

HANSARD

NOVA SCOTIA HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY

HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

Wednesday, January 31, 2024

Committee Room

Printed and Published by Nova Scotia Hansard Reporting Services

HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY MANAGEMENT COMMISSION

Hon. Karla MacFarlane (Chair)

Nolan Young (Vice Chair)

Hon. Kim Masland

Hon. Allan MacMaster

Danielle Barkhouse

Hon. Derek Mombourquette

Hon. Keith Irving

Susan Leblanc

James Charlton, Chief Clerk of the House of Assembly
(Non-Voting Member)

[Hon. Keith Irving was replaced by Hon. Kelly Regan.]

In Attendance:

Gordon Hebb
Chief Legislative Counsel

Matthew Timmons
Director of Operations and Administration
Office of the Speaker

David Hastings
Assistant Clerk of the House of Assembly



House of Assembly
Nova Scotia

HALIFAX, WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 31, 2024

HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY MANAGEMENT COMMISSION

4:42 P.M.

CHAIR

Hon. Karla MacFarlane

VICE CHAIR

Nolan Young

THE CHAIR: Good afternoon. We'll now call the meeting to order for the House of Assembly Management Commission, January 31, 2024, and the time is 4:42 p.m. I'm Karla MacFarlane, and I am the Speaker and Chair of the House of Assembly Management Commission. I will ask the members to introduce themselves, and I will begin to my left.

[The committee members introduced themselves.]

THE CHAIR: To my left, we have Chief Clerk James Charlton who is a non-voting member, and to my right we have Gordon Hebb, Chief Legislative Counsel, and of course, to the front of me here, we have Matthew Timmons, Director of Operations and Administration.

We will begin the meeting, of course, with any corrections to be made to the minutes that were circulated in advance of this meeting. Are there any corrections or errors?

Would someone like to move that the minutes be accepted? We have MLA Barkhouse, and seconder, MLA Young.

All those in favour? Contrary minded? Thank you.

The motion is carried.

We called this meeting today to invite you back for the ongoing and important conversation around MLA office security. We know that at the last meeting, the Chief Clerk gave an overview of this issue and some proposals advanced by MLAs to address it, and the recommendations that were made by Corporate Security at the Department of Justice, which actually performs assessments of all of the constituency offices for MLAs, and how to best address security issues in your offices. We were lucky that we were able to hear from Ian Burke. He had a lot of wisdom and a great amount of knowledge with decades of experience.

[4:45 p.m.]

I think what we will do now is have an opportunity to - there was a motion that was moved by Mrs. Leblanc and seconded by Mr. Mombourquette that the discussion of this matter was going to be deferred to today. A recorded vote was taken on that motion, and the motion was passed unanimously.

Now it's up to us to determine what we will do to move forward. For this meeting, I will begin to see who wants to open up the discussion.

Yes, go ahead, MLA Leblanc.

SUSAN LEBLANC: Mrs. Leblanc is my mother.

Just to be clear, Chair, the motion that I made last week is still on the table? No, my motion was not the motion. What is on the table? There's no motion on the table.

THE CHAIR: I was just reading what we did . . .

SUSAN LEBLANC: I just wanted to clarify that.

THE CHAIR: . . . and refresh from last week.

SUSAN LEBLANC: Okay, great. I don't need to speak at this moment, then.

THE CHAIR: MLA Regan.

HON. KELLY REGAN: Based on the interests of safety for our offices and constituency assistants, I'm moving the following motion: I move that this committee agree to allocate additional funding to hire a supporting staff person in each of our MLA offices so that our CAs do not have to work alone.

THE CHAIR: Do I have . . . (Interruption) We cannot speak to the motion until there is someone who will second it.

We have a second from MLA Leblanc. Now we may speak to the motion. Who would like to go first?

MLA Mombourquette.

HON. DEREK MOMBOURQUETTE: I just want to provide a few comments. I do appreciate the work of Corporate Security, and the work that not only they do with the MLA offices but the offices that are in and across the province that support Nova Scotians every day. This is something, as I said in the last meeting, that is important to our caucus. It's something that we've heard, and we all know, and we've experienced an uptick in more inappropriate behaviour coming in to our offices and our CAs having to deal with it. We've all experienced that in some capacity, I believe, as MLAs. As a caucus, we've said it time and time again: offices that are operated predominantly by women in communities across the province - we strongly believe that an additional person will help with many of the security measures that MLAs are talking about implementing now or have already implemented.

We heard a number of suggestions. I know many of the MLAs have had audits of their office to determine what they could put in place from a security standpoint when it comes to equipment - cameras, panic buttons, et cetera. I'll have some questions for the staff at some point tonight after we go through this motion.

This is something that's very important to us. This is something that we've been advocating for. I think that it's time to look at this. It's time to look at - if we're going to look at other security measures that we can put in place, as we've heard and we've talked about - nothing is 100 per cent guaranteed, but having another person in the office, not only for safety but for support. As we've all talked about, many of the programs that Nova Scotians are utilizing, the MLA offices are the first point of contact. Of course we're seeing, especially in this time, where the cost of living is such an important - well, it's an important issue for all of us, and it's a huge challenge for families. We're all seeing the volume of people coming into our offices grow substantially.

I'll stop there for now. This is something our caucus strongly supports. I appreciate my colleague bringing it forward.

THE CHAIR: We will now go to MLA Young.

NOLAN YOUNG: Safety in our offices is utmost - paramount - hands down. Obviously I can't speak about the discussion that took place in camera, but it came with some really good recommendations and insights from the experts who deal with safety on a day-to-day basis. Speaking for myself, I'll continue to support the experts in this field with their recommendations.

SUSAN LEBLANC: Well, I'd like to thank my colleague for putting this motion on the table. I support it wholeheartedly. I also appreciate Mr. Burke's comments. He didn't actually make any solid recommendations. There were lots of comments and lots of thoughts, but there was no standing recommendation. There is a recommendation on the table now, on the floor, and that is to have the budgetary allotment for a second full-time staff person in our offices.

Last week when we discussed this issue, the Minister of Finance and Treasury Board, Minister MacMaster, accused the Opposition - and you can make all the faces you want - in the media scrums following the meeting, Minister MacMaster accused the Opposition of playing politics. Yes, we are politicians, and we have partisan references that we come from, but to suggest that this issue is a partisan issue or merely a cash grab on behalf of the Opposition is reprehensible, and I was offended. I am offended. I think every CA in this province should be offended by those comments.

I would like to just remind everyone here about a couple of things that have happened in the last several years in Canada. The first one is, as we know, "MLA raises workplace safety concerns after assistant assaulted at constituency office." That's MLA Maguire. "Nova Scotia politicians speak out about threats made towards them and their families." That was an article by Sarah Plowman following the issues that happened in Cape Breton. "Jagmeet Singh verbally harassed during Ontario election campaign stop in Peterborough." Oh, that's a repeat. "Suspicious packages arriving by mail at Nova Scotia MP, MLA offices." My office received one of those. We sat for hours with the forensic department of the Halifax Regional Police department while we waited to see if this was a package that could poison us or kill us. It was not a good day.

"Toronto NDP MPP" - sorry, maybe I'm referencing NDP offices too much - "Toronto NDP MPP's constituency office vandalized with feces, eggs." "Canadian politicians warn of political violence after U.K. MP is stabbed to death." Meg Hillier. Is that her name? Yes, Meg Hillier. "Former MP says better security needed at all local offices." "We will not let them win," Trudeau says after being pelted with gravel during campaign stop."

I have more. "Bernier condemns violence." Sorry. "Vulgar slur painted across MP Catherine McKenna's office." The c-word, in case anyone's wondering what the vulgar slur was, in red spray paint on her office window, and "Fort McMurray Liberal candidate's campaign office vandalized with 'threatening' posters." Then we don't have to - we can remember the guy with the Molotov cocktails in the Edmonton Legislature a couple of weeks ago - or Edmonton City Hall, I should say. Then, of course, there is the man who went onto Parliament Hill and shot a guard, killed a guard, and then went into the House of Commons looking for other people to harm.

Why am I saying all of this? To remind everyone in this room that there are certain things that cannot be taken for granted, and that is safety. Yes, these articles make the news

because they're about the elected officials, but behind all those elected officials are staff who stand by them, and speak for them, and answer the phones on their behalf. They are just as much a target as the elected officials, and in many cases, some of them have four people that they work with in their offices. In our case, our CAs have one person - by themselves. I will reiterate. It is reprehensible that the Opposition with this kind of motion would be accused of making a cash grab for partisan politics. I really implore the government members to take a look at this issue square on, think about your own CAs, and make the right decision and support this motion.

THE CHAIR: MLA Barkhouse.

DANIELLE BARKHOUSE: You know, I find it very interesting. As an MLA, I have - my CA is usually not alone because I choose to use my budget wisely. I choose to have a part-time. I'm in my office every Monday. If I'm going to take meetings on Mondays, I move that I'm in the office Thursdays and Fridays. I'm usually in there two days a week, so I choose to spend my money wisely. We need to learn to choose how we spend our money for our budgets.

We've had some suggestions put on the table. I said this in the last meeting, that I'd be doing this. For example, the doorbell with a camera and a camera in my office. That's what I choose to spend my budget on. I do not choose to spend it on advertisement or - all the time. I do not choose to spend it on those things.

You have to make decisions. We have over \$60,000 a year to work with in our budget. Our CA budget comes from a completely different budget than what we have to run our office. Again, we have enough money in our budget to do it. We need to choose to do it. If you do not choose to do it, then that's on you, not on myself. I'm not the only person - I know I have other colleagues who have part-time staff, who do spend time in their office so that they're not alone.

I just find it very ironic that this is what you go to, instead of trying to find better ways to spend your money to help your constituents, that you go to this. We have people out there suffering right now, and our constituents need us. They need all the help that they can get. I choose to spend my money on my office.

KELLY REGAN: I just want to let the honourable member know it would be very rare that I would buy a dinner ticket. I don't do a lot of advertising. I do send out mailouts in my riding, and those are expensive. Here in Metro - and I'm sure in other places across the province, as the Speaker has let us know - the most expensive rent was not in Metro but in many places in this province. MLAs spend a good portion of their budget on rent. Saying we have to manage our budget wisely - there are some places where they could not find places to rent. It took ages for offices to get set up because there was literally no place in their constituency to set up. So don't talk to me about how we spend our budgets. I'm not out there spending it on dinner tickets or advertising.

What we are trying to ensure is that the people who help our constituents, who support us, have the same support and the same safety - well, not even the same, but at least decent safety. I can tell you that when the attack on Parliament Hill happened, we had no trouble spending money to ensure that MLAs were taken care of, that MLAs were safe. We didn't do the same thing for our CAs. We did not do that for them.

I would add to my honourable colleague's list Andy Scott, MP for Fredericton, was beaten by a constituent because of his stand in favour of gay marriage. You might think this won't happen to you, but I'm telling you, as someone who was a frequent flier with legislative security for a period of time, it can happen in any office. Kelly Gomes is one of the most accomplished, hard-working - she has, I'm sure, defused more threats than a lot of other CAs put together, and she didn't have a chance there. To suggest that this was a cash grab by Opposition parties is, in my view, not worthy of the honourable member, who I know is a thoughtful person. This was a serious incident, and they're happening all over the place. It is by the grace of God that somebody hasn't been seriously injured here.

[5:00 p.m.]

Our offices - we often take the office we can get or the office we can afford here. We do not have adequate set-ups. In many cases, because of the way our budgets are run, MLAs put out the money for any expenses at their office, and then we get reimbursed - if we're lucky, if we followed all the procedures. But we can only receive a certain amount of money each month.

We could set up a great big security set-up, but it could be months before you're fully reimbursed for that. That's a problem here, too, and what it does is it ensures that people who are rich, who are older, who are established are more likely to run for office because it discourages people who don't have large credit lines when they're setting up an office. You might not be able to get the furniture that the former member had. Actually, I think that's changed. It used to just go off into general storage and all kinds of people could have access to it.

All I'm saying is I think we want to ensure that our CAs are protected in the same way that we are protected. We don't work alone at the Legislature. We have security looking out for us all the time. At some point, we have to make a decision that the people who work for us, the people who help us serve our constituents are worthy of some kind of protection, too.

THE CHAIR: Before we proceed, can I ask a question with regard to rent? Just for clarity. It is my understanding that MLAs can have that directly paid from . . . (Interruption) Okay. I just wanted to make sure that we weren't - yes.

SUSAN LEBLANC: At the risk of falling into a child-like argument, I will just say that MLA Barkhouse is absolutely right, that we have a budget and we make choices, just

like the Budget of the Province. I also choose, my honourable colleagues, to pay a part-time person in my office, and I also choose to pay for an alarm system, and I also choose to pay for panic buttons, and I also chose to make sure that I had a locked door when I moved into my new office, so I am doing quite a lot. In fact, the security measures that I am taking in Dartmouth North are more, as we've heard, than many of the MLAs. Yet I am advocating for this.

Making sure that our staff are safe is not just about one measure or another measure, and what would work here and what would work there, and cherry picking all of the things. The idea to make people safe, or to make sure that they are as safe as possible is to do all of the possible things, and one of the possible things is to double up on staff as we see - by the way, I meant to say this earlier. Last week in our meeting, one of the colleagues on the other side compared CA work to working in a candy shop. After I left that meeting, I walked out Barrington Street past the candy shop, and guess what? There were two people working in the candy shop. So if it's good enough for a candy shop, according to MLA White, it should be good enough for our MLA offices.

That being said, the only thing in the case of MLA Maguire's situation and Ms. Gomes's situation, the only thing that made that situation not go completely sideways, and frankly, very dangerous - I mean, it was very dangerous, but could be serious physically - was a second person. We know that about that situation. Maybe that's not the same idea, or maybe that's not the same case in every situation, but we do know that about that situation. The only way to guarantee CAs to be as safe as possible is to have more than one person in the office.

I leave it there. I cannot believe we're continuing to debate this. I look forward to hearing the rest of the comments, but I think we should just vote on this.

NOLAN YOUNG: My last comment is clearly this is a very emotional issue. It hits a chord and stuff, and we've got to get back to looking at what the experts are saying is in the best interests of our CAs. The honourable member, MLA Leblanc, had mentioned some of the truly, truly egregious acts that have happened across this country. It's a different world that we live in, even five years ago. The questions I kind of had that come back to me: Are two CAs going to prevent suspicious mailed packages? Are two CAs going to end spray painting on a wall? When rocks are being thrown at honourable members, are two CAs going to prevent that?

I look back at my years in the oil field. There were always really toxic environments that you'd be part of, and what we focused on was engineering controls, whether it's breathing apparatus and training, to do our jobs safely. Would putting more people in a hazardous situation make it safer? That's not always the case. There's administrative and there's training and there's engineering controls that we could be looking at, and taking advice from the experts. That's all I have.

DEREK MOMBOURQUETTE: As MLA Leblanc said, I don't want to get into a big back-and-forth, which this could very well turn into. I honestly can't believe the rationale I'm hearing on the other side about throwing rocks at two instead of one. That's hard to believe, that that's where we're at in this conversation from government.

I'm sitting here looking at this. If there wasn't another person with her that day, that could have gone way worse than it did. We sat in committee last week. We had people come in. The Auditor General was in. We approved additional positions for the Auditor General - important work that they're doing to audit the government on health. This committee was very happy to recommend to the Department of Finance and Treasury Board that the Auditor General have additional staff. Good for them. That's great.

But here we are: CAs, who work by themselves, who provide the information about all the services that government offers, de-escalating situations, helping people who are desperate. As we've talked about before, MLA offices are like the last hope for people, and they're desperate when they come, many of them. We're looking at those staff and we're saying no, because we don't want to put two people in a place where somebody might throw rocks at them. That's the example that we just got.

The comment about MLAs not spending their money wisely - that's why we have an Auditor General. When the member says that, she's not insulting me. I've been doing this for nine years. She's insulting her own colleagues. I have great faith in the 55 MLAs, that they spend their money very wisely, and they're going to spend their money in ways that best support their community. What we're saying is that that's always going to be flexible in how people decide to do it. There should be a budget allocated for an additional staff person, and also, there should be additional budget allocated for the safety measures to make sure that all of the MLAs consistently do that.

But again, the arguments I'm hearing - and I look at this article - and this is just one example I'm using. My colleague from the NDP gave many. We've approved other positions to go to the Department of Finance and Treasury Board in the millions, and the government doesn't even want to look at this for the people who work for them - for the people who work for them every day, by themselves in a lot of cases, who are supporting members of our community, and many of them where it's their last beacon of hope.

DANIELLE BARKHOUSE: Interestingly enough, MLA Young had some of the points that I was going to make. But I would like to set the record straight, just because I feel - this is why some people start getting tired of politicians. There was a statement made earlier that the rent comes out and you don't get your money for months. That's untrue.

KELLY REGAN: I did not say that.

DANIELLE BARKHOUSE: Well, I'm paraphrasing. Anyway. That's not true. Not only is your rent paid for by the Speaker's Office, so are some of your other things. I find it

offensive as a single mother with no child support that you're saying this job - unless you think I'm old, which - fair. I'm getting old, especially if you ask my children. (Laughs) As a single mother - nothing deterred me about how the finances go to stop me, and you perpetuating that stops people my age or in my situation from wanting to run. There are some lovely sound bites from over there, but I would like to just take the vote so we can move on.

THE CHAIR: I do have one more. Minister MacMaster, please.

HON. ALLAN MACMASTER: None of us are safety experts. My feeling from the start on this is it's important, and we should ask the safety experts. We just had a safety expert here who made a number of practical suggestions, all that could be made possible through budgets that we have. The issue of adding a second person was raised, and something that I actually didn't think about until now, but what was raised was that if there's a situation where somebody's in line of being harmed, if there's a second person there, the second person could also be harmed. I didn't even think about that, but that's because I'm not a security expert. I'm inclined to listen to experts. I'm not an expert. They know best. There were practical suggestions made. Again, to me they're affordable. They're doable.

I only had one piece of correspondence from a constituent on this. They said - their last line was, "Many people are vulnerable in isolated work environments, and the organizations they work for," - I'll paraphrase. It said "they," but the organizations they work for can't afford to solve this problem by hiring a second security person. They have to choose practical, simple strategies, "as should we," it says here, but I think the message actually is "as should you," as an MLA.

I just had one piece of correspondence. I thought it sounded like common sense. I wanted to read that into the record, and I will side with the security experts on this one.

KELLY REGAN: Since we are referencing the security advice that we received, I would like to actually have that put into the record here so that all of the other MLAs who are going to be affected by what we do here today will actually be able to see that advice because I did not hear, You must do X or Y and not Z. I heard some options. So I would like to have that read in here.

THE CHAIR: Excuse me. MLA Regan, I'd like to remind you we are not to speak on the conversations that were held in camera.

KELLY REGAN: It was referenced.

THE CHAIR: And my mistake earlier that I did not address that - just a reminder, a friendly reminder, to everyone. I just received advice here, so my apologies that if there was something said earlier, it was not caught.

SUSAN LEBLANC: Yes, well then, we shouldn't have had that conversation in camera. That conversation should be made in the public so that we can talk about it in public because this is a public meeting and a public-facing committee. If we're going to make a decision, then perhaps we should punt the decision again to next week, bring some security experts back because now we can't even talk about how maybe we need a second opinion because we're not allowed to talk about the conversation at all.

My suggestion would be to punt the meeting again, bring in Mr. Burke in public, bring in another security expert because Mr. Burke is not the be-all and end-all of security experts - no disrespect - and continue the conversation.

That being said, I have - because of this now, I have lost my train of thought of what I wanted to say in the first place. Time out. I just need - I had something important to say. I will wait until it's my turn again.

[5:15 p.m.]

THE CHAIR: I'm going to have our Chief Clerk comment on a few things, and then I think it's time that we take a vote.

JAMES CHARLTON: I just want to remind everyone that this isn't a standing committee of the Legislature. It doesn't have the power to compel witnesses. We had a witness who was here speaking during our in camera proceedings. We had no power to compel that witness. That witness appeared and was willing to appear because it was in camera and felt that was a conversation that couldn't take place in public because depending on the questions asked, it could be revealing security information that would be compromising to the security of MLA offices. That's my understanding for that particular witness. It's not a conversation that can take place in public, or at least that witness does, and we can't force that witness back, for that particular witness.

KELLY REGAN: Then I would like to amend my motion that in advance of voting on this motion, we bring in two security experts, one of whom would be chosen by the government and one who would be chosen by the Opposition parties. We could hear from them, and they could tell us about the security in our offices. That way, not only we would be better informed but also the MLAs whose offices are going to be subject to the decision we make today, plus our CAs, who will have to work in those offices, and the people of Nova Scotia can hear the advice that we are getting to make sure that the people who serve our constituents are safe.

THE CHAIR: Again, I would like the Chief Clerk to comment on - MLA Regan, I believe you cannot amend your own motion, but I do think for clarity, it's always good to have the Chief Clerk explain.

JAMES CHARLTON: To confirm, the Chief Legislative Counsel and I were discussing that. One can't amend their own motion.

There also may be a bit of an issue with the amendment just because of the nature of the motion. The motion is to take particular action, and then the amendment is to hear from two different experts before we take that - I'm not sure that it makes sense. It may make sense to move to defer the motion, and then we could deal with another motion to hear - I think what was proposed was to hear the two security experts, and then we could deal with the motion on the constituency assistants after that was dealt with.

KELLY REGAN: So I can withdraw my motion, correct? With unanimous consent of the committee, right? Then we could put in a motion to hear from two security experts in public before we make a decision on this particular thing.

THE CHAIR: As long as you're not making - right. You can, if you withdraw it and have unanimous consent on it, then you can make a new motion, yes.

KELLY REGAN: So I withdraw my motion - with unanimous consent of the committee, of course.

THE CHAIR: Is there a seconder? (Interruption) You don't have to? Okay.

All those in favour of the motion made by MLA Regan? (Interruption) Do I have unanimous consent?

I'm hearing a number of nays. That amended motion is defeated.

We will now proceed with the original motion that was put forth, which was made by the MLA to allocate funding for a second CA for MLA offices. There was a seconder for that.

All those in favour?

We have been requested to have a recorded vote. I will ask the Chief Clerk to begin that vote.

[The Clerk calls the roll.]

[5:18 p.m.]

YEAS

Susan Leblanc
Hon. Kelly Regan
Hon. Derek Mombourquette

NAYS

Hon. Kim Masland
Danielle Barkhouse
Hon. Allan MacMaster
Nolan Young

JAMES CHARLTON: For, 3. Against, 4.

THE CHAIR: The motion is defeated.

That concludes our meeting for - MLA Mombourquette.

DEREK MOMBOURQUETTE: There's another piece of this for me, and it goes around the costs associated with implementing some of the measures that we've talked about in these past two meetings.

I'll ask for some feedback from staff in a second, but I also do think that - and you can correct me if I'm wrong - MLAs may have run into a problem in the past with trying to purchase some of the security equipment through their existing budgets. They may have run into some issues around that.

What I think should happen is that there should be a separate account outside of it, that if an MLA comes into office - similar to when you have your startup costs when you become a new MLA. Outside of your existing budget, there should be an allotment of money that's there for all MLAs to make sure that their offices are - that they're taking the recommendations of security into account with cameras, panic buttons, et cetera.

I guess my question, Chair: Have there been any challenges with MLAs around purchasing this equipment that may not have been approved in the past?

THE CHAIR: Thank you for the question. I will defer to Mr. Timmons.

MATTHEW TIMMONS: Not that I'm aware of but granted, I've only been here two years. The only challenge I could anticipate would be budgetary constraints. That would be the only - but it is an allowable expense under the regulations, so it would just be a budgetary constraint at the time of purchase.

DEREK MOMBOURQUETTE: I think it's something that the committee - I don't know if it's for a motion today, but I think that if we're serious about this conversation - and staff was a big part of it for us - I want to make sure that whether we're in the seats or somebody else is in the seats, that it shouldn't come out of the allocation. I think that there needs to be a set pot of money that goes into these offices. That also includes your training when it comes to your training around de-escalation and everything else. I think that needs

to be separate from our offices because we all spend our money in different ways and some people will have more money than others at the end of the year.

You may run into some cost restraints when it comes to installing cameras, and installing panic buttons, and whatnot. It's something that I think your office, Chair, may want to take a look at.

THE CHAIR: Thank you very much for those comments. Mr. Timmons, do you have anything to add to that?

MATTHEW TIMMONS: No, I'm good.

THE CHAIR: Okay, thank you so very much.

DEREK MOMBOURQUETTE: I am going to move a motion, and the motion is to have the Office of the Speaker investigate and come back to committee with a budget outside of our current MLA budgets that would cover the costs associated with ensuring security measures can be implemented at MLA offices.

THE CHAIR: Do I have a seconder for that motion? MLA Regan.

I'll now open it up for discussion.

DANIELLE BARKHOUSE: I'd like to make an amendment just because I find it very restrictive. I think that I would not mind having the information of what it would cost for a panic button, for a camera in our office. So my amended motion would be to strike out - and I don't have the exact words of it, sorry - but to make a motion for staff to come back with pricing on panic buttons and cameras for our offices.

THE CHAIR: Can I have a seconder for the amendment, and then we'll have the debate on the amendment? MLA Young as a seconder. Now we will open up debate on the amendment.

KELLY REGAN: I actually think that the amendment pretty much nullifies the point of the motion that MLA Mombourquette made. It's to come back with a laundry list of this costs this, and to be clear, I'm aware of at least one case - though there may have been more - where an MLA purchased security equipment for their office, but because they had not accumulated a sufficient surplus - and this is how we fund extra things in our office. We only get X amount each month, so if you have a large item or a large cost service like doing a newsletter, you have to have enough in your surplus built up to be able to have that reimbursed.

MLAs continue to underwrite the functioning of government, and this is not a partisan thing because it happened under the NDP, it happened under the Liberals, and it

happened under the PCs. MLAs continue to underwrite those, and they carry the costs month after month if they have a big cost item that they haven't built up enough surplus for. What it virtually does is it ensures that the government knows there won't be any newsletters coming out in the first few months of the fiscal year because you know that the MLAs haven't built up enough of a surplus at that point to have it reimbursed through your office.

That's what I was talking about. I want to be very clear with MLA Barkhouse. That's what I was talking about. There's only so much money every month that comes in. You have to make sure you have enough surplus to pay for your newsletter, or if it's a big-cost security system, which happened with one MLA - that MLA had to carry that cost for months before they were fully reimbursed, and that's what I was talking about when I was . . . (Interruption) Same as with the startup costs.

I just wanted to be very clear with the MLA, what I was talking about - Number 1 - and Number 2, the amendment nullifies the whole point of what that original motion was. To me, it's not an amendment, it's a nullification.

ALLAN MACMASTER: I think the intent here is good. When an MLA is starting out, I think the intent of the motion is to ensure that they have, right away, the ability to have some security measures put in place amongst all of the other startup costs that they would have. Things have changed so much over the years. I feel like when I started, we got an allotment for the year when we started, and then at some point along the way, that changed so that it became that you got your annual allotment divided by 12.

Having started with getting a lump sum at the start, as I recall - I had access to it at least, if I needed it. This was never an issue. I can see if someone is a new MLA and they're starting out, that if they're only getting that first month plus the - what is it, \$2,500 now - to get your furniture and start paying all your regular bills and get security may not be enough. I think that's the intent of the motion, and I think it's reasonable that the motion - I think it's asking for the Speaker's Office to review this to see if maybe the \$2,500 could be expanded to ensure that it includes enough for people to put in place some security measures.

I think, just for my own take, I think that's reasonable. Maybe we could even get some clarification on why the change was made from the lump sum to the monthly amounts because there was some reason for that along the way, and I can't remember what it was. If we can't get it today, maybe we can have it for - maybe it can be distributed to members on the committee, that explanation by way of email after the meeting.

THE CHAIR: I will ask Mr. Timmons to have some input on that, and then we'll go to MLA Barkhouse.

MATTHEW TIMMONS: I'm not exactly sure when and if it changed, but I do know the rationale would be so that, at the end of the year, they have enough money to pay their office rent and their casual CAs. It kind of keeps them on track so at the end of the year, we're not in a situation where they don't have any money for their office rent, their casuals, or for any other expense to run their office. It's just to kind of keep them on track so we don't run into a situation at year end.

DANIELLE BARKHOUSE: I had a two-part question because that's what I assumed, just because we'd had this conversation. On average - I guess you'd probably know the amount. How much does an MLA have a month to spend for their constituency office? I'm sorry, I'm making you work hard.

AN HONOURABLE MEMBER: Fifty-five hundred, or something like that.

DANIELLE BARKHOUSE: I've got the exact number here, but I want him to say it.

MATTHEW TIMMONS: The base amount is \$5,453 a month. That is kind of the standard, and then there are the constituencies which are larger that have more money. I'm not exactly sure the higher end, but it's about \$69,000 for the year, and if I divide that by 12, it's \$5,750. So \$5,400-\$5,750 a month would be the range.

THE CHAIR: Thank you for that information.

DEREK MOMBOURQUETTE: I don't support the amendment because I actually think the Minister of Finance and Treasury Board agrees with my initial motion which is - and I want to bring it back to security. This is an important issue for all of us. We've been debating this for two meetings. I think at least we should look at carving that out - not getting into who has what left in their budget, and why you can carry over and all that stuff. We do this with startup costs for MLAs when they come in. Carve that out and just say okay. Let's get the information.

Like I said, it's about the functional stuff, like your cameras and your panic buttons, but as we've talked about as a committee, it's what else should - if there's a cost associated with de-escalation training for CAs, put it in that pot of money. Work that number out and just carve that out so that MLAs do not have to worry about that within their existing budget.

That's my motion. We're not looking for a set number today. We know there's some work that has to be done with that. I would want the committee to come back - ask staff to come back with those numbers.

We don't support the amendment, but the initial motion.

[5:30 p.m.]

THE CHAIR: There is an amendment made by MLA Barkhouse that's on the floor. Did you want to speak?

DANIELLE BARKHOUSE: My amendment is asking to get the price tags for all of this and get the cost of it. (Interruption) Exactly. Mine's asking the same thing as yours is. You're just putting in there that we carve it out, and my amendment is not. The statement earlier, that it's nullifying his amendment is not reality. Let's see the costs.

THE CHAIR: So there is a motion. It's an amended motion that is on the floor by MLA Barkhouse.

All those in favour of the amended motion? (Interruption)

Thanks for the suggestion of five minutes, but I'm good. Would you guys like a recess? (Interruption)

Okay. We will recess for five minutes.

[5:32 p.m. The committee recessed.]

[5:34 p.m. The committee reconvened.]

THE CHAIR: Order, please.

MLA Barkhouse.

DANIELLE BARKHOUSE: Thank you for the recess. I will withdraw my motion.

THE CHAIR: With unanimous consent, please. Do I have consent?

Carried.

We will now refer back to the motion that was made by MLA Mombourquette and seconded by MLA Regan.

DEREK MOMBOURQUETTE: Chair, I'm going to rescind my motion and offer a new one, with unanimous consent.

THE CHAIR: Great. We have unanimous consent on this? Agreed.

Carried.

DEREK MOMBOURQUETTE: I'm going to offer a new motion. That motion would be that the Speaker's Office go back and investigate increasing the startup office budget above the \$2,500 maximum that we have now with a focus on security.

THE CHAIR: Thank you for that motion. Do I have a seconder for that motion? I have MLA MacMaster seconding that motion.

I will put that motion to all of you. Again, it's for the Speaker to go back and investigate the increasing startup budget for new MLAs to ensure that there is enough money in the budget for security and safety reasons. Is that correct?

All those in favour? Contrary minded? Thank you.

The motion is carried.

We have completed the agenda for today. Thanks for attending. Now we are adjourned.

[The committee adjourned at 5:36 p.m.]