



Opening remarks before the House of Commons Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics 2023-2024 Main Estimates

Sandy Tremblay – Director of Corporate Services and Chief Financial Officer
Melanie Rushworth – Director of Communications, Outreach and Planning
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Thank you for the invitation to speak with you today to highlight the achievements of the Office of the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner over the past year and the plans for the year forward. I am Sandy Tremblay, Director of Corporate Services and Chief Financial Officer for the Office. I am joined today by Melanie Rushworth, Director of Communications, Outreach and Planning, who is responsible for parliamentary affairs.

On the administration side, the Office has fifty-one (51) full-time employees and had a budget last fiscal year of eight point one million dollars (\$8.1 million). While we met our mandate with this allocation, a reallocation exercise was completed to help ensure resources were prioritized to programming, with a focus on supporting advisory services and education. To this end, former Commissioner Mario Dion requested slightly less than two hundred thousand dollars (\$200,000) this fiscal year, which is about two percent (2%) of our budget.

While the majority of the eight point three million dollars (\$8.3 million) budget for the Office is for salaries, from an information technology standpoint, sixty-five percent (65%) of the professional services budget provides for an IT agreement for support and development from the House of Commons Administration. Part of the work that we have been undertaking with their expertise in the past two fiscal years is to develop a new system which will consolidate the declaration portal, the case management system and the public registry, including the ability to securely receive financial documents. When complete, the new system will be rolled out with appropriate internal and external educational materials to aid in a successful transition. We anticipate being in a position later this fiscal year to present the new forms under the *Conflict of Interest Code for Members of the House of Commons* that underpin the system to PROC for its approval.

The Office aims to instill confidence among the public and Parliament that the duties and functions assigned to it under the *Parliament of Canada Act* are fulfilled, that allocated funds are used responsibly and efficiently, and that it is a trusted steward of public resources. I will now turn to Melanie Rushworth to address some of the work we do with regulatees and the public.

Thank you. One of the key functions of the Office is demonstrated in its commitment to providing timely expert guidance to regulatees, such as public office holders and Members of the House of Commons. A team of advisors provide confidential one-on-one advice, which has been instrumental in preventing conflicts of interest before they arise, in promoting responsible decision-making, and in safeguarding the public's interests. This group has been stretched as the number of regulatees has grown six percent (6 %) in the past five years, or by one hundred seventy-eight (178) people. This growth in fact represents a fifteen percent (15%) increase in reporting public office holders, which is the group that requires the most interaction with an advisor as part of the initial compliance process.

The reallocation of funds added one (1) more full-time equivalent employee to this team.

With intention to ensure regulatees better understand the requirements of the *Conflict of Interest Act* and the Code, the Office has expanded its educational programs. A first step towards this was two important surveys undertaken in twenty twenty-two (2022)—one for all public office holders and a second tailored to Members of the House of Commons. The response rate for each of these surveys was thirty percent (30%) and forty-three percent (43%) respectively, providing good insight for planning.

Recognizing the importance of proactive measures, the Office has implemented initiatives aimed at preventing conflicts of interest by educating regulatees about their obligations. It aims to foster a culture of integrity and ethical behaviour throughout the tenure of all regulatees, with learning further reinforced during initial compliance meetings and ongoing discussions with a personal advisor.

Anticipating the changes to the Code that pertain to education, former Commissioner Dion prioritized funds for this fiscal year to prepare to provide individualized mandatory training for Members within the first one hundred and twenty days (120 days) after their confirmation of election.

One of the notable accomplishments of the Office has been its dedication to the publication of reports and related investigations into potential conflicts of interest in a timely manner. All reports by former Commissioner Dion were completed within a year and in his last year as Commissioner, five (5) reports were published.

Given the work undertaken over the past year, the Office of the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner is well positioned moving forward. We welcome any questions you might have about the Office and the work we are undertaking.