



Opening remarks before the House of Commons Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics 2022-2023 Main Estimates

Mario Dion – Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner

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Thank you for inviting me to appear before you today as the Committee considers the 2022-2023 Main Estimates for the Office of the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner.

To begin, I will share some brief background information about the Office for those of you whom I have not previously met in my four years as Commissioner.

Our main goal is to help regulatees, namely public office holders and Members of the House of Commons, know and follow the rules of the two regimes the Office administers: the *Conflict of Interest Act* and the *Conflict of Interest Code for Members of the House of Commons*.

We fulfill this mandate through our experienced staff. There are slightly more than 50 people who work for the Office, and their salary accounts for more than 80 % of the total budget.

You were likely in communication with an advisor from the Office as you completed your initial compliance process.

In addition to advisory services, all the work of the Office supports regulatees directly and indirectly and builds an understanding of the rules. Employees provide communications and outreach support, investigate allegations of possible issues, and provide legal expertise. They maintain the technical and financial framework for the Office's operations and assist me directly. Nearly 70 % of the budget is dedicated to program-related functions.

It has indeed been a busy year. The advisors' workload has increased by 43 % this fiscal year over the previous one. This is a natural outcome following an election and requires additional work under both regimes, such as completing the initial compliance process that I mentioned earlier.

Prevention is the major focus of the regimes the Office administers. And education is key to prevention.

In the past fiscal year, for the first time ever, we surveyed public office holders to help us better understand their needs. The response rate was high and yielded positive responses. The analysis is nearly complete, and we will not only use the results to better align our business approaches, but we will ensure it is made public to support transparency in our work. We plan to do a similar survey under the Code in the coming year.

I believe that regulatees are honest people who want to follow the rules.

My role is to provide what is needed to achieve and maintain compliance. I believe regulatees are accountable for their compliance with the rules and must develop a reflex to act ethically and educate themselves to ensure compliance. The Office will continue and strengthen its focus on education and outreach in support of this.

The Office has maintained its primary focus on assisting, advising and directing regulatees, as well as monitoring their actions. The continuing focus in this area is reflected in the Main Estimates for the coming year.

The 2022-2023 Main Estimates for the Office include an increase over the previous year of almost 473 thousand dollars.

This amount considers:

- changes to employee benefit plans from the adjustment of the rate as determined by Treasury Board;
- economic salary increases and increments;
- training and developing communications materials for the new integrated case management system; and
- compliance with the new accessibility requirements under Bill C-81.

The Office is already taking steps to improve the accessibility of documents used on social media and in presentations. Accessibility is not just required, it is key to meeting the needs of regulatees and the public.

I trust this will meet the approval of the Committee. I look forward to your questions.