



Opening Statement before the House of Commons Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs

Mario Dion – Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner

Ottawa, Ontario, February 3, 2022

Madam Chair,

Honourable Members of the Committee,

Thank you for inviting me here today. As I said when I had the privilege of appearing before the Committee in December as an officer of the House of Commons, whenever Members call me, they are my first priority.

I am pleased that the Committee has initiated a review of the *Conflict of Interest Code for Members of the House of Commons*. The Code is an important set of rules governing certain aspects of Members' activities. It benefits from being examined from time to time. This process will test the continued applicability of the rules and address any shortcomings identified through people who, like myself, have a certain experience gained through administering the rules.

The last review was completed in 2015, before I was appointed to my current position. I consider myself fortunate to have this opportunity to, in some way, contribute to the ongoing evolution of this important framework supporting our democratic institutions.

The Committee has received from the Office a list of six recommendations regarding the Code and a selection of technical amendments. These recommendations were developed over the past four years, since I became Commissioner, with the participation of advisors and lawyers in the Office who work with the Code on a daily basis.

These suggested amendments are aimed at bringing greater accountability and transparency.

- **Recommendation 1:** Set a baseline minimum amount for gifts and potential influence, that being \$30 dollars all-inclusive in a 12-month period.
- **Recommendation 2:** Strengthen and align the Rules of Conduct against furthering private interests of friends and family members, bringing it in alignment with the *Members By-law*.
- **Recommendation 3:** Prohibit outside activities incompatible with a Member's parliamentary duties and functions.

- **Recommendation 4:** Build coherence within the Code for sponsored travel by considering it as a gift that must pass the acceptability test like any other gift.
- **Recommendation 5:** Enhance understanding of the Code with mandatory training for new Members, akin to some of my remarks in December.
- **Recommendation 6:** Provide increased autonomy to the Office to amend forms and give generalized guidance to help better explain the Code’s provisions.

These proposals were developed over time through observation and reflection. I believe they would modernize and improve the rules related to gifts and conflicts of interest as they relate to friends and family members, and would better define the boundaries of permissible outside activities for Members. They would also require Members to spend some time learning the rules set out in the Code, as experience has shown that ignorance of the rules is often at the root of contraventions.

Finally, if the House deems it useful, one of my suggestions is to provide the Commissioner with additional autonomy to address specific situations requiring general guidance.

It is the Committee’s role to assess the relevance of these recommendations, and I will, of course, respect its decisions. I would also be pleased to offer my views throughout this review or on any matter that the Committee may wish to refer to me.

I would be pleased to hear Members’ reactions, take questions, and provide explanations. I offer my support as a resource to the Committee. My hope is that I can assist Members as they ponder what needs to be addressed in this review.

Thank you.