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**Official Report
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(Hansard)**

A-37

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des débats
(Hansard)**

A-37

**Standing Committee on
Government Agencies**

Intended appointments

1st Session
43rd Parliament

Wednesday 20 November 2024

**Comité permanent des
organismes gouvernementaux**

Nominations prévues

1^{re} session
43^e législature

Mercredi 20 novembre 2024

Chair: David Smith
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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

STANDING COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT AGENCIES

COMITÉ PERMANENT DES ORGANISMES GOUVERNEMENTAUX

Wednesday 20 November 2024

Mercredi 20 novembre 2024

The committee met at 0900 in room 151.

The Chair (Mr. David Smith): Good morning, everyone. The Standing Committee on Government Agencies will now come to order. We are joined by staff from legislative research, Hansard and broadcast and recording. As always, all comments by members and witnesses should go through the Chair.

SUBCOMMITTEE REPORTS

The Chair (Mr. David Smith): The first item of business will be the adoption of two subcommittee reports, which were distributed in advance. I have the subcommittee report dated Thursday, October 31, 2024. Recognizing MPP Martin. Go ahead, please.

Mrs. Robin Martin: I move adoption of the subcommittee report on intended appointments dated Thursday, October 31, 2024, on the order-in-council certificate dated October 25, 2024.

The Chair (Mr. David Smith): Any discussion? Are members ready to vote? All those in favour? All opposed? Seeing none, that motion is carried.

We have the subcommittee report dated Thursday, November 14, 2024. Could I please have a motion? Recognizing MPP Martin. Go ahead, please.

Mrs. Robin Martin: I move adoption of the subcommittee report on intended appointments dated Thursday, November 14, 2024, on the order-in-council certificate dated November 8, 2024.

The Chair (Mr. David Smith): Any discussion? Any further discussion? Are members ready to vote? All those in favour? All opposed? The motion is carried.

INTENDED APPOINTMENTS

MR. LESLIE LUGO

Review of intended appointment, selected by official opposition party: Leslie Lugo, intended appointee as member, Human Rights Tribunal of Ontario.

The Chair (Mr. David Smith): Our first intended appointment today is Leslie Lugo, nominated as member of the Human Rights Tribunal of Ontario.

You may make an initial statement at your discretion. Following this, there will be questions from members of the committee. With the questioning, we will start with the government, followed by the official opposition. There will be 15 minutes allotted to each recognized party. Any

time taken in your statement will be deducted from the time allotted to the government.

You may proceed, sir.

Mr. Leslie Lugo: Good morning, Mr. Chair, Madam Vice-Chair and members of the standing committee. My name is Leslie Lugo. I appreciate the invitation to appear before the committee to discuss my qualifications to be a member of the Human Rights Tribunal of Ontario, and I am very honoured to be here today.

The HRTO fulfills an important public role in public trust. Those appearing before it represent the breadth of Ontario society from all regions, and the appointed members of the tribunal bring a variety of backgrounds and experiences to adjudication. I hope that my remarks demonstrate that I can contribute meaningfully to the work of this tribunal and its impact on the lives of my fellow Ontarians.

By way of background, I'm a lawyer with 33 years' experience with a practice that is focused on, among other things, employment law, competition law, regulatory compliance and appearances before administrative tribunals in Canada and internationally.

I am currently retired. I will speak to my qualifications in greater detail. I am a Canadian citizen and an Ontario resident, and I live in Ottawa. I moved to Canada for employment in 2002, initially residing in Montreal and later Ottawa, and became a Canadian citizen. I was born and raised in New York City, raised by two Latino parents. My father was from Puerto Rico and my mother from Cuba. My siblings and I were raised speaking Spanish at home.

Mes qualifications académiques comprennent un baccalauréat de Haverford College en Pennsylvanie, un diplôme en droit de l'Université de Pennsylvanie, à Philadelphie. Je suis membre du barreau du district de Columbia, et je suis admis à exercer la profession d'avocat en Angleterre et le pays de Galles. Durant mes études en droit, j'étais un des rédacteurs principaux de Comparative Labor Law Journal.

In terms of relevant experience, in 1987, I began my legal career as a judicial clerk in the United States District Court for the Southern District of Ohio. This afforded me an excellent view of the judicial process that has stayed with me. In private practice, I first worked in the Washington, DC firm of Crowell and Moring on matters related to aviation and federal rules regarding contracting.

In my subject matter areas, I began to develop an administrative law practice. Crowell and Moring had a strong pro bono services program. I volunteered to provide trust and estates counsel to terminally ill persons with AIDS who were under the care of the Whitman-Walker clinic in Washington, DC. This was heartbreaking but profoundly satisfying work.

I subsequently joined American Airlines, providing commercial law advice and counsel. Given my academic interest in labour and employment law and foreign-language skills, I was transferred to Europe, where I had a labour relations practice and was responsible for labour union and works council matters in Paris and then London. This included matters before workers' tribunals, with specific rules of practice. Lawyers who practise employment law will tell you it is essentially composed of two things: disputes regarding monetary matters and conditions of work and, secondly, complaints of discrimination in the workplace on grounds essentially identical to the prohibited grounds under the Ontario Human Rights Code. My practice involved both.

In 2002, I accepted a position in Montreal with the International Air Transport Association, where I worked for 18 years until my retirement. My practice had a strong emphasis on competition and regulatory law compliance, and representation of IATA, both written and oral, before various competition and transportation-related tribunals. I made appearances both as an applicant and as a respondent on multiple occasions.

Additionally, over my 18 years at IATA, I had extensive experience with IATA's alternative-dispute-resolution mechanism for travel agents. This provided the essential right to be heard and to seek redress, given the power dynamic and economic disparity between international airlines and travel agents, which were often small, closely held, family-owned businesses.

I think it's important for a member of the Human Rights Tribunal to have a sensitivity to the power imbalances between ordinary people and organizations that may discriminate against them. A focus on procedural fairness goes a long way in addressing such imbalances. The HRTTO is designed to take that into account. The parties I dealt with were often unsophisticated as to matters of legal procedure; the best arbitrators I saw were those who were willing to explain process and ensure that interim and financial rulings were clearly expressed and understandable. I found the ADR work I did to be satisfying professionally and personally, and I note the value of mediation over litigation whenever possible.

As a practitioner who has appeared before various international administrative bodies, I've been exposed to a variety of approaches, characterized by basic core common principles. I understand that administrative law does vary from jurisdiction to jurisdiction, but basic principles of natural justice are expected across them. I believe a tribunal member's abilities are best shown in what they bring to a hearing: an open mind, an understanding of the issues before them, a realization of the importance of fairness as a core principle and an aware-

ness that in an environment of self-represented parties, clarity and drafting is vital. Administrative law decisions are best when written to be clear to the parties and the general public.

I also know what it's like to be a member of a minority community as a Latino, as a gay man and as an allophone in Quebec. I believe this can only add insight for a Human Rights Tribunal member.

In short, I'm cognizant of the importance of the HRTTO's role and its impact on Ontarians. I believe I have the necessary experience with administrative tribunals, legal knowledge and language abilities. I have a willingness to undertake any specific training required by the HRTTO to make meaningful contribution to the important work of the tribunal.

I welcome your questions. Thank you very much.

The Chair (Mr. David Smith): I'll turn to the government side. Recognizing MPP Martin. Go ahead, please.

Mrs. Robin Martin: Thank you, Mr. Lugo, for being here and for putting your name forward for this appointment. It's an important tribunal.

We know one of the things about the Human Rights Tribunal right now is that it has high caseload volumes, so I wanted to ask if you could share, perhaps from your experience, how you would manage large caseloads, how you would prioritize cases and how you'll ensure that you stay on top of that workload and deliver decisions within the targeted processing times.

Mr. Leslie Lugo: I appreciate that question. It's very important to be able to handle large workloads. As a lawyer who has been practising for 33 years, I'm very much accustomed to a heavy caseload, particularly in my last 18 years at the International Air Transport Association.

I handle my cases in a professional manner and in a timely manner. The most important thing to me when something new comes in is to examine it and to understand what statutory deadlines are required and must be met. Simply by handling my work in a deliberate manner, I'm able to meet those deadlines and juggle quite a considerable amount of work.

Mrs. Robin Martin: Thank you.

The Chair (Mr. David Smith): Recognizing MPP Pinsonneault.

0910

Mr. Steve Pinsonneault: Thank you for coming out to meet with us today. You've had a wide range of professional experiences in your career. Could you please share how these experiences have prepared you for your work with the Human Rights Tribunal?

Mr. Leslie Lugo: Yes, indeed, my career has been varied, but it accumulates over 33 years. Much of that has been in administrative tribunals as either an applicant or a respondent on behalf of my employers. I have extensive alternative dispute resolution experience, including arbitrations and mediations at the International Air Transportation Association, and previous to that at American Airlines.

I have extensive employment law experience, which has very much of a human rights emphasis. Additionally, I understand the importance of natural justice and fairness, and timeliness and clarity in writing. I think my entire career has brought me to this point where I can make an effective and important contribution to the HRTO.

The Chair (Mr. David Smith): Recognizing MPP Smith. Go ahead.

Ms. Laura Smith: Thank you so much, Mr. Lugo. We appreciate you coming here, albeit virtual. I'm going to talk about—you have an extensive legal background. You also talked about some of the sensitivity of the work that you do, including self-represented individuals, and writing very specific and clear rulings. I want to talk about what you believe it takes, what it means, to be an effective member of the Human Rights Tribunal, and what you believe you could bring to the table that would make you an effective member.

Mr. Leslie Lugo: I think what I bring is a great belief in what is called natural justice in administrative law, or natural justice broadly. I believe in fair and unbiased hearings. I believe that before decisions are made, evidence must be evaluated thoroughly, and one must be able to communicate effectively to the parties. I think in my career I've been able to do that, and I bring the ability to absorb a great deal of facts, summarize them, be able to apply the law effectively to those facts, and be able to reach a decision and communicate that effectively.

I've been known throughout my career as a very, very clear writer. I'm grateful for that. I know that it has been appreciated by not only my employer, but parties that I have dealt with in an adversarial position.

Ms. Laura Smith: [*Inaudible*] in being an effective—

Mr. Leslie Lugo: I'm sorry; you cut out there.

Ms. Laura Smith: Can you hear me?

Mr. Leslie Lugo: Yes, now I can.

Ms. Laura Smith: Okay. What about the time frame in providing those written responses and those written rulings?

Mr. Leslie Lugo: I'm a great believer that I have to meet—I've always had to meet my deadlines as an attorney, and I believe that I will continue to meet those deadlines. I've always worked and done what was necessary to meet those deadlines, even though at times the caseloads could seem overwhelming.

The Chair (Mr. David Smith): Recognizing MPP Pang. Could you go ahead, please?

Mr. Billy Pang: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Through you to Mr. Lugo: How are you?

Mr. Leslie Lugo: Fine. Thank you very much.

Mr. Billy Pang: I have a question. We understand that parties appearing before the Human Rights Tribunal often don't have legal representatives, and this can create some challenges. How do you ensure that all the parties in the case understand the proceedings?

Mr. Leslie Lugo: That's a great question. When I was at IATA—IATA has its own administrative tribunals internally for travel agents to bring disputes against airlines and vice versa. By and large, I would say close to

99% of the parties that appeared there were self-represented—travel agents, often small businesses. The best mediator or commissioner in charge of those cases had the responsibility to communicate effectively and patiently to people who were self-represented, and often they were emotional. But I respected the fact that they were sympathetic, that they took the time to explain, and I believe that they're role models for my intended behaviour as a tribunal member.

The Chair (Mr. David Smith): Recognizing MPP Dowie. Go ahead.

Mr. Andrew Dowie: Mr. Lugo, thank you so much for being here. Congratulations. You're here because you went through a merit-based selection process via Tribunals Ontario. It's competitive, and you certainly rose to the top, so we appreciate having your recommendation today.

I wanted to get a sense of what your impression was of the process you went through, and also if you could elaborate as to why you're the best candidate for the job.

Mr. Leslie Lugo: I think it was a very, very fair process. During the summer, when I was considering volunteering myself for tribunal experience, I went to the website, I saw that there was a position available at the HRTO and I applied using the online application form. It was easy, and then when I clicked “send,” I waited and eventually Tribunals Ontario got back in touch with me.

The interview was interesting. It was fair. I was provided with questions in advance, which was very, very interesting, because most of the time as a lawyer, in an interview situation, you have no idea what's going to be asked. It gave me time to focus, to reflect and to provide proper answers.

I found the testing portion of the procedure very interesting. It brought me back to my law school days. I had a significant amount of information which I needed to absorb, cases that I needed to read, the pleadings that were filed by the applicant and the respondent, and summarized them, applying the law. It was a fascinating experience, and I have to assume that I did well.

The Chair (Mr. David Smith): With 19 seconds, recognizing MPP Hamid. Go ahead, please.

MPP Zee Hamid: I'll keep my question really short. I was going to compliment your background, but I'll skip that. How do you perceive the role of the tribunal in the justice system?

Mr. Leslie Lugo: Absolutely essential and cost-effective. It gives access to a great variety of people—

The Chair (Mr. David Smith): And that concludes—

Mr. Leslie Lugo: —who may not ordinarily have access because of the caseload—

The Chair (Mr. David Smith): Hello? That concludes the time for the government side.

We will now listen to the official opposition. Recognizing MPP Pasma. Go ahead, please.

Ms. Chandra Pasma: Thank you very much for being here this morning, Mr. Lugo. I know it's not the most comfortable process, but it's an important part of our democratic process so that the public can have confidence that appointments are being based on merit rather than connections to the government, and that people have the

qualifications that are required to competently fill the role to which they're being appointed, so I appreciate that you're here this morning.

The Human Rights Code of Ontario states that the selection process for the appointment of members of the Human Rights Tribunal "shall" be based on the following criteria—and I note that it says "shall," and not "could" or "might" or "pick one of the following." It says "shall" be based on "experience, knowledge or training with respect to human rights law and issues."

Your career has been in commercial law, and for the last 30 years specifically in the aviation sector. Can you please explain how you meet the criteria for experience, knowledge or training in human rights law and human rights issues?

Mr. Leslie Lugo: Thank you very much. That's a very important question. A significant portion of my career at American Airlines was focused on employment law, including individual employees and employees who were represented by organized labor. I was based first in Paris and then in London, dealing with those groups and with related issues.

I will say that a significant portion of labour and employment law has to deal with two areas: (1) with wages, hours and benefits, but (2) with discrimination claims, which are based on grounds, many of which are set forth in the Ontario Human Rights Tribunal. So my work in that area has provided me with a background in that area.

Additionally, in my practice in aviation at the International Air Transport Association, while the bulk of my work has been commercial work and competition law work, none of the lawyers at IATA are silos. We each brought our own individual experiences from our previous employment. And so, when certain employment issues or discrimination issues would come up, I talked freely with my colleagues. In some cases, I handled those matters. Early on in my career at IATA, when I was responsible for Latin America, for example, as a regional counsel, I handled everything from commercial to real estate leases to employment claims. So I have significant experience and background in that particular subject matter area.

0920

Ms. Chandra Pasma: I'll note that human rights law is a different category than employment law. But digging into your experience in employment law, the employment laws in the United States are very different than the employment laws in Canada and in Ontario specifically, which I know because I used to work for a labour union. So what experience do you have working in the context of employment law in Ontario?

Mr. Leslie Lugo: I have no experience with regard to Ontario. What I have been doing since applying to the HRTO has been trying to bone up on the legislation around the code. I've noticed that the code has five areas to protect Ontarians: employment, accommodation such as housing, goods, services, and facilities. And so, while I do not bring specific Ontario experience, I believe that the 33 years that I've practised as a lawyer in various jurisdictions have enabled me to learn statutes quickly, to be able to under-

stand facts and apply those statutes to the facts and reach decisions, provide advice and counsel etc.

While not specific to Ontario, certainly many other jurisdictions: I provided employment law advice with regards to discrimination, for example, in Bolivia—I certainly am not a Bolivian lawyer—similarly in France and in the UK and throughout the areas of Europe where I was responsible when I was based there. Again, I had to master those facts, master the statutes and apply them.

Ms. Chandra Pasma: Thank you. We also have very particular accessibility legislation in Ontario with the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act. What experience do you have dealing with accessibility legislation and issues regarding people living with disabilities in Ontario?

Mr. Leslie Lugo: Issues concerning Toronto Pearson airport certainly came up when I was employed at IATA. Accessibility issues are something that is of great concern to the airlines and to the disabled community. So I certainly have been aware of accessibility issues in air transport, and I certainly am aware of accessibility issues in the United States by virtue of having a disabled family member. With Ontario, I would look forward to training provided to HRTO members on accessibility issues.

Ms. Chandra Pasma: Another area where we have a different legal context than the United States is around racial discrimination. What experience do you have dealing with legal issues relating to racial discrimination in Ontario?

Mr. Leslie Lugo: In Ontario, I do not have specific experience with regard to racial discrimination, but issues regarding racial discrimination came up which were subject to Quebec law when I was employed by IATA in Montreal. And racial discrimination issues came up quite frequently in the United States. I recognize that the laws are different, and I look forward to learning specifically the Ontario aspects of discrimination law.

Ms. Chandra Pasma: What experience do you have dealing with issues relating to gender-based discrimination in Ontario?

Mr. Leslie Lugo: None specifically with Ontario but certainly gender-based discrimination law in a variety of jurisdictions where I've had to provide advice and counsel to internal clients at IATA and at American Airlines.

Additionally, I would like to highlight that when I was at American Airlines, I was part of a group of lawyers that provided compliance training to our offices around the world. The compliance training included non-discrimination policies and a training component that included issues with regards to race, ethnicity, sex, religion, accessibility and other forms of discrimination.

When I was at IATA, IATA did not have a similar compliance program, but I was invited by the general counsel to prepare one. So, in 2004, I was the author of IATA's first compliance program. It contained the strong anti-discrimination portions of the program, questions and answers, and we provided lectures around the globe at our offices regarding these issues.

I would like to say one of the more fascinating aspects of it was that both American Airlines and IATA's non-discrimination policies and their compliance training, in quite a number of cases, went beyond the laws of the jurisdictions in which we had employees and offices. That was interesting to see that as an employee of either American Airlines or IATA, our employees had, internally, greater protections than they did under their applicable governing law.

Ms. Chandra Pasma: Which is laudable for IATA, and I'm sure the employees appreciated it, but in Ontario, you'd need to apply the context of Ontario legislation.

Mr. Leslie Lugo: Of course.

Ms. Chandra Pasma: What experience do you have dealing with issues relating to discrimination on the grounds of sexual identity or orientation in Ontario?

Mr. Leslie Lugo: In Ontario, I don't have that experience. However, I certainly have lived that experience in a variety of jurisdictions as a gay man.

If I may give you a personal anecdote that has impacted my life as a lawyer, when I was a junior lawyer—this was at the height of the AIDS crisis in the late 1980s—I went to go see a physician for a checkup. I wanted information on how to protect myself against exposure to HIV. The doctor, as it turns out, was a personal friend of my employer, and he disclosed to my employer that I was gay and that I was concerned about exposure to HIV. It was a very stressful and embarrassing moment in my life that taught me a very important lesson about power imbalances. It's been a life experience that has stuck with me, and I think I bring an understanding of power imbalances to my experience to being a potential appointee at the HRTO.

Ms. Chandra Pasma: I'm sorry that happened to you, Mr. Lugo. It should not happen to anyone, ever.

My next question: MPP Martin referred to the backlog of cases at the HRTO, but kind of skated over just exactly how bad they are. The backlog, without addressing any new, incoming cases, would take three years to clear at the rate that the HRTO is currently clearing cases. Wait times of 18 months for a hearing are not uncommon. Only 43% of decisions are being issued within six months of the hearing.

That backlog has been growing under this government, even though the number of applications being filed every year is actually going down. Tribunal Watch has flagged that this is taking place due, in large part, to the fact that we have a large number of adjudicators who have no experience in human rights issues and who do not know how to navigate complex discrimination law.

So you've admitted, in all of the areas that are under the HRTO's protected grounds, you do not have experience in Ontario legislation on these issues, and that you will need to have the HRTO training in order to understand the legal context in Ontario. Given your lack of experience in these issues and the fact that you will need the training in order to understand them, how are you going to contribute to bringing down the backlog without taking away the right of applicants to have an oral hearing or to attempt mediation?

Mr. Leslie Lugo: Well, I don't have substantive knowledge on Ontario law applicable to the HRTO and to the discrimination that are suffered by applicants. However, I certainly have that experience broadly, from a variety of jurisdictions. I will need to have the training, but I've got 33 years of legal experience where I'm able to absorb information quickly and apply the language of statutes to fact patterns. All I can say is that in my career as a lawyer, I've always been the kind of lawyer that works hard, hits the ground running and does what needs to be done, even though it may take many hours and many, many weekends over 33 years.

0930

I take my work very seriously and take a great deal of professional pride in doing my job well. I will work very, very hard at making certain that I reach my decisions promptly and that the parties will find the language in my decisions helpful and clear.

Ms. Chandra Pasma: I'm certainly not questioning your work ethic, but there's a larger pattern here at the Human Rights Tribunal that adjudicators without the experience necessary who need training on the complex world of discrimination law in Ontario is contributing to the length of time that it is taking for cases to wind their way through the HRTO. More than half of applications are waiting more than 18 months. Some applicants have been waiting more than three years. So given your lack of experience with the legal jurisdiction and discrimination law in Ontario, how will you contribute to reducing wait times for applicants to the HRTO?

Mr. Leslie Lugo: As I've said, working very hard and taking the same approach that I have throughout my 33 years of legal experience. From what you've described, it's a challenging situation. Other than acknowledging that, I don't think that I can comment any further on the time delays at the HRTO.

Ms. Chandra Pasma: Last quick question, because I'm running out of time: The HRTO, like other tribunals, has moved to a digital-first strategy, which disadvantages some people appearing before the tribunal because they don't have equitable access to Internet. The HRTO, in 2022-23—out of 2,024 hearings, only eight were in person. The Ontario Bar Association has expressed concern about accommodation, as has ARCH Disability Law Centre, so what will you do to ensure that every party that appears before you will have a fair hearing, including an in-person hearing, if that is what they want?

The Chair (Mr. David Smith): That concludes the time available.

I'd like to thank you, Mr. Lugo, for your presentation here this morning. Thanks again.

Mr. Leslie Lugo: Thank you very much.

MS. DEBBIE ST JOHN-DE WIT

Review of intended appointment, selected by government party: Debbie St John-de Wit, intended appointee as member, board of health, Eastern Ontario Health Unit.

The Chair (Mr. David Smith): Our second intended appointee today is Debbie St John-de Wit, nominated as member of the board of health, Eastern Ontario Health Unit.

You may make any initial statement at your discretion. Following this, there will be questions from members of the committee. With that questioning, we start with the government, followed by the official opposition, with 15 minutes allotted to each recognized party. Any time you take in your statement will be deducted from the time allotted to the government.

You may proceed.

Ms. Debbie St John-de Wit: Thank you very much. Can you hear me all right?

The Chair (Mr. David Smith): Yes.

Ms. Debbie St John-de Wit: Good morning, Mr. Chair, Ms. Vice-Chair and honourable members. I'd like to begin by thanking you for inviting me to appear before you today and to say that I'm very pleased to be considered as a public appointee to the Eastern Ontario Health Unit board. I welcome this opportunity to discuss my personal and professional experience and qualifications so that you have confidence in my ability to assume this role. Let me begin.

I felt privileged to retire from a very fulfilling and meaningful 40-plus-year career in public service. I enjoyed my work, worked with very many stakeholders over the years and learned continuously. I always felt I was giving back to my community. As a lifelong resident of Stormont, Dundas and Glengarry counties, I have deep roots in my community, and I feel a deep sense of belonging. My community matters to me, and for this reason, I submitted my application to the Public Appointments Secretariat.

As a synopsis of my employment history, I began my career at the grassroots level and over the years moved into middle management and then senior leadership positions. I began by providing personal support and personal care to marginalized individuals, then worked in the upper-tier municipality of Stormont, Dundas and Glengarry in community consultation and development of seniors programs. From there, I became supervisor of a team of health care workers coordinating home care and long-term-care placement services, and then moved on to lead a small team in a not-for-profit charitable organization.

For almost a decade, I was employed by the regional office of the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care, which later divested to the Champlain Local Health Integration Network. In both organizations, my role involved system-level planning, community engagement, oversight of legislative compliance and fiscal accountability of operating agreements for transfer payment agencies within the eastern counties region.

In 2009, and until my retirement, I was honoured to be the inaugural executive director of Seaway Valley Community Health Centre. As executive director, I was responsible for carrying out the organization's mission according to the strategic direction as set out by the board of directors. Additionally, I was responsible for the overall man-

agement and leadership of the organization and plant, accountability of financial oversight, legislative compliance, delivery of best practice, stakeholder relations and communications. In this role, I gained significant experience in board development, collaboration and governance practices.

Over the years, I've been a member of many committees and boards, and I understand board etiquette. I have a clear understanding of governance frameworks including the legal, fiscal and fiduciary obligations, the rules and procedures of a board, conflict of interest and code of conduct policies, as well as knowing how to work within current legislation and regulations. I know what the Public Service of Ontario Act requires when it comes to political activity, and I know what my responsibilities are in and outside of the boardroom.

To summarize my education, I possess an early childhood education diploma, a degree in social sciences, a master's diploma in project management and certification in the areas of ethics, hospital health care management, administration of long-term-care homes, human resource management and senior leadership. Additional training that I've benefited from over the years include Indigenous cultural sensitivity training; diversity, equity and inclusion; and inclusive leadership and governance.

I currently volunteer for the Canadian Centre for Accreditation as an accreditation reviewer, and I volunteer for local not-for-profit organizations and our local elementary school on an as-needed basis. I believe this experience and education will be of benefit to the Eastern Ontario Health Unit board should I be appointed as your public appointee. My interest is simple: I wish to continue serving this community and the public.

On a personal note, my husband of 42 years and I live and work on our family farm. We've raised three children, and we currently have five beautiful grandchildren.

Once again, it's an honour to be considered for this appointment. I'd be pleased to answer any questions you may have. Thank you and merci de votre écoute.

The Chair (Mr. David Smith): Thank you very much.

I'll turn the remaining time to the government side. Who is first? Recognizing MPP Martin. Go ahead, please.

Mrs. Robin Martin: Thank you very much for putting your name forward for this role. It seems that you have extensive experience.

I was wanting to ask if you could share an example of a situation that arose, maybe during your time as executive director of the Seaway Valley Community Health Centre, that would maybe translate into applicable experience that might help you on the governance of the Eastern Ontario Health Unit board. Can you think of an example in one board that would translate to the other and help you in your governance role in the Eastern Ontario Health Unit board?

Ms. Debbie St John-de Wit: Certainly. Throughout the years as executive director of Seaway Valley Community Health Centre, the health unit—although it was a senior management position—was a partner on our board. It was a standing member of the Eastern Ontario Health Unit on the board of directors for Seaway Valley so that

we collaborated in our health promotion and health protection in terms of the programs that we delivered either jointly or we decided to operate very distinct programs.

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For instance, vaccination programs: We would not duplicate the childhood vaccine program, because the health unit managed that, but we did collaborate and deliver the community's vaccines for the public, and particularly for seniors or people who were more vulnerable. Likewise, the dental program: We collaborated to deliver that program, falls prevention and exercise programs.

I think my experience in governance in my community, knowing my community very well—the demographics and the needs of our community; the challenges and the strengths of our community—I think I can bring to the board an understanding of where the gaps are and what services are required not to duplicate effort and to have the best use of financial resources and human resources in our community to serve the population health needs.

Mrs. Robin Martin: Thank you.

The Chair (Mr. David Smith): Recognizing MPP Pinsonneault.

Mr. Steve Pinsonneault: Mr. Chairman, through you: How do you plan to contribute to the board's objectives of delivering local care?

Ms. Debbie St John-de Wit: As an example, local care—well, that's pretty much what I've been doing all of my life, taking the provincial priorities and applying them locally as needed. In our community, lung health has been a larger issue than in some areas of the province. As an example, we collaborated with the Eastern Ontario Health Unit to strengthen and build the smoking cessation program.

I think taking the provincial priorities and the funding that's available and adapting them or delivering them in a needs-based manner so that the people of greatest need get the programs that are needed—not every program needs to be administered and applied equally across the province. They all need to be available, but some need strengthening. Sometimes you need more education in one area; sometimes you need more support personnel on the ground.

It's knowing the demographics, knowing the epidemiology and the data of your community, and then making decisions, not unilaterally with the board, but with the data and the information in front of us about what the greatest need is and applying resources accordingly.

Mr. Steve Pinsonneault: Thank you for that. Your background does show that this is a high priority in your career.

The Chair (Mr. David Smith): Recognizing MPP Pang. Go ahead, please.

Mr. Billy Pang: Mr. Chair, through you: Thank you for putting your name forward. What specific skills from your previous roles do you think will be most beneficial in your potential new role at the east health unit board?

Ms. Debbie St John-de Wit: I beg your pardon. I missed the first sentence.

Mr. Billy Pang: What are the specific skills from your previous roles—

Ms. Debbie St John-de Wit: “Skills”—thank you. That's what I missed.

My experience, my skill sets—I'm adept at writing. I think I have a very strong ability in report-writing, communications, collaboration, knowledge of my community, ability to analyze and understand data, good judgment. I think I'm fair. I think I understand the principles of equity. It's ongoing learning for me, but I think I bring good judgment and a fair approach to decision-making.

Mr. Billy Pang: Thank you.

The Chair (Mr. David Smith): Recognizing MPP Dowie. Go ahead, please.

Mr. Andrew Dowie: Ms. St John-de Wit, thank you so much are putting your name forward for this. I'm just looking at your CV. You certainly have a lot of relevant experience here, and I want to thank you for putting your name forward. Really, it looks like two decades-plus of leadership.

I'm hoping you can elaborate a little bit on your background. I see the LHIN, the regional office of the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care, the Alzheimer Society, the CCAC—an extensive background. How do you see being able to apply that background that you have to help with your position at the eastern health unit board?

Ms. Debbie St John-de Wit: My first career, actually, in 1982, was a contract with the Eastern Ontario Health Unit, and it involved infants. To extend that further, over my career, from birth to death—I guess to old age—I've had opportunity to work across all age groups and in programming across all of those areas. I think I bring the experience of understanding the needs of different age groups, the needs of families at all levels, when it's early childhood, the teen years, early adulthood, older adults and so on.

Long-term-care-home placement and school entry are very different areas in your life when people experience crises or need, but you never get there until you get there. You never worry about what school your child's going to until you have to make that decision, and you never worry about what long-term-care home Mom has to go to until you get there. So I think I bring the experience across the lifespan and know the programs in our area.

Again, I know the needs of our area, the demographics. I think I will be able to help with knowing the legislation across those areas, as well, that others may not have experienced in their careers.

The Chair (Mr. David Smith): Recognizing MPP Hamid. Go ahead, please.

MPP Zee Hamid: Thank you for your time so far. By the way, I'm very envious of your farm living. Related to that, can you speak to your experience living in eastern Ontario? And also, what priorities do you see for public health in that region? Because every region is a little different.

Ms. Debbie St John-de Wit: Well, there's a bilingual component here that other areas of the province don't necessarily experience to the same degree. My own personal bias, I suppose, is that every Canadian should have at least two languages in this day and age. I know that it's

not possible, but I'm very pleased that our community works very hard to provide more than one language to all of the children in our area. I know this community—you asked me about challenges that we'll be facing. Is that correct?

MPP Zee Hamid: Yes, the priorities. What priorities do you see for public health in the region?

Ms. Debbie St John-de Wit: Oh, the priorities. Well, I think it'll be difficult to get people back to the table for a COVID vaccine, and I think it's going to be important for a while—maybe all immunization after. I don't know that that's unique to this area, but I see it in this area.

Smoking cessation, opioid use is high in this area and literacy levels are lower in this area, so it's hard to get that health-promotion information out to people.

There are also a lot of dental issues that are required in this area, so the programs that the province has implemented for dental, it's important to get that information out. I think those will be some of the priorities right now.

Environmentally, because of farming and pesticide use, education about pesticides—again, it's related to lung health issues. So, I think that the priority areas will be getting people back to vaccines, education and literacy issues, lung health issues and mental health and drug addictions.

MPP Zee Hamid: That's very helpful. Thank you.

The Chair (Mr. David Smith): That concludes the allotted time to the government side.

We will now turn to the official opposition. Recognizing MPP Pasma. Go ahead, please.

Ms. Chandra Pasma: Thank you for being here this morning, Ms. St John-de Wit. I know it's not the most comfortable process to appear before the committee, but it's an important part of our democratic process so that the people of Ontario can have confidence that decisions for appointments are being based on merit and not connections to the government, and that people have the appropriate qualifications for the role. So thank you for being with us this morning and for answering our questions.

You certainly have a very impressive résumé with years of service in the area of health. I want to follow up on the question that MPP Hamid asked at the end, because your most recent experience was at the Seaway Valley Community Health Centre. Community health centres provide health care for some of the members of our society who have the biggest barriers to health care, and they do that in a way that addresses the local priorities.

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In my riding of Ottawa West–Nepean, I have two community health centres, but they have different programming because each of them is targeted to the needs of the immediate community that they serve, and that health care takes an equity lens.

So what do you see, from your experience at the Seaway Valley Community Health Centre, as some of those equity concerns for health in eastern Ontario that you believe should be prioritized by the board of public health or that the public health unit always needs to keep in mind during their work?

Ms. Debbie St John-de Wit: Well, there are many things. As you said, community health centres provide an equity lens to programming, and Seaway Valley does the same.

The health unit needs to recognize poverty as an overlying factor, a social determinant of health in our area, and that it has no boundaries. Poverty is a big one in our area, as well as the need to support marginalized LGBTQ2+, two-spirited, trans populations. Seaway Valley has developed programs specific to LGBTQ because there was a big gap in our community—people were driving to Ottawa, Toronto, Montreal, and the health unit partners in those programs—but it's not in their strategic plan specifically, so that's an area that they might want to look at in the future.

I think our growing population—the demographic is changing, as it is across Ontario, with migrants, immigrants, refugees, and I think the services that we currently offer in this area have not taken that into account in the growth and delivery yet. So that's going to affect what services are delivered, how they're delivered—the translation services. It's going to mean understanding of cultural norms and the values of different cultures. And I don't think we're ready for that yet, as a community, across—maybe everywhere.

I know in our community, there has been a huge influx of many, many cultures—long, long overdue in our area—and it's wonderful, but I really see the gaps, even in the grocery store. I see the look on individuals' faces when they pick up a pineapple and see the cost of it, because it's not native to our community. Anyway, I just don't think we're there yet, and that will affect all programs that we deliver.

So those are two examples.

Going back, generation after generation, the education that we're providing to people isn't getting out deep enough to those who require it. I still see the same issues that we saw 40 years ago, so we're not getting deep enough into the communities. We need to get to the people directly for a number of reasons.

I heard you talking to Mr. Lugo. Accessibility is more than a physical plant. It's also cultural sensitivity. It's providing services in the home. It's understanding people's values. It's language. It's translation. It's transportation. So I think we're not getting to people in the way that we could be to make more meaningful change.

Ms. Chandra Pasma: I appreciate your passion, and you are preaching to the choir with the criteria that you mentioned.

My riding also has a high proportion of newcomers—a population that is low-income, living in rental housing; English may not be their first language—and so there are challenges and barriers in access to health care. The Ottawa Public Health unit has been trying to address those challenges through the creation of the Healthy Babies Healthy Children Program.

In the two years since I've been elected, I've gotten a bit of a crash course in the challenges facing public health units at the Association of Municipalities of Ontario con-

ference, because public health units will come and speak to us about the challenges that they're facing. Many of them have to do with insufficient funding to meet the needs of the community that they serve.

This Healthy Babies Healthy Children Program was an attempt by the Ottawa Board of Health to bring together multiple pots of funding, multiple services that would normally be delivered individually, and provide them through neighbourhood hubs so that hopefully you get somebody through the door because they need a vaccine or they want to do a well-baby check, but while they're there, you can also do dental screenings, you can do mental health screenings, and there are resources available. They can provide employment and social services in co-operation with other agencies from the city of Ottawa so that you are able to provide information directly. They also tend to have nurses who speak multiple languages so that hopefully someone who walks through the door is able to receive information in their own language. It's a program that the Ottawa Board of Health is continuing to fight for to get sufficient funding.

What role do you see for innovations like that within the Eastern Ontario Health Unit that could help to meet some of the specific needs and equity challenges you've laid out?

Ms. Debbie St John-de Wit: Well, I think the example that you've just mentioned would be ideal. To have those types of hubs would be—it's well overdue. In Akwesasne, they've had that kind of integrated hub for years and years, and I've always admired them for their foresight to bring public health and primary care and holistic care, their ambulance, daycare, pharmacy—they have it all in one location, and it makes so much sense. They have a population of about 10,000 or 12,000 people. Why have individual offices in different locations when you could have everything under one roof and provide the services to the population in that area? I think that's a wonderful example of non-duplication of services, of better access, of knowing your community. The community then also feels that this is their health home.

I think that's a model that this community should know more about and really look at as a delivery model going forward. There are just not enough resources to split and pay rent in all different locations and have intake by 10 different organizations when you can have one. Payroll, you can have one—so on and so forth. There are just so many economies of scale, if we could work together more collaboratively.

Ms. Chandra Pasma: Yes, absolutely.

In my riding, there are a number of people, because of the high cost of rent and incomes not being sufficient, who are working multiple jobs to pay rent, so they don't necessarily have the capacity to search out different programs and to even understand what health services are available or what they might need. Having a one-stop hub is a way of connecting them with those services that they might not have otherwise been connected with.

There was one public health unit in southern Ontario that flagged that they don't have sufficient funding to help

catch up with childhood vaccinations. We've seen that the COVID period had a significant impact on routine childhood vaccinations, so many children are years behind. They're in school, but they may not have the vaccines that are required for schoolchildren in Ontario. There's also a knowledge gap. This particular public health unit pointed out that it's actually far more cost-effective to invest in prevention, which is the vaccine, than to deal with an outbreak once it has occurred—both the health care that these children would need but then also the resources for the public health unit to track and properly monitor cases.

What do you see as the role of the Eastern Ontario Health Unit in helping to close that vaccine gap?

Ms. Debbie St John-de Wit: Health promotion, education, access—make it available closer to home or in the schools, ideally. The parents or the guardians are ultimately going to make that decision, so it's how to get the information to those families. Health promotion, social media, possibly—all of our local, rural newspapers are now defunct; they no longer exist. That used to be a source of information for a lot of people. Now, to access it through social media, I guess, is the format.

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But to send letters home from school, to be one voice, primary care has to have the same message as the health unit. Organizations, food banks, any health or social service organizations: We have to work with one voice to bring the message across, because one source is not going to be enough to get the message out.

Ms. Chandra Pasma: Thank you. You mentioned primary care. One of the challenges that we're seeing in Ontario is that too many people don't have access to primary care. There are 2.5 million Ontarians right now who don't have a family doctor. Obviously, public health units are not the sole solution to that. We need to see investments in team-based care, innovative solutions that help doctors expand the number of patients they're seeing. But what do you see as the role of the Eastern Ontario Health Unit in helping to address that gap in primary care?

Ms. Debbie St John-de Wit: I think a lot of the programs that they're currently offering—cancer screening, smoke cessation, the dental program—those are all prevention programs, and I think it's more of that and the growth of those programs to specifically fit the needs of the community. In our community, that's smoke cessation, mental health, drug addiction, prevention programs and health promotion. It could go a long way, and in each community, that might look a little different.

If the health unit were doing the health promotion and prevention at a high level, and the public and the screening of cancer and so on, then the primary care could manage individuals who need the primary care after, as opposed to doing so much screening. So if the health unit could expand and do, as an example, routine physicals that no longer exist, it might catch things at an early stage that primary care could manage downstream.

Ms. Chandra Pasma: Right. Thank you. I appreciate that, because right now, we're seeing people being diagnosed with cancer in the emergency room, and often, it's

at an advanced stage because either they didn't know that it was that serious and that they should seek out care, or they knew it was a problem but it never felt serious enough to go to the emergency room over. So the more that we can do those early screenings, the better for patients, the better outcomes that they have, but also the less intensive interventions that our health care system needs to provide for them.

Another thing that we heard from public health units this summer was that they do not have the resources any longer to properly track outbreaks. They were speaking specifically of measles this summer, but right now, I'm watching the news about avian flu with some pretty increasing concern about what happens if we start seeing larger outbreaks of avian flu. What do you see as the role of the Eastern Ontario Health Unit in tracking outbreaks of infectious disease?

Ms. Debbie St John-de Wit: I think that surveillance and data alignment is really, really important. I know when I was working and watching COVID long before it was announced, as you just mentioned with the measles outbreak. I was watching what was happening in China and in Italy and I was thinking, "This is no longer epidemic; it's becoming pandemic very quickly." I think data surveillance is key. I understand that budgets are always a consideration, always a concern—

The Chair (Mr. David Smith): Excuse me. That concludes the time allotted for this session. I want to thank you, Ms. St John-de Wit, for your presentation. Thanks again.

Ms. Debbie St John-de Wit: Goodbye. Thank you.

The Chair (Mr. David Smith): We will now consider the intended appointment of Leslie Lugo, nominated as member of Human Rights Tribunal of Ontario. Recognizing MPP Martin. Go ahead, please.

Mrs. Robin Martin: I move concurrence in the intended appointment of Leslie Lugo, nominated as member of the Human Rights Tribunal of Ontario.

The Chair (Mr. David Smith): Any discussion? Are members ready to vote?

Ms. Chandra Pasma: Recorded vote, Chair.

Ayes

Dowie, Hamid, Martin, Pang, Pinsonneault, Laura Smith.

Nays

Pasma.

The Chair (Mr. David Smith): That motion is carried. We will now consider the intended appointment of Debbie St John-de Wit, nominated as member of the board of health, Eastern Ontario Health Unit. MPP Martin.

Mrs. Robin Martin: I move concurrence in the intended appointment of Debbie St John-de Wit, nominated as member of the board of health, Eastern Ontario Health Unit.

The Chair (Mr. David Smith): Any discussion? Seeing none, are members ready to vote? All those in favour? Any opposed? That motion is carried.

The deadline to review the intended appointments selected for the October 24 certificate is set to expire on November 24, 2024. Is there unanimous consent to extend the certificate by 30 days? I heard a no.

That concludes the business for today. The committee now stands adjourned.

The committee adjourned at 1006.

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Mr. David Smith (Scarborough Centre / Scarborough-Centre PC)

Vice-Chair / Vice-Présidente

Ms. Chandra Pasma (Ottawa West–Nepean / Ottawa-Ouest–Nepean ND)

Mr. Andrew Dowie (Windsor–Tecumseh PC)

Mr. Chris Glover (Spadina–Fort York ND)

MPP Zee Hamid (Milton PC)

Ms. Sarah Jama (Hamilton Centre / Hamilton-Centre IND)

Mrs. Robin Martin (Eglinton–Lawrence PC)

Mr. Billy Pang (Markham–Unionville PC)

Ms. Chandra Pasma (Ottawa West–Nepean / Ottawa-Ouest–Nepean ND)

Mr. Steve Pinsonneault (Lambton–Kent–Middlesex PC)

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