendations to the budget. The strong-mayor powers really diminish the ability of councils to influence the budget. The CAO is picked only by the mayor. They're the ones who pick all the staff, the integrity commissioners. There are inherent conflicts in that relationship. I've been a municipal politician now for [inaudible]. It has drastically changed the relationship with staff, under the strong-mayor powers.

MPP Lise Vaugeois: I really appreciate you raising that, because we share that concern. Also, because in the last election—strong-mayor powers were not on the table, so this is something that's come in after the fact for people who elected members of council believing that those members would actually be part of a democratic process that could not be overridden by the strong-mayor powers. So I appreciate that you are raising that because I think it's a very serious concern.

1020

I also wondered—we're talking about having training, and a consistent training, for integrity commissioners at the local level and also a consistent code of conduct. I think those are both very important moves that are in the bill. I think that matters, to have consistency across the board. And I think, also—again, if I understood you correctly, you're really looking for consistency and fairness in terms of judgment, that they aren't going to be arbitrary judgments but it's a clear process, that the code of conduct is very clear so that people aren't having to ask themselves, "Was this a breach of conduct or not?"

So that's very important. I think we agree with that, and I believe you are also emphasizing that yourself.

Mr. Chris Leahy: Yes, no, agreed. Any interpretation of what those rules are—if you leave anything to interpretation, that's a risk.

MPP Lise Vaugeois: Yes. You know, what I see in this bill is that it's a very lengthy process. First, you've got the local integrity commissioner, then it goes to the provincial Integrity Commissioner, then it goes back to the local integrity commissioner and then it goes to council where you have to get a unanimous vote. My sense is that actually it will never happen. There will never be—no one will ever be removed from council by the time all of those steps have been taken, and then it has to be unanimous. In council, you have personal relationships, obviously. You're going to have internal conflict within the councillors about whether they are going to remove one of their peers.

Mr. Chris Leahy: Yes.

MPP Lise Vaugeois: Yes.

How am I doing for time?

The First Vice-Chair (Mr. Guy Bourgouin): Two minutes and 10 left.

MPP Lise Vaugeois: Okay.

I think, then, to reiterate—and please, you can agree or clarify—that the strong-mayor powers have distorted the role of councillor and created an imbalance in council and an imbalance that was not presented to voters prior to the last election. That has already skewed the balance within council and the ability of council to do its job. And then when we're looking at holding councillors to account to a code of conduct—we will get that through this bill, but then we're also going to get a very, very onerous process that is not likely to result in any actual removals but probably quite a lot of tension even amongst the members of council to have to come to a decision.

My own sense is that it should not be going to council for a decision. This should be more like a legal decision based on the behaviour, based on the evidence and the consequences of that evidence. All of that should be spelled out so that it's not down to people with personal relationships with each other having then to judge each other. Does that make sense to you?

Mr. Chris Leahy: Yes, I would agree with that statement. The strong-mayor powers have definitely distorted the relationship between council and staff. It definitely made it more difficult, there is a lot more power concentrated in the mayor, and it's difficult for members to bring things forward and make adjustments to budgets and it impacts staff. So relationships being on both sides of that bill—it's a huge difference. I was also on the school board. It's a very different experience for all of those to combine.

Also, your comment around people kicking out their peers: Yes, that's always going to be a challenge, but if those political relationships could skew it in any way, and if this is hanging over the council's head for six, 12, 18 or two years, that could have a huge impact on how council operates and it's going to overshadow a lot of things. So there are some concerns there for me, whereas if you take it out of the political process, it eliminates those concerns. The person beside you isn't deciding your fate. It's done independently based on, ideally, precedent and the rule of law, and people should have confidence in that outcome.

The First Vice-Chair (Mr. Guy Bourgouin): Thank you, Mr. Leahy.

MPP Lise Vaugeois: Thank you very much.

The First Vice-Chair (Mr. Guy Bourgouin): Thank you, MPP Vaugeois.

Now to Députée Collard.

M^{me} Lucille Collard: Merci, Mr. Chair, and thank you, Mr. Leahy, for your presentation. I look forward also to reading your full presentation.

I don't know if it makes you feel better, but what you have been talking about this morning and the concerns you've expressed are pretty much what we have been hearing on this committee throughout all of the hearing process. Today is actually the last day of the committee

hearing tour, and your concerns I think are taken into account—and I'm hearing that from all sides.

Now, I just want to ask you personally, because you're a city councillor, we know that the government is proposing legislation that involves the development of codes of conduct, and we know that consultation is actually an important part of developing strong legislation. I would like to know if you or any of your colleagues were consulted on this issue prior to the introduction of this bill?

Mr. Chris Leahy: There was consultation with the clerk and the clerk's staff based on a previous iteration of the bill, and some of the clerk's recommendations came forward to council, but nothing was endorsed. There wasn't really much discussion. We saw some information. So there was an opportunity to respond, but council chose not to, so that's why you're seeing individual members like you saw the mayor—our mayor—make a statement. Councillor Yamada made a statement. I made a statement because [inaudible] have been going through this process with some concerns and tensions quite a bit this term of council. So we're a little bit more on the active side of it, I suppose.

M^{me} Lucille Collard: All right.

Speaking about the code of conduct—and I know you've mentioned that you are in favour of having a unified code of conduct, and this legislation will give the minister the power to impose that standardized code of conduct across the province—I would like to hear from you: What would you like to see the minister include in the new standardized code of conduct, and who else should the ministry consult with before drafting those regulations? If you have any advice for the committee in that regard.

Mr. Chris Leahy: Again, just continue to do outreach and reach out to different members of council. I heard through friends that there was an opportunity to speak. Even when the feedback came in the spring on the previous iteration, there was no real easy way to find out that we were able to consult on this bill until we heard about it through colleagues, so a more widespread reach-out for consultation, especially to people with experience in the current code-of-conduct regime, would be helpful and, of course, yes, that combination always makes for stronger legislation. I'm a firm believer in that as well.

Again, just at the risk of repeating myself, my only concern is trying to find a mechanism to remove councillors to take politics out of the process. I recognize, as the government is proposing, a two-step process, which would be an improvement to what we have right now, but my fear is that we'll still be in the same position that we are now, where politicians' decisions are deciding what happens to other politicians. That's one concern.

The second concern I have is there needs to be a clear legislation in there that outlines what this high bar is, what's the egregious reach—is it at the Criminal Code level? What is that bar? If it's not specifically spelled out and it's up for interpretation, then people will take advantage of that to the detriment of the whole concept of democracy, where the people choose who represents them.

M^{me} Lucille Collard: Okay, so what I understand is you would like to see the legislation include more precisions about the definitions of the allegations that are to be taken into account.

Mr. Chris Leahy: Correct.

M^{me} Lucille Collard: Speaking about the process, instead of the local council having the ultimate power to actually remove someone from office upon recommendation of the integrity commissioners, it's been proposed by others to have a Superior Court judge to be the one to ultimately make that determination. Do you think that would be a more unbiased process?

Mr. Chris Leahy: I would think the judge would have a much more unbiased process because they're not beholden to anybody. That's their particular role. They're there to just apply the law as it exists, and they're not going to have that political bias. To me, that would solve a lot of issues even if you followed your process.

When it went to the Ontario Integrity Commissioner's office and it was in conjunction with some type of judge—anything along that line would increase people's confidence in the process. There's no question that the judge would be way more impartial.

1030

M^{me} Lucille Collard: Another practical question: My colleague MPP Vaugeois mentioned the length of the process. That could be a deterrent in terms of seeking justice and accountability. Of course, if you have a three- or four-step process and it takes four years or more—we know our justice system is a little bit backed up already. If it takes that long, then the person would presumably continue to sit.

What do you think would be something more fair? Somebody who's under investigation—should they be suspended with pay? Suspended without pay? What do you think would be an appropriate measure to protect the opinion of the public towards politicians? Because, obviously, justice delayed is justice denied. So what do we do about that? Do you have any views on that?

Mr. Chris Leahy: It's tough because then we're in conflict with the concept of “innocent until proven guilty.” To me, that's a fundamental thing. Until you're proven guilty, to me, you should continue to do your role, I would think, because you are chosen by the people to represent the people.

Until you go through that fairly, through your peers or through a tribunal, like the land tribunal or something that's expertly chosen, I just don't think that is fair because that actually weaponizes the process even more. The second that there's even a complaint a person makes, I think that's really dangerous.

The First Vice-Chair (Mr. Guy Bourgouin): Thank you, Mr. Leahy. Thank you, Madame Collard.

Second round. MPP Grewal.

Mr. Hardeep Singh Grewal: Thank you, Mr. Leahy, for being with us today on this presentation on Bill 9. When I was listening to your presentation, in the very, very beginning, you were talking about different municipalities and the code-of-conduct actions taking place

across those municipalities. What I really want to talk about is that in this particular bill, we basically take all the municipalities and we apply one code of conduct throughout because we have noticed that as you change jurisdictions across the province, that threshold and the code of conduct changes as well, which makes things difficult to understand what's acceptable and what's not acceptable as you change municipalities throughout the province.

That also applies to the integrity commissioners that are making those decisions. Sometimes those integrity commissioners are then representing more than one municipality and have to continuously review those codes of conduct to ensure that they comply with that particular municipality and the complications that all brings into play.

The way this bill is designed is also to ensure we remove all those complications, set up one standard across this province and ensure that our integrity commissioners are also held to account with then introducing the provincial Integrity Commissioner that we have. That decision can then be escalated into the provincial Integrity Commissioner to see if that was made impartially because those local integrity commissioners are also appointed by the municipality.

So to ensure the impartiality of those decisions made by the integrity commissioners and to ensure those rules and the playing field is the same across the board, what you think about this piece of the bill and the changes that it will implement on the municipalities? What are your thoughts on that?

Mr. Chris Leahy: I got lost in the thrust of the question, I'm afraid. Is the concern around the choice of the integrity commissioner, or who chooses it?

Mr. Hardeep Singh Grewal: The concern is about the choice; the concern is about transparency and ensuring that the laws that govern our ethics are the exact same across the entire province, and currently they are not, the way the system is set up. I just want to hear about your thoughts on those changes in this part of the bill.

Mr. Chris Leahy: On those particular changes in the bill, I'm fully supportive. We have a standardized code for roads; we've got the difference for bike lanes. We've got standardized codes for so many things in this province. It makes nothing but common sense to have the same kind of integrity code for municipal councillors across the province. That just makes an awful lot of sense to me.

The [inaudible] is again if, under the new regime, it's proposed that you have a more consistent application of integrity complaints with consistent training and approval of the people that are allowed to be integrity commissioners. I think that will help, because right now it does seem a bit like the Wild West. It's up to people's interpretation, because some of the wording in the codes is quite broad and up to interpretation, and that's where I think it could be clearer.

Mr. Hardeep Singh Grewal: And then my follow-up to that would be that another change that we're making through this bill is going to be ensuring that all elected officials throughout the province—elected councillors and regional councillors—receive integrity training in terms of

the ethics that are involved in being in politics. Currently, some municipalities do mandate that training; some municipalities don't. In this, we're now all going to regulate all municipalities to ensure that the councillors are trained and well aware of all the rules and regulations in place. Do you think that's going to make a positive impact going forward?

Mr. Chris Leahy: "Never stop learning" is what I'm trying to instill in my kids. My parents instilled it in me. I think that's a great plan. We should always be following up with training, reminding us of what it is supposed to be, because as we get lost in the day-to-day and we've been working for years and decades in politics, you always need that reminder. I think that's good.

Mr. Hardeep Singh Grewal: Thank you very much.

I will be sharing the rest of my time with my colleague MPP Racinsky.

Mr. Joseph Racinsky: Chair, how much time do I have?

The First Vice-Chair (Mr. Guy Bourgouin): You have two minutes and 21 seconds left.

Mr. Joseph Racinsky: Great. Thank you so much, Chair.

Thank you, Councillor Leahy, for your deputation. Based on your deputation, I can tell that you value the importance of protecting democracy and local democracy. I was wondering if there are other options that should be considered by this committee to address serious code-of-conduct violations, while respecting the importance of democratically elected local officials.

Mr. Chris Leahy: Personally, I think that being a lot more prescriptive in the legislation about what is the level of an egregious breach that would qualify a person to be removed from office would increase transparency for everybody: the public, the taxpayer, as well as the people who are doing the breach. It will encourage them not to cross the line.

The other piece is, I still think you need to take the politics out of the process. For your peers, the ones who make the complaints, and then to decide the complaint—it doesn't line up with the principles of fairness, and it kind of takes away the point of democracy. If the people chose X to be their representative, then that should be their representative until the next election. That is ultimately what the general principle is.

Mr. Joseph Racinsky: And so you think the decision should be made by an unelected judge, for example, as opposed to fellow democratically elected councillors.

Mr. Chris Leahy: I think they would be more unbiased. I think they could be trained well, and I think they are going to be detached from the community they are overseeing and that people are more likely to agree with that unbiased position.

Mr. Joseph Racinsky: And just with the rest of my time, quickly, a last question following up on MPP Grewal's question about training: I assume you agree that it's very important as elected officials—I was a local councillor prior to this, as well—that we set a good example, that we lead by example and that we conduct ourselves in appropriate ways, so that we increase trust in our local democracies and our democratic process. Do you think the

mandatory training that's proposed in this bill would help with that image for our institutions?

Mr. Chris Leahy: I think it would help. It would tell people where the line is and where not to cross it, and it would also encourage people to be fearless when they're pushing back and fighting back about taxes and spending and all of this. Right now, there is a fear of weaponization, that you say the wrong words and someone will file an IC complaint against you. When it's really clear where the line is, it's more comfortable for the politician and it's more transparent for the public.

The First Vice-Chair (Mr. Guy Bourgouin): Thank you.

I will now go to the official opposition.

MPP Lise Vaugeois: I'm kind of trying to think through—we have got a lengthy process, and I'm imagining if we are dealing with sexual harassment, for example, in some places the person accused might be removed from their workplace for the time being. That's a question about whether that should be there or not. But really, the problem is going to be if somebody is accused, it doesn't mean that they're necessarily guilty, because there are all kinds of factors there. If this process goes on and on and on for a long time, then that also means that if a person is being harassed, they're sitting beside or opposite their harasser for a very long period of time.

I'm wondering if you have thoughts on that and what would be the best way, really, to protect members of council—those with a grievance and those defending themselves from an accusation.

1040

Mr. Chris Leahy: Now you're asking me to put on lots of hats.

Again, I've seen those concerns. I've got daughters myself and I've seen those different challenges. But there's no question that if someone was being harassed in any way, we need to protect the person that's being harassed and do all the mechanisms in place.

Let's say the politician has harassed staff—let's say in Ottawa or wherever. Then yes, it would be up to the employer and the municipality to put in constraints to separate those people. Maybe there could be rules that, when you're under investigation, you can only attend meetings virtually. I think there's a way to address the concerns of keeping whatever victim or complainant safe but still allow the person to do their job while the investigation goes on.

That's the best I can come up with because I'm not really an expert in that, but there's no question we should always be protecting the victims.

MPP Lise Vaugeois: No, thank you. I appreciate you thinking that through.

I'm wondering also about the cost and how local integrity commissioners are chosen. One presenter has suggested that a qualified list of commissioners come from the Ontario Integrity Commissioner—that you would start with a high bar and then there would be consistent training. Is that a recommendation that resonates for you?

Mr. Chris Leahy: I think just some type of vetting process—that there's a stamp of external approval, whether it's through the province or the Integrity Commissioner of the province. I think that would add a lot of credibility and I think that would be a step in the right direction.

MPP Lise Vaugeois: Thank you. I think, again, we're looking at a way to take politics out of this process.

I also note that the outgoing Integrity Commissioner, David Wake, is concerned about the costs to municipalities. If municipalities are going to have to pay for a local integrity commissioner out of their already very constrained budgets—whether you would like to see the province then financing local integrity commissioners so it's not an undue burden on local municipalities.

Mr. Chris Leahy: That would certainly be a help to a lot of municipalities. As you know, there are hundreds and hundreds of municipalities in the province that don't have the budget [*inaudible*].

I'm out visiting a cottage here in Cloyne right now which is why my Internet reception is so terrible.

But that would immensely help municipalities because that's a burden. Let's say you have a council that really likes to complain to each other, and they lodge complaints to each other all the time about anything because there's no bar to writing a complaint. You can make a complaint about anything. That really increases the costs to municipalities, especially the more rural municipalities. That really could strain their budgets because they're so tight.

Anything that could upload that type of process to the province would only strengthen the ability to be successful in all communities.

MPP Lise Vaugeois: Thank you very much.

When I was reading through my notes on the bill, it seems like there is a bit of an all-or-nothing in terms of the reprimands or punishments available. Do you have a sense that there should be graduated forms of discipline based on a standardized set of—it's spelled out what behaviours are considered ethical and appropriate.

Mr. Chris Leahy: The legislation could only be strengthened if it actually clearly outlines what the levels of breaches are and what the next level is—like the difference of being suspended from a meeting versus docked pay versus losing your seat. We should have more of a say in what those penalties are and it should be really specific that a breach of X leads to a consequence of Y. It provides transparency, and actually knowing where the line is means less people will cross it.

MPP Lise Vaugeois: Yes. Thank you very much.

What we're saying is that graduated consequences are spelled out very, very clearly in the legislation and that the local integrity commissioners then have the knowledge and ability to actually respond to those breaches.

Mr. Chris Leahy: I completely agree.

MPP Lise Vaugeois: Thank you very much.

The First Vice-Chair (Mr. Guy Bourgouin): You have 37 seconds.

MPP Lise Vaugeois: I'll pass.

The First Vice-Chair (Mr. Guy Bourgouin): We will go to the third party.

M^{me} Lucille Collard: Chris, you've unpacked a lot and I think we're maybe being a bit repetitive here, but I would like just to hear some precisions. Some of the strong points you made are about taking the politics out of the process, and I certainly agree with that.

You also talked about respect for taxpayers' money, and I would like to understand a little bit more what you mean by that. What aspect of this bill actually may raise concerns regarding taxpayer money? I'm not sure if you're referring only to having a councillor being paid while deserving maybe to be removed or if you're referring to something else altogether.

Mr. Chris Leahy: Well, part of it all is again to the overall cost of implementing the code of conduct and the impact of the cost to the municipality. So if it's really clear in the legislation that if you disparage person X by saying these types of statements, or disparage staff, or are going after things, or are at the level of sexual harassment with someone, it should be really clear in the legislation what is the breach or what is the level of breach, and then you're not going to have frivolous complaints—or it's really clear to the public what's going to be going.

The cost of running the integrity commissioner in the process: It can be a high burden for a municipality, so by having it really clear and transparent where you cross the line, it will be easier to either have less complaints or more targeted complaints, because every complaint costs the municipality money. So I'm talking about the cost of running the integrity commissioner system on municipalities, especially the burden on *[inaudible]*.

M^{me} Lucille Collard: Okay, yes. Thank you for that precision, actually. It's helpful for me to understand.

Talking about the local integrity commissioner, what improvement, if any, would you suggest for the process of appointing the local integrity commissioner? Are there any specific qualifications that you think that person should have?

Mr. Chris Leahy: I think that it would be good for the qualifications that the province has to pick their own Integrity Commissioners or some principle that could be applied at the municipal level and say that you need to be, let's say, a lawyer or a *[inaudible]* an expertise in these particular areas, and you've maybe been trained by the Ontario Integrity Commissioner and you report to them or are part of an association with them and there is peer reviewing of what you're doing. To me, just adding some credibility and some accreditation would help for municipalities to pick a qualified integrity commissioner, and we would have a more consistent application of the code, I think.

M^{me} Lucille Collard: Sounds good. Do you believe any candidate that is seeking an elected official position should be forced to disclose any criminal charges that they have?

Mr. Chris Leahy: Absolutely, no question, because you are responsible for dealing with staff at the municipal level. You are going to events. You're dealing with chil-

dren. You're dealing with things. I think that would do nothing but create confidence in the public. And yes, I think we should all submit to those types of criminal code review, and it should all be available online, just like our expense reports and everybody that gives us money.

M^{me} Lucille Collard: Do you think that the rules we're talking about today should also apply to school trustees?

Mr. Chris Leahy: Oh, absolutely, no question. As a former school trustee and chair of the Durham Catholic board, I completely agree with that sentiment.

M^{me} Lucille Collard: Right, okay. I was also a former school trustee and I also agree with you on that.

I don't have anymore questions. Thank you very much.

The First Vice-Chair (Mr. Guy Bourgouin): Thank you, Mr. Leahy.

We'll go to the next presenter.

THE EMBERLIGHT PROJECT DDSB CONCERNED PARENTS MS. LINDSAY KOCH

The First Vice-Chair (Mr. Guy Bourgouin): The next presenter is the Emberlight Project—Jessica Street, director. Madame, you have seven minutes to make your presentation and then we will go to questioning from the committee members.

Ms. Jessica Street: My name is Jessica Street. Good morning and thank you for the opportunity to speak.

The Emberlight Project is a non-profit organization dedicated to promoting transparency and accountability so that we can ensure integrity in our government systems.

At the onset, we want to acknowledge there is much in the intent of Bill 9 that we support. Ontarians deserve strong ethical standards, clear rules for elected officials and effective tools to ensure accountability in municipal government.

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We believe everyone on this committee, regardless of political party, shares the same goal: protecting public trust in our institutions. However, legislation that is designed to protect democracy must also be designed so that it cannot be used to undermine it. This is the concern we have with Bill 9 as it is currently drafted.

Ontario already has laws, policies and procedures to remove council members for serious misconduct under the Municipal Act. What is not needed is a second, more political, less accountable pathway to remove an elected official.

It is the view of the Emberlight Project that it is wrong for elected officials to have the power to remove a potential political opponent, not just from one current council, but from future elections as well. That undermines the principle of voter choice. The decision to remove an elected representative should rest with the electorate.

One of the most concerning elements of Bill 9 is the reliance on the term "harm to the health, safety or well-being of any person" without definition of what "harm"

means. Everyone agrees that harassment, abuse or violence must be addressed, but “harm” is a subjective standard, and subjective standards are dangerous in law.

The Emberlight Project is reminded of a simple example from Queen’s University law professor Bruce Pardy. He points out that if there is a law requiring you to drive under a certain speed limit, you must follow it, but you are also allowed to say you don’t agree with the law; you are allowed to question its fairness; you’re allowed to advocate for change. This is the essence of democratic debate—following the law while being free to criticize it.

The same principle applies to municipal policy. Criticism of a bylaw, policy or procedure is not misconduct; it is representation. It is the work councillors are elected to do.

And yet, without a clear definition of “harm,” such criticisms can be reframed as causing harm to well-being.

This concern is not hypothetical. The Emberlight Project has reviewed multiple instances where integrity commissioners have declined to investigate serious concerns.

In one Ontario municipality, complaints were brought forward regarding the use of municipally owned CCTV footage and municipal funds in a city-produced video that appeared to target a dissenting councillor. The complaints were dismissed. That matter has since been referred by police for further review regarding potential retaliation, breach of privacy legislation and misuse of public resources. Under the Municipal Act, integrity commissioners are expected to refer credible evidence of wrongdoing to the appropriate oversight body. When municipally owned assets such as CCTV footage are involved, that means referral to the appropriate authority, such as the IPC or the OPP. In this instance, that did not occur.

While that example is serious, it is not unique. Similar concerns have been raised in municipalities across Ontario. Patterns of overreach, inconsistent enforcement and strained public trust are not limited to one case or one council.

We have seen integrity commissioners terminated from Oro-Medonte, Sudbury, Belleville and other municipalities for overreach.

We’ve observed procedural changes in some municipalities that limit public accountability, including rules that prevent delegates from even speaking about integrity commissioner findings in council chambers.

We have noted statements from integrity commissioners in which they described spending time training councillors and protecting them during public meetings. These roles—coaching, advising and defending the very people they will later investigate—build relationships that undermine the appearance of independence.

We have also observed a double standard in code-of-conduct enforcement. Citizens and delegates have been labelled harmful and hateful for dissenting views. Councillors using inflammatory language towards members of the public are often not sanctioned.

In larger councils, recognize that unanimous votes for removal are rare, but in smaller councils with 10 or fewer

members, unanimous or near-unanimous votes are routine. This makes political removals far easier.

This is not partisan observation. This is a systematic risk that requires safeguards. The solution is not to weaken accountability, but to ensure a fair, independent and protected—and that it is protected from political misuse.

The Emberlight Project recommends the following amendments to Bill 9:

- establish a rotating provincial pool of integrity commissioners, assigned by lottery, for each investigation and tracked by the Ontario Integrity Commissioner;

- clearly define “harm” in legislation so that conduct is distinguished from disagreement and expressive dissent is protected;

- require integrity commissioners to refer credible evidence—

The First Vice-Chair (Mr. Guy Bourgouin): One minute left.

Ms. Jessica Street: —of potential criminal wrongdoing, including misuse of municipal assets or funds, to the appropriate oversight authority, such as the IPC or OPP, where applicable;

- guarantee the public’s right to speak about the integrity commissioner findings in council meetings;

- implement tiered discipline, censure, suspension and removal only as the current act dictates; and

- protect individuals who raise concerns about bias, discrimination and systematic issues from being treated as code violators.

Bill 9 can strengthen municipal accountability, but only if it has built-in safeguards to prevent political misuse. Along with this delegation, the Emberlight Project will be providing the committee with, for your review, integrity commissioner correspondence, dismissal reviews, freedom-of-information requests and other such materials. Thank you.

The First Vice-Chair (Mr. Guy Bourgouin): Thank you, Madame Street.

This time, we’ll start with the official opposition—

Interjection.

The First Vice-Chair (Mr. Guy Bourgouin): Oh, sorry. We’ll go to the next presenter: DDSB Concerned Parents and Jessica Wilkins, director.

Ms. Jessica Wilkins: Thank you for allowing me to speak here today. My name is Jessica. I represent DDSB Concerned Parents, a grassroots organization advocating for transparency, fairness and accountability in our public institutions. Today, I am speaking to you not just as a parent and engaged citizen, but as someone who has watched the erosion of democratic representation unfold before my eyes. Bill 9, if passed without safeguards, will be weaponized. I know this because it already has been. When a councillor is removed for having a dissenting opinion, it doesn’t just silence them; it silences the thousands of voters who put them in office.

We are watching the rise of a system where municipal integrity commissioners are no longer arm’s-length oversight bodies. They are contractors, paid by the very municipalities they are supposed to regulate. That means

that the same city staff or CAO who may be the subject of a councillor's concerns are also the ones directing and paying the so-called independent integrity commissioner.

In both Pickering and Whitby, councillors have faced integrity commissioner complaints for nothing more than doing their job: representing constituents who disagree with staff recommendations or who challenge controversial bylaws and DEI policies. Their legitimate questions are being reframed as misconduct. That's not accountability; it's suppression.

These integrity commissioners, often former lawyers with multiple municipal contracts, are running a business. Many serve over 60 municipalities, and the incentive to keep those contracts flowing leads to an obvious conflict of interest. The CAO holds the pen on renewal, not the public.

The company most associated with this practice, Principles Integrity, was fired from the township of Oro-Medonte after a drawn-out investigation into a local councillor. The commissioner accused the councillor of dishonesty and obstruction, but many in the community and on council saw it as an overreach. Council rejected the commissioner's recommendation for reprimand, then terminated the contract entirely, citing bias, hostility and unprofessional conduct. One councillor called it an attack on the councillor's integrity.

Then, just this year, the city of London also voted to remove Principles Integrity. The reason was that their reports were generic, included copy-and-pasted content from other municipalities and lacked focus on local context. They even included the names of another councillor in Pickering in their findings. This is clear evidence that the process was rubber-stamped. London's deputy mayor said it best: We are not paying them to recycle boilerplate; we're paying them for accountability, and we're not getting it. Yet, under Bill 9, the same type of commissioner would be now given expanded powers with even fewer checks.

1100

If councillors can be suspended, sanctioned or pressured to resign based on one-sided, unaccountable findings, then we have destroyed the very meaning of local democracy. Councillors are not employees, they are elected officials—they answer to voters, not bureaucrats. The ability to remove a sitting councillor without a court conviction, without a clear breach of law, should never be handed to political appointees or contracted firms. Doing so undermines the vote of every single resident who put that councillor in office.

This bill opens the door for partisan abuse, particularly against those who challenge ideological orthodoxy or staff-driven agendas. It replaces deliberation with discipline; it replaces political debate with professional punishment. That's not democracy; that's turning a local government into a top-down system where power is concentrated in the hands of a few, unelected people and dissenting voices are now pushed out.

If we truly want ethical governance, then any additional powers given to integrity commissioners must come with

strict transparency requirements, clear evidentiary standards and the right of reply and public accountability mechanisms. And, most importantly, we must prohibit integrity commissioners from recommending removal or suspension of elected officials unless the matter is adjudicated by a neutral court. If councillors break the law, let the law handle it, but if they challenge the prevailing narrative, that's called representation—it's their job.

Bill 9, in its current form, confuses dissent with disorder and it grants power to people who, by design, are not accountable to the electorate. I urge this committee to pause, reconsider and amend this bill because if this legislation passes as is, you won't just be removing councillors, you'll be removing voters from the conversation. Thank you very much for your time.

The First Vice-Chair (Mr. Guy Bourgouin): Thank you for your presentation.

Next presenter, Lindsay Koch, please: You have seven minutes to do your presentation.

Ms. Lindsay Koch: Good morning, committee and Chair. Thank you for having me today. My name is Lindsay Koch. I'm a councillor in the city of Kenora. Thanks also for travelling up to the great northwest of our province for this work. I'm truly sorry I'm not able to be there in person today.

I'm here as a growing movement of Ontarians and the Women of Ontario Say No who are deeply concerned about misconduct in municipal government and the urgent need to address gaps in accountability, transparency and safety. Bill 9 is a promising and necessary step forward. Thank you to the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing and others for hearing our calls for action on this issue. It touches on two essential areas: municipal codes of conduct and occupational health and safety. These are not abstract issues; these are matters that shape the integrity of our local democracies and the well-being of our municipal employees, many of whom are women and who have experienced harm or who have been silenced under threat of retaliation.

We have seen too many recent examples of councillor misconduct across Ontario just in my term of council: from Norfolk, where a councillor made inappropriate comments to a staff member; to Brant county, where staff endured a toxic work environment stemming from council disfunction. The situation became so unmanageable that the CAO and several senior staff left the municipality, citing a complete breakdown in governance and personal harassment. In Brampton, we've seen investigations, lawsuits and accusations of retaliation tied to allegations of harassment, abuse and power. These issues weren't just about personality conflicts; they created a workplace culture where professional staff feared speaking up. And we can't forget the years-long saga in Ottawa where all allegations faced by former councillor Rick Chiarelli of sexual harassment from staff and job applicants were substantiated. Despite damning findings by the integrity commissioner with only brief suspensions in pay, he was able to remain in office until the end of his term.

These are not isolated bad apples; they are warning signs that current mechanisms are not working. And further, I want to emphasize that this is not about dissenting opinions. Healthy debate is a recognized part of the job.

I want to speak directly to the section of the act what would allow a council to remove a sitting member found in breach of their code of conduct by a unanimous vote. While well-intentioned, we must ask, is a unanimous vote realistic or fair? In many cases, misconduct is not addressed because personal alliances, political debts or social pressures get in the way. A councillor may not be a lone wolf; their actions may be known, tolerated or even supported by others. Expecting a unanimous vote in such a climate creates a high bar that may never be met, no matter how serious the misconduct.

With this in mind, I urge the committee to amend Bill 9 to require a super majority—two thirds of council—rather than a unanimous vote. This maintains democratic oversight but reduces the risk of gridlock due to internal relationships or retaliation fears.

Better yet, an independent panel of provincial Integrity Commissioners should be tasked with determining the most severe sanctions. Removing that decision from council altogether eliminates the internal politics that often shield offenders.

Second, Bill 9 must ensure that any member of council who is charged with assault, harassment or other egregious criminal acts is placed on automatic leave, pending resolution in the courts. Just as other professionals such as teachers, police officers and health workers face automatic leaves in such situations, so too should elected officials whose actions carry serious public consequences, and if convicted, automatic removal from office should apply. No more passing the buck. No more waiting for victims to go public before action is taken. We need clear, legislated consequences, which leads to my third point.

I will urge the committee—and I think maybe that you are considering consequences for substantiated breaches of conduct that fall short of removal. Not every offence warrants ousting a councillor, but every offence warrants consequences on some level, with options including:

- mandatory integrity commissioner training or other remedial action;
- public apologies with an accountability plan;
- temporary suspension of committee appointments or voting privileges; and
- what is currently in place: financial penalties or salary withholding.

These measures, when applied transparently, will reinforce that misconduct has consequences without relying only on the extreme of removal.

Let's also remember that these breaches occur not just among council members but often involve municipal staff, particularly women, younger workers and racialized employees, who must feel safe bringing forward concerns without fear of reprisal. This bill must ensure whistleblower protections for staff, confidential reporting pathways and safeguards for their employment and mental

health, because ultimately this is about safety—emotional, psychological and professional safety in the workplace.

Council chambers are workplaces, and they must be held to the same occupational health and safety standards as any other. Staff should not have to choose between silence and survival. Council members should not operate in a consequence-free zone whether they are working in chambers, while appointed to local boards and committees or attending community events in their capacity as council members.

Women of Ontario Say No has gathered thousands of signatures and hundreds of resolutions passed by municipal councils calling for greater municipal accountability, and their voices must be reflected in this legislation. Their central message is clear: Public office is not a right; it's a responsibility.

In closing, I thank the committee again for considering Bill 9. I urge you to strengthen it to reflect the real challenges facing our communities. Let's ensure the tools that we provide to municipalities are not just symbolic but practical, enforceable and just—and opportunities to restore public confidence in our local democratic institutions.

Thank you for your time. I welcome your questions.

The First Vice-Chair (Mr. Guy Bourgouin): Thank you. This round of questioning will start with the official opposition. Then, we'll go to the third party and then to the government.

Madame Vaugeois, s'il vous plaît.

MPP Lise Vaugeois: Thank you very much, Chair. We've heard from three very interesting perspectives; distinct perspectives, I think. But what I'm seeing in common is the desire for consistency, the removal of political interference in how decisions are made, very clear standards of conduct and having a high standard of conduct, a high bar for elected officials. I hope I am hearing that correctly.

Some are saying things should lie with the electorate, but that often leaves problems unaddressed, and it leaves people who are being affected by bad behaviour from council members hanging for a very long period of time.

I think I will ask each person in turn. I'll start with Jessica. You made some very specific recommendations, but I think what you're looking for is very clear definitions of what constitutes appropriate behaviour, acceptable behaviour, and you're also looking for the public's right to speak to these issues. We're hearing different levels because sometimes a complaint is brought forward that shouldn't necessarily be made public at the time until it's really been thoroughly investigated.

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Would you agree, first of all, that integrity commissioners would best be appointed by the Ontario Integrity Commissioner or somebody with some independent body so that we don't have built-in conflicts of interest? Also, I would suggest that the local integrity commissioners be paid by the province and not by a local council, again to eliminate that potential conflict of interest.

Maybe I could ask Jessica first and then go—do we have two Jessicas?

Mr. Brian Saunderson: Yes.

MPP Lise Vaugeois: We do, okay. So Jessica Street first, if you could respond to that, and then I will ask the other two people.

Ms. Jessica Street: Certainly. As I stated in my delegation, what we believe would be most fair would be, yes, assigned by the Ontario Integrity Commissioner, but to do it in a lottery system so that there is less chance of a bias being built up.

In regard to your comment about being able to speak about an integrity commissioner report, this is after the report has concluded, after it's been presented publicly. We have noticed that there are some integrity commissioners who are going to different open council meetings and requesting that a motion be put forward that delegates can no longer question or speak up on their findings.

MPP Lise Vaugeois: Thank you very much. I think those are really important points, and I'm glad to have them on the record.

Jessica Wilkins?

Ms. Jessica Wilkins: Sorry, what was the question?

MPP Lise Vaugeois: The question is, would you agree that the Ontario Integrity Commissioner should have the role of appointing local commissioners and that that role be paid for by the province to try to eliminate undue influence and bias within local communities?

Ms. Jessica Wilkins: I actually don't believe it should be the role of a municipal integrity commissioner at all to—I don't believe that a municipal integrity commissioner should be appointed by anybody.

MPP Lise Vaugeois: You believe that issue is a—

Ms. Jessica Wilkins: It should have to go through the courts.

MPP Lise Vaugeois: Okay. All right, noted.

And Lindsay?

Ms. Lindsay Koch: Thank you for your question. I do agree that the Ontario Integrity Commissioner should appoint local integrity commissioners. Certainly, as a councillor, I would be pleased for the province to pay that bill.

MPP Lise Vaugeois: Thank you. Do I have a little bit more time?

The First Vice-Chair (Mr. Guy Bourgouin): You have one minute, 41 seconds.

MPP Lise Vaugeois: Okay, right. The other thing is, I think that there's been general concern about politicizing the process of judging one's peers. I'll start with Lindsay this time. Do you agree that, as much as possible, appropriate standards and behaviours are spelled out with the consequences so that when you come to office, you know what is expected and the consequences have been spelled out so that it's not arbitrary, it's not left to individual councilmembers to be pushing against each other or voting on each other?

Ms. Lindsay Koch: Yes, I do agree with that. When we know better, we do better. When we know there's a line, we know better not to cross it.

Certainly, I don't feel comfortable voting one of my colleagues out. I think that just gets ethically icky.

MPP Lise Vaugeois: Thank you very much.

And Jessica Wilkins?

Ms. Jessica Wilkins: Yes, I also do not agree that councillors should be able to vote each other out.

MPP Lise Vaugeois: Thank you.

And Jessica Street?

Ms. Jessica Street: Yes, I believe that if a member of council especially has put a complaint forward, they shouldn't be able to then vote on that. I also believe that if it should be something that is already within the Criminal Code or the Municipal Act that it should be handled as we currently have the rules for it in place today.

MPP Lise Vaugeois: Thank you very much.

The First Vice-Chair (Mr. Guy Bourgouin): Thank you.

Now we'll go to the third party. MPP Collard.

M^{me} Lucille Collard: I want to just make my first question to Ms. Jessica Street. I could hardly find any information about the Emberlight Project and you're appearing today representing this project. I would like to hear more about what's your mandate and mission. Who do you represent? I would just like to understand where the views are coming from.

Ms. Jessica Street: Thank you very much for the question. The Emberlight Project is fairly new. We noticed a need in our community where people were trying to voice their advocacy or disdain for things and they weren't being heard. They were being ignored by their government officials and by the government systems.

We realized that a lot of Canadians and Ontarians are not aware of how to effectively communicate with their government systems in that they aren't aware of what appeal processes there are. A lot of these systems are difficult for many people to navigate, and as a result, we found a lot of people had started to lose faith in our government systems and our elected officials. We started to put together to help show them how they can find transparency and accountability within their government systems so that they could see the integrity once again.

M^{me} Lucille Collard: Okay, thank you very much. Then I will add a follow-up question to you again: You've mentioned some changes you would like to see in the bill. I would like to know if, generally, you agree with the intent of this legislation in terms of providing more accountability and transparency in some unbiased system to hold elected officials accountable. Are you in agreement with the bill, or are those changes you talked about actually something you see as essential?

Ms. Jessica Street: The changes that I put forward—the amendments—I do believe that those are quite essential in order to safeguard some of the systematic issues that we have witnessed. Again, I will be providing the committee with further documentation to support that.

We believe that there's a need for a centralized code of conduct so that there's less room for misinterpretation.

Again, I don't believe it should be up to political opponents to have the ability to potentially remove a political opponent not just from the current council but from the next election. Whether they get re-elected should be to the power of the voter. It's their decision if they wish to have that person represent them. We already have laws in place in Canada that if someone—

The First Vice-Chair (Mr. Guy Bourgouin): Thank you. We have to go to the government side now for questioning.

Interjection.

The First Vice-Chair (Mr. Guy Bourgouin): Seeing no questions from the government—no, just giving you a hard time. A Chair has to have fun sometimes though.

MPP Racinsky.

Mr. Joseph Racinsky: Thank you very much, Chair. Through you: Thank you to the presenters for your deputations. I wanted to follow up on a comment Ms. Street just said about the centralized, standardized code of conduct—thank you for that support.

I wanted to hear from the other two delegations. We will start with Jessica Wilkins. What are your thoughts on having a standardized code of conduct across the province where it's the same in every municipality?

Ms. Jessica Wilkins: Well, it would stop councillors from being able to put in bylaws that—we've seen some bylaws being passed in some of our local councils in regard to code-of-conduct changes that are not happening in other municipalities. In my opinion, it doesn't make sense not to have it the same across the board.

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Mr. Joseph Racinsky: Great. Thank you.
Councillor Koch?

Ms. Lindsay Koch: I agree that maybe a base standardized code of conduct could be effective. Perhaps if a council was seeking to have it stronger, or a different language mechanism where they can work with an integrity commissioner or maybe the Ontario Integrity Commissioner to adjust if there are things that they would seek to change—just a process for it to look different, noting that I live all the way up here and things in northern Ontario don't always look the same as they look in the south of our province. I can't think of an instance where that might be necessary but the ability to do so might be useful.

Mr. Joseph Racinsky: Thank you.

Another question I wanted to pose to all three presenters was about the mandatory training for integrity commissioners that's going to be introduced in the proposed legislation. What are your thoughts on that?

We'll start with Jessica Street, please—standardized training for integrity commissioners across the province.

Ms. Jessica Street: I think it's important that integrity commissioners get updated training on whatever the code of conduct is. As I said, I would like to see a centralized code of conduct put in place and I do believe that it would be important for both the integrity commissioners to be

updated on that as well as council members, but perhaps not from the same person who's doing their investigations.

Mr. Joseph Racinsky: Great. Thank you.

Ms. Wilkins?

Ms. Jessica Wilkins: Yes, I also agree.

Mr. Joseph Racinsky: Thank you.

Councillor Koch?

Ms. Lindsay Koch: Absolutely. Standardized training for integrity commissioners would be important. Also, ongoing training would be useful, as there is case law or things that might influence how they interpret legislation or advise on decisions.

Mr. Joseph Racinsky: Thank you very much.

Chair, I'll cede the rest of my time to MPP Ciriello.

The First Vice-Chair (Mr. Guy Bourgouin): MPP Ciriello.

MPP Monica Ciriello: I appreciate everyone taking the time here this morning to provide their comments on the bill that we are bringing forward.

I have a couple of questions for Councillor Lindsay Koch, if you don't mind. I really appreciate the practical experience that you bring to this conversation, so my questions are really going to centralize on your role as a councillor.

What do you think are the important considerations for an effective code of conduct that balances the needs—recognizing that there are variations—in municipalities? I think you alluded to it in your last answer to my friend here, that you may be up north and there may not be consistency in other municipalities. So, what do you think are the important considerations we should take into account?

Ms. Lindsay Koch: I think—and maybe this isn't just limited to northern communities but small and rural communities—small-town things impact local politics differently than in larger city centres. A way to consider those types of relationships, both inside council chambers and how we relate with staff—often it's family members who are also municipal employees. Things like that, to build in—it's not a pecuniary interest necessarily but where there might be conflict or where somebody might be impacted by familial relationships in the workplace or in the work that we do together—I think that would be important.

Also noting that members of council participate in the community both where they're appointed to boards as part of their work but also largely—and I would say, across Ontario, we're doing this work on council because we believe in our community, or we care about our community. So we're also giving up our time and skills and our personal time. You don't get to turn off being a councillor.

And so, something that might consider—maybe you're not doing this work with your council hat on, but you are still that person so how you show up and how you participate outside of this job also matters. I don't know that there could necessarily be consequences for what you do in your personal time, outside of criminal charges and

things like that, but something that at least mentions it, I think, would be important.

MPP Monica Ciriello: I appreciate that. Thank you.

Just changing gears a little bit: I've also had the experience of working in the municipal field, and what I've seen first-hand is, when there are different integrity commissioners that get brought on, either during the same term of council or in the next term of council, the same factors may result in a different decision. And I think you mentioned something along the lines of, it shows that our current system, our rules, are currently not working. So what in this bill here would prevent something like that from happening?

Ms. Lindsay Koch: I think you've all kind of touched on it. I think it comes with a standardized code of conduct as a baseline, at least. I think it comes with consistent training for integrity commissioners and the same ongoing learning opportunities for those integrity commissioners based on the things that are actually happening in real time or, like I said, case law.

I think somebody earlier spoke about the cost of integrity commissioner investigations and the ability to have—

The First Vice-Chair (Mr. Guy Bourgouin): Thank you, Councillor Koch.

We're going to go back to the official opposition. MPP Vaugeois.

MPP Lise Vaugeois: Actually, I was very interested in your answer, so continue, please.

Ms. Lindsay Koch: Just having it really clear—if you do this then this is the potential consequence to limit frivolous and vexatious complaints that do come in. So I think we get so mired in all of the little things that the ability to focus on the real complaints that need proper attention and funding and support through whatever mechanism is built in through this legislation and others would strengthen the system.

MPP Lise Vaugeois: Thank you.

I want to go down that road a little bit further because—well, a few things. You talked about a toxic work environment and people being afraid to speak up, but you also talked about, because it's a small town, also, you've got lots of family relations within staff, within council and so on. I'm also wondering if there are other systemic corrections that you would like to bring forward that might again—will a standardized code of conduct address those kinds of challenges? Are you worried? I don't know whether Kenora has strong-mayor powers at this point, but I know that other communities are not necessarily happy about the effect of those strong-mayor powers and how that has altered relationships on councils.

I've probably included too many things in one question.

Ms. Lindsay Koch: Kenora does have strong-mayor powers. I actually think it maybe provides for an opportunity for the mayor to—it just adds a level of leadership, maybe. I'm not generally in favour of strong-mayor powers, but it gives him a little more leverage to say, "Hey, Councillor X. You are very close to overstepping." I don't honestly know why I feel that way, but I think just the idea

that they have a little bit more opportunity to take a unilateral role when others might be afraid to. I'm not necessarily saying, "Hey, Councillor Whoever, I'm not going to warn you about where I think your behaviour is going, but I think the mayor already should be," (a) and (b) despite having that additional—I don't know; I don't quite know where I'm going with this.

MPP Lise Vaugeois: Do I still have a little bit of time?

The First Vice-Chair (Mr. Guy Bourgouin): Yes, you have three minutes and 35 seconds.

MPP Lise Vaugeois: All right.

Because I know that you are part of the group the Women of Ontario Say No—and I know about this group—a lot of the impetus for this legislation has come because there have been no consequences for council members really known to have perpetrated harassment of council members and staff and so on, and there were no consequences. So I'm just wondering how you see the legislation addressing that in particular—what you would like to see, what kind of guardrails you can imagine putting in place—because I'm sure you've thought about that aspect of it quite a bit.

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Ms. Lindsay Koch: I think certainly, if there are criminal charges as part of that, and that needs to be considered as a reason for somebody to be currently removed from their seat while the court plays out, and then if there's—I think as I said, if there's a guilty finding, then they're removed from their seat. Somebody who is making decisions to perpetrate sexual violence or any kind of really egregious things, whether it's in their time on council or in their personal time—it really calls into question their judgment and their ability to make good decisions. I think there need to be whistle-blower protections for the people who bring it forward.

There's a gap between council and municipal staff where, really, we're only talking to the CAO, who's our only employee, so when things are happening in the staff underneath the CAO and the organizational structure, we don't necessarily know about it. We don't hear about it or it's very uncomfortable for them to bring it forward because they might be identified or there are risks, or perceived risks—so, something to protect people when they want to bring things forward.

MPP Lise Vaugeois: So, as I understand you, you would like to see whistle-blower protection built into this act and into a code of conduct.

Ms. Lindsay Koch: Yes.

The First Vice-Chair (Mr. Guy Bourgouin): We will go to the third party. MPP Collard.

Mme Lucille Collard: I'll do a general question to each of the presenters so you can speak on that.

There's a general agreement, I think, that a strong unified code of conduct would be something good in terms of accountability. I think that a lot of the strength of this legislation will rely on that code of conduct. So what would you like to see included?

I know, Ms. Koch, you just talked about it a little bit, but which are the points that you would like to see included in the code of conduct?

I'll start with Ms. Street, and then Ms. Wilkins and Ms. Koch.

Ms. Jessica Street: Could you rephrase your question? I do apologize.

M^{me} Lucille Collard: This legislation will create the ability for the minister to build a code of conduct. What would you like to see in that unified code of conduct?

Ms. Jessica Street: Some of the things that I would like to see is that they're there to treat each other and their constituency with respect, follow the laws, the lay of the land, that we already have in place, and that they are held to, at minimal, those accounts; and that should they, in their private—for example, on Facebook, a lot of elected officials have multiple accounts. If they're acting in an official capacity in their private account—that they be held to the same account in the code, and that there are levels of discipline put in place so that we are not just going to the potential of just automatically removing a councillor.

M^{me} Lucille Collard: Ms. Wilkins?

Ms. Jessica Wilkins: Somebody mentioned bad behaviour. There should be a clear definition. Bad behaviour to one person may not be bad behaviour to another. I don't believe that bad behaviour should be a part of a code of conduct. Maybe that's something more that could be said to training and making sure that elected officials know what is expected versus what is not. Sorry, I'm having a hard time finding my words. Basically, the code of conduct needs to be very specific, in my opinion, and I'll just speak to that.

M^{me} Lucille Collard: Okay. Thank you. Ms. Koch?

Ms. Lindsay Koch: There are points I've mentioned already, but clearly identified repercussions for breaches of varying levels; whistle-blower protections; required training for municipal councils, perhaps at the beginning and in the middle of the term, on their codes—so, like a refresher midway, I think, would be useful.

I can't think of anything fresh that I haven't already articulated in my comments.

M^{me} Lucille Collard: Sure. Yes, that's fair. Thank you. We are being a bit repetitive here.

I want to ask another question, and I know, Ms. Wilkins, you may not agree with it because I think that altogether you think that the voters should make the decision on whatever is appropriate behaviour through election cycles. I'm just wondering, and I'll ask each of you, instead of having council get the ultimate power to vote on the removal of a colleague, it's been suggested that maybe having a Superior Court judge make that ultimate decision instead would be more unbiased. Would you agree with that?

I'll start in reverse; I'll go with Ms. Koch first.

Ms. Lindsay Koch: I think the Superior Court probably depends on the seriousness of the breach. I think that seems a bit extreme in some cases, but certainly I don't agree with it living at the council table, so either the

Ontario Integrity Commissioner or, if warranted, then through the courts.

M^{me} Lucille Collard: So, Ms. Koch, just to follow up, because you had recommended that maybe having a super majority instead of a unanimous vote at council would be appropriate: Do you think that, actually, we should not have council vote on such a decision?

Ms. Lindsay Koch: If the will of the people passing the legislation was that it needs to live at the council table, then I would ask for it to not be by unanimous vote; I would seek a super majority. But I would prefer it not live within the council role at all.

M^{me} Lucille Collard: Okay.

Ms. Wilkins, would you like to comment on maybe having a judge of the Superior Court be involved? In a serious case, where—this bill was inspired by some sexual harassment cases that we've seen in the province, so that's quite serious and it kind of destroys lives—

The First Vice-Chair (Mr. Guy Bourgouin): Thank you, Madame Collard. We have to go to the government side.

M^{me} Lucille Collard: Very good. Thank you.

The First Vice-Chair (Mr. Guy Bourgouin): MPP Saunderson.

Mr. Brian Saunderson: Thank you very much, Chair. You sound disappointed that it gets to come to government.

Laughter.

Mr. Brian Saunderson: We've been waiting for this. I want to thank each of our presenters this morning for coming in and sharing your input on this important legislation.

I think what I'm hearing from all the presenters is that this is an important topic and one that needs to be addressed. I'm going to direct my questions to Councillor Koch because I appreciate your direct front-line experience in the municipal sector as a council member, and I too served municipally in the town of Collingwood, which is similar in size, I think, and scope to your beautiful municipality of Kenora. And I was there for the opening of your justice centre a while ago.

You mentioned cost, so I wanted to drill down on that a bit, because it is obviously a very big concern. I know, in my time—I was eight years involved with the town of Collingwood—when municipal integrity commissioners were just coming into being, really, and one of the things we found is that (a), we had to invest a lot of money in creating a code of conduct and then (b), that every time there was a code-of-conduct complaint, it seemed like the integrity commissioner was creating it from the ground up—recreating the wheel, almost.

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And so, one of the benefits that I think lies in the standardized code of conduct across the province is that you're going to have integrity commissioners interpreting the same provisions in all 444 municipalities, and there won't be 444-some-odd different codes, so wording won't be an issue there. The way I see that is it will help to reduce cost

for the local municipalities—and I'd ask you to comment on that observation first. Do you think that's the case?

Ms. Lindsay Koch: Yes, I think you're right. We're paying for people's time to do this work and so if it's a little bit more clear, that saves.

Mr. Brian Saunderson: And just to get a scope: I know it's not the same, but in my municipality, we would get an annual report from our integrity commissioner about the number of complaints and the total cost. Do you get that at your council?

Ms. Lindsay Koch: We get a report with each one that outlines, obviously, the investigation and the results and the costs. I don't know that I've seen an annual one; we get them as they come.

Mr. Brian Saunderson: Okay. And in the integrity commissioner's complaints you've heard to date at council, what was the average cost per complaint? Do you have an idea?

Ms. Lindsay Koch: Oh, I don't have an idea. They range from at least \$500 to what could be \$3,000, depending on the time that's needed for the investigation.

Mr. Brian Saunderson: Okay, and I can think of a number of circumstances in my municipalities when the costs exceeded \$8,000. It's not an insignificant cost, especially for a municipality the size of yours and Collingwood.

The other corollary to that is as we get a number of decisions made, interpreting a uniform code of conduct across the province—you're going to see decisions being made, and while often the circumstances are different, the complaints are pretty similar in terms of undue influence or conflict of interest and that sort of thing. What you are going to find is that complaints are similar; there's a bank of decisions, and so integrity commissioners can access previous decisions, so they're not having to recreate the wheel. They can look back and say, "Well, here's a similar circumstance and this was the ruling. I think it may be applicable"—or not; it would be up to them. Do you think that would be helpful?

Ms. Lindsay Koch: Yes, I think so. Applying nuance in any sort of situation that comes forward—if they had something to draw from, I think that's useful.

Mr. Brian Saunderson: And I know that you're a member of The Women of Ontario Say No. Thank you for your work in that area. It's important work. You, I think, would agree with me that there are certain circumstances where a councillor may need to be removed. Would you agree with that?

Ms. Lindsay Koch: Yes, definitely.

Mr. Brian Saunderson: In my past life, I was a litigation lawyer, and one of my first cases was a similar case of employment law, where a CEO of a not-for-profit corporation was, in my opinion, harassing his staff. A number had quit. That litigation was—I'm aging myself here—about 20 years ago. That court case, I think, took two years to get to trial, during which time the individual continued to be the CEO of the corporation, and then two years to get to the Court of Appeal, because the initial Superior Court

justice didn't agree with my client that there was cause for dismissal. That took four years, and I'm embarrassed to tell you how much money it cost all the parties.

But it goes back to costs. Do you agree that we should be looking for the most cost-effective, immediate way to address the situation, to protect employees or staff who may be victims of harassment?

Ms. Lindsay Koch: I think it's important to consider cost-effectiveness, but I don't think it's the number one factor. I think people feeling safe to go to work, day in and day out, is the most important factor. If it comes with a little bit of an increased cost because the process factors that in, then I think that's okay.

Mr. Brian Saunderson: How about timing, then? Because it took four years in my case. Do you think four years is an appropriate time to have somebody who has been accused of harassment working alongside those who have accused him or her?

Ms. Lindsay Koch: Absolutely not. I think in my points I suggested that they be removed pending the court result.

Mr. Brian Saunderson: So you think speed of resolution is important in this process?

Ms. Lindsay Koch: Yes.

Mr. Brian Saunderson: Okay. I appreciate that.

I did a little bit of research coming into today's hearing. Under the Municipal Conflict of Interest Act, a judge has the ability to declare a seat vacant, and I can think of a number of contexts which have led to judicial inquiries. There was one in my municipality in Collingwood, there have been two in the city of Toronto and there was one in Mississauga. Two of those cases led to individuals bringing complaints under the Municipal Conflict of Interest Act that were large matters of record, and unfortunately, in neither case was the councillor at issue—one of them was the mayor—removed from office—

The First Vice-Chair (Mr. Guy Bourgouin): Thank you, MPP Saunderson. This is all the time we have.

Thank you to all the presenters.

COMMITTEE BUSINESS

The First Vice-Chair (Mr. Guy Bourgouin): I know we have a motion. MPP Vaugeois.

MPP Lise Vaugeois: Yes, I have a motion that I'd like to read.

I move that, pursuant to standing order 1(3), the committee conduct a study regarding the testing of Ontario commercial truck drivers by Ministry of Transportation-certified examiners; and

That the committee meet for public hearings as soon as possible; and

That the Minister of Transportation be invited to appear before the committee; and

That the minister shall have one hour to make an opening statement, followed by three hours of questions and answers, divided into three rounds of 20 minutes for the government members, three rounds of 20 minutes for

the official opposition members and three rounds of 20 minutes for the third-party member of the committee; and

That legislative research provide the committee members with a summary of the hearings as soon as possible; and

That the committee meet for report-writing as soon as possible following the hearings; and

That the subcommittee on committee business be authorized to schedule meeting dates and deadlines.

The First Vice-Chair (Mr. Guy Bourgouin): Thank you. Any questions? MPP Saunderson.

Mr. Brian Saunderson: I question the relevance of this motion at this particular hearing on Bill 9, and I would look to the Clerk, through the Chair, to rule whether this is part of the scope of this hearing or this would be necessary to come before committee through the subcommittee.

The First Vice-Chair (Mr. Guy Bourgouin): Okay, it's not part of Bill 9, but the committee is authorized to look at this. It's in order to bring a motion and it's up to the committee to decide what they want to do with it.

MPP Saunderson.

Mr. Brian Saunderson: I would ask that MPP—I'm going to not get this right—

MPP Lise Vaugeois: Vaugeois.

Mr. Brian Saunderson: —Vaugeois—sorry—bring this through the subcommittee, because this was brought to us without notice, on short notice. If we force the vote today, the government will be opposing it, but if MPP Vaugeois wants to bring this before the subcommittee, I'm happy to deal with it there.

The First Vice-Chair (Mr. Guy Bourgouin): At this time, it's up to MPP Vaugeois to decide what she wants to do with it. She can continue debating and then if it fails, then she can bring it at subcommittee after. But it's up to MPP Vaugeois to decide what she wants to do with the motion.

MPP Lise Vaugeois: Since I have the option to debate it and also take it to the subcommittee later, I think I would like to debate it now.

The First Vice-Chair (Mr. Guy Bourgouin): MPP Vaugeois.

MPP Lise Vaugeois: I think we've spoken about this many times in the Legislature. Certainly, those of us living in the north and using Highways 11 and 17 have seen a huge increase in the number of accidents, many of which are caused by truck drivers not adequately trained. I know this from speaking with truck drivers, also, that they are often paying for training, but they are not necessarily getting it.

What we would like is to move the training under the authority of the MTO so that the drivers and the public can be confident that any drivers who are on the road, driving a commercial vehicle, have all received a high level of training necessary to drive the truck safely, and also knowing how to maintain the truck safely.

We know this is not happening right now, so it's a fairly simple ask that we are looking for, to move this under the MTO so that it's standardized and the accountability is built in. Right now, there are problems with companies

able to actually train, test and license drivers themselves with very little oversight. We also know that there are problems with DriveTest and that that's not always been proven to be a reliable place to have the testing and licensing done. So we would like to see that moved back to where it was previously, under the authority of the MTO.

The First Vice-Chair (Mr. Guy Bourgouin): Further discussion? MPP Collard.

M^{me} Lucille Collard: Thank you. I wasn't expecting the motion so I didn't have a chance to really think about it, but your explanation actually makes sense.

I have to say that I've heard from people even in Ottawa complaining about those commercial companies that give training just to take money from people but provide inadequate training, which can definitely lead to hazardous driving that affects the public safety. So I'm ready to support that motion to have the committee look into it.

I think we need stronger safeguards when we talk about training people to drive big trucks that can do big damage. So, yes, I will support that motion from MPP Vaugeois.

The First Vice-Chair (Mr. Guy Bourgouin): Further discussion? MPP Saunderson.

Mr. Brian Saunderson: Thank you, Mr. Chair. As I indicated at the outset, we will not be supporting this. We weren't given any warning about the motion, but we are happy to talk about it to the subcommittee.

I will also yield time to MPP Grewal, who is the PA to the MTO, to speak to some of the actions that are being done on this issue.

Mr. Hardeep Singh Grewal: Thank you very much, MPP Saunderson.

Thank you for bringing your motion, but some notice and some time would have been conducive to giving a better response to the conversation and to kind of enact that conversation. According to what Mr. Saunderson said, we would be happy to hear about this at subcommittee and then have a further conversation on all this.

Our government is committed to ensuring that we have some of the safest roads in North America. We're leaders in road safety across this country through our highway projects across this province.

As well, taking a look at our DriveTest centres, we hold them to the highest regard in terms of graduating our drivers. And through privately trained colleges, all of those drivers that are then trained there have to be tested and approved by our DriveTest centres to ensure that they are held to the highest extent of our driver training.

We're more than happy to have that conversation, because just like this committee hearing that we're talking about today in terms of Bill 9, road safety is also a non-partisan issue. We want to make sure all parties across the board are working together and make sure that we keep Ontario as one of the safest jurisdictions in North America when it comes to road safety, protecting our citizens and protecting drivers.

Just for the short notice and the relevancy to today's conversation on Bill 9, like MPP Saunderson said, we will

be voting no, but we are happy to have this conversation on road safety with you at another time, another date.

The First Vice-Chair (Mr. Guy Bourgouin): Further discussion? Are you ready for the vote? Okay.

All in favour of the motion? Those opposed? Motion is defeated.

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.

I want to also thank all the presenters today. There being no further business, the committee is now adjourned.

The committee adjourned at 1154.

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