



## NANCY BÉLANGER, COMMISSIONER OF LOBBYING

STANDING COMMITTEE ON ACCESS TO INFORMATION, PRIVACY AND ETHICS

2021-05-14

### OPENING REMARKS

Good afternoon Mister Chair and Committee members.

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today on the Main Estimates. I am pleased to speak to you about my Office, its accomplishments over the past fiscal year, and our plans for this one.

I want to start by saying that I am proud of the way my staff responded with innovative thinking, adaptability, and resolve over the past 14 months.

Part of this success is due to thoughtful planning during our move in 2019, when we ensured we had the tools and equipment we needed to be a modern and mobile workforce. That decision paid huge dividends when we suddenly shifted to telework in March 2020.

As a result, my office was able to face its busiest year and deliver on the three areas of my mandate:

- maintaining the Registry of Lobbyists;
- ensuring compliance with the Lobbying Act and the Lobbyists' Code of Conduct; and
- fostering awareness of Canada's lobbying regime among all stakeholders.

### REGISTRY OF LOBBYISTS

I'll begin with the Registry of Lobbyists.

When individuals, corporations, and organizations lobby the federal government, they must file a public registration that contains specific details about their lobbying activity. They must also report certain oral and arranged communications with high-level decision-makers in monthly communication reports.

The past year brought records in several areas.

We saw the highest monthly average of active lobbyists and a record of 6,435 in March 2021.

There were 2,457 new registrations. This reflects an increase of 41% from the previous fiscal year.

With respect to monthly communication reports, we also saw record numbers with a total of 28,919 for the year.

## COMPLIANCE AND ENFORCEMENT

Our activities to ensure compliance also increased: 28 preliminary assessments were initiated, almost twice the number of the previous year.

During the last fiscal year, six (6) preliminary assessments proceeded to the investigation stage and 12 were closed. I suspended three (3) investigations after referring them to the RCMP. I also recently tabled one investigation report in Parliament.

My office had 24 preliminary assessments and four (4) investigations ongoing at the end of the last fiscal year.

## EDUCATION AND OUTREACH

On the outreach front we shifted to a completely virtual model. The team averaged more than one presentation per week, reaching more than 900 stakeholders.

I also participated in several virtual events at the international level to speak about the Canadian experience with lobbying regulation. As you know, many other jurisdictions view the Lobbying Act and the Lobbyists' Code of Conduct as models that they aspire to emulate.

While Canada's legislation delivers on the goal of fostering transparent and ethical lobbying, there's always room for improvement.

## MY OFFICE

Upon your request, I submitted a report called "Improving the Lobbying Act: Preliminary recommendations" to this Committee in February. It outlines 11 areas where I believe that improvements to the legislation would enhance transparency, fairness, clarity, and efficiency. I look forward to discussing these recommendations with you.

Last November, we launched a public consultation to seek input from stakeholders on potential changes to the Lobbyists' Code of Conduct. The Office is revising the Code for the purposes of further consultation.

I expect to refer an updated Lobbyists' Code of Conduct to this Committee and publish the final version in the *Canada Gazette* before the end of this fiscal year.

Other key initiatives for this fiscal year include enhancing the usability of the Registry of Lobbyists and making it easier to enter and find information. We will also explore ways to improve efficiencies in compliance work, and expand awareness and understanding of the Act and the Code by using stakeholder feedback to help focus outreach activities.

All of this work is being performed by a very small team of 28 employees. It is important to recognize that more often than not, they are asked to go well beyond what is required of their position.

My total budget is approximately \$4.18 million, excluding employee benefit payments. More than three-quarters of my total allocation goes to salaries and benefits, leaving me with an operating budget of about \$1 million. About half of that amount is spent to obtain corporate services, such as human resources, from other government institutions. The Office's budget has not changed substantially since 2008.

That is why I am pleased to say that we received a positive answer to our request for additional funding. Budget 2021 allocated a total increase of \$4-million over the next five (5) years to help ensure that the Registry of Lobbyists and the Office's IM/IT systems remain modern, reliable, secure, and accessible. The increase will mainly serve to hire five additional IM/IT employees.

I would like to conclude my remarks by thanking each and every member of the Office. I want to recognize their dedication, professionalism and excellence in delivering on our mandate despite the challenges of the last year.

#### CONCLUSION

Mister Chair and Committee members, thank you, and I welcome your questions.