



Standing Committee on Community Services

ANNUAL REPORT

2019

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**Legislative
Committees Office**
House of Assembly
Nova Scotia

PO Box 2630, Station M
Halifax, Nova Scotia
B3J 3P7
Telephone: (902) 424-4432
Fax: (902) 424-0513

Honourable Kevin Murphy
Speaker
House of Assembly
Province House
Halifax, Nova Scotia

Dear Mr. Speaker:

On behalf of the Standing Committee on Community Services, I am pleased to submit the Annual Report of the committee for the period from January 2019 to June 2019 of the Sixty-third General Assembly.

Respectfully submitted,



Keith Irving, MLA Kings South
Chair
Standing Committee on Community Services

Halifax, Nova Scotia
2019

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INTRODUCTION

The Standing Committee on Community Services, an all-party Committee of the House of Assembly, was struck at the beginning of the First Session of the Sixty-third General Assembly. Pursuant to Rule 60(2)(e) of the *Province of Nova Scotia Rules and Forms of Procedures of the House of Assembly*:

(e) the Community Services Committee is established for the purpose of considering matters relative to Community Services, culture, heritage, human rights, municipal affairs, recreation and sports. am 2018.

MEMBERSHIP

There shall be no more than nine Members of the Legislative Assembly appointed to this committee. The current membership of the Standing Committee on Community Services is as follows:

Mr. Keith Irving, MLA
Kings South

Mr. Keith Bain, MLA
Victoria-The Lakes

Ms. Rafah DiContanzo, MLA, Vice Chair
Clayton Park West

Mr. Steve Craig, MLA
Sackville-Cobequid

Mr. Ben Jessome, MLA
Hammonds Plains-Lucasville

Ms. Susan Leblanc, MLA
Dartmouth North

Mr. Bill Horne, MLA
Waverly-Fall River-Beaver Bank

Ms. Lisa Roberts, MLA
Halifax Needham

Hon. Gordon Wilson
Digby

MEMBERSHIP CHANGES

As of July 3, 2019, Ms. Lisa Roberts, MLA (Halifax Needham) replaced Ms. Lenore Zann, MLA (Truro-Bible Hill-Millbrook-Salmon River) and As of July 31, 2019, Mr. Steve Craig, MLA (Sackville-Cobequid) replaced Mr. Larry Harrison, MLA (Colchester-Musquodoboit Valley).

PROCEDURES AND OPERATIONS

The Community Services Committee traditionally meets once a month. These meetings are usually held on the first Tuesday of the month in the Committee Room, Granville Level, One Government Place.

NOTICES, TRANSCRIPTS, REQUESTED INFORMATION, PRESENTATIONS AND REPORTS

NOTICES

Notices of committee meetings are sent to all members of the committee, caucus office staff, legislative staff and Communications Nova Scotia. The notices are also posted in Province House and on the Nova Scotia Legislature website at the following address:

<http://nslegislature.ca/index.php/calendar/>

TRANSCRIPTS

Transcripts of all Community Services Committee meetings are available from the Legislative Library in Province House, the Legislative Committees Office, or on the Community Services Committee web page at the following address:

http://nslegislature.ca/index.php/committees/committee_hansard/C6/

REQUESTED INFORMATION

On occasions when the committee requests information that is not readily available during a meeting, the witness will be asked to provide the requested information as soon as possible following the meeting. Once the requested information is received and approved by the committee, it is placed on the Community Services Committee web page and can be viewed at the following address: http://nslegislature.ca/index.php/committees/committee_hansard/C6/

PRESENTATIONS

Witness presentations are distributed to committee members in advance of the meeting date. Presentations are placed on the Community Services Committee web page after the meeting and can be viewed at the following address:

http://nslegislature.ca/index.php/committees/committee_hansard/C6/

REPORTS

All reports of the Standing Committee on Community Services are compiled by the Legislative Committees Office and forwarded to committee members for consideration. Upon completion of the review and approval of the report, the Chair tables the report with the Speaker of the House of Assembly or with the Clerk of the House of Assembly.

Distribution of the report is as follows:

To the Speaker and the Clerk of the House of Assembly; committee members; all witnesses who appeared before the committee; the Nova Scotia Legislative Library; the caucus offices; and the media. This report is available to the general public upon request from the Legislative Committees Office, and is available on the Community Services Committee web page at the following address: <https://nslegislature.ca/legislative-business/committees/standing/community-services/reports>

RESEARCH MATERIAL

All research for the Community Services Committee is compiled by the Legislative Library in consultation with the committee clerk. Research material is compiled in an electronic format and is distributed by the committee clerk prior to the meeting to members, staff, and witnesses.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The committee wishes to extend its gratitude to all witnesses for their time and co-operation. Special appreciation is extended to the Legislative Committees Office; Hansard Reporting Services; Legislative Television and Broadcast Services and the Nova Scotia Legislative Library.

PUBLIC HEARINGS

WITNESSES

There were no witnesses present at this meeting.

MATTERS OF DISCUSSION

The committee met to discuss future witnesses and to organize its meeting schedule.

The committee agreed to keep its regular date and time of the first Tuesday of the month from 10:00 am to 12:00 noon and also to continue its practice of posting submission/presentations and responses to the website.

With respect to the Nova Scotia Advocate articles posted and emailed to the committee by Mr. Kendall Worth, the members agreed to have Mr. Worth send these articles directly to their government email addresses. This eliminates the need for the Legislative Committees Office to catalogue each of these articles within its database, taking up storage space.

The committee accepted past correspondence and the 2018 Annual Report.

Since the committee has been reconstituted (September 12, 2018), the mandate of the Standing Committee on Community Services has been amended. The new mandate is: “the Community Services Committee is established for the purpose of considering matters relative to Community Services, culture, heritage, human rights, municipal affairs, and recreation and sports”.

Due to prorogation all past agenda items have become null and void, therefore, the committee had to reset its agenda. Previous items could be reintroduced as well as new items.

A motion was put forth and agreement was made for the following topics of discussion:

- Business ACCESS-ability Grants
- Poverty Reduction Grants
- Career Rising Program

Department of Community Services and Department of Internal Services:

“Protection of confidential information”

Department of Community Services:

“Employment Supports for Income Assistance Recipients

Legal issues in Child Protection Witnesses

(Rollie Thompson is the suggested witness, but the NDP caucus agreed to have Leonard Doiron of the Department of Community Services attend as well).

The request to appear from Kendall Worth/Benefits Reform Action Group (BRAG) will be reconsidered at a future agenda-setting meeting.

COMMITTEE BUSINESS

The committee received and agreed to accept the following correspondence:

Response from Minister Regan regarding the motion from the June 5, 2018, meeting of the standing committee asking the Department of Community Services to meet with the Benefits Reform Action Group (BRAG)

Correspondence from BRAG informing the committee of the results of that potential meeting.

Response from Minister Regan regarding the motion from the May 1, 2018, meeting of the standing committee calling for the Department of Community Services to investigate funding levels between the Halifax Regional Municipality and the Cape Breton Regional Municipality, and a review of homelessness in the Cape Breton Regional Municipality.

Correspondence from the Cape Breton Homeless Society regarding cost estimates for the recommendations to increasing support services for homelessness in Cape Breton Regional Municipality.

WITNESSES

Department of Communities, Culture and Heritage

Dawn Stegen - Director of Regional Services

Wayne Matheson – Program Officer

Department of Justice

Gerry Post, Executive Director of Accessibility Directorate

MATTERS OF DISCUSSION

The standing committee has invited the witnesses to discuss the issue of the Business ACCESS-Ability Grant Program and the administration of the grants.

In 2017, the Accessibility Act was passed and proclaimed, demonstrating the commitment to a more equitable, barrier-free province. The Act recognized the accessibility as a human right and sets goals for an accessible Nova Scotia by 2030. Access By Design 2030 is the strategy to accomplish this goal led by the Accessibility Directorate.

Communities, Culture and Heritage collaborated with the Accessibility Directorate and others on the design of a grant program. The Business ACCESS-Ability Grant Program was launched on December 1, 2017. Through this initiative, businesses can apply for cost share grants to make accessibility-related improvements. The program has an annual budget of \$1 million.

The grant is broken down into five categories. The first being the Built Environment, is for the removal of physical barriers for persons to access business services and projects. For example: installation of automated door openers, ramps, curb cuts, or bathroom renovations.

Second is Accessible Communication Services, which provides consumers and employees with access to information and support communication between persons with disabilities and commercial enterprise. For example: accessible web design, accessible signage, communication in a business such as tablets or audio systems, and conversion of commercial documentation into braille.

The third category is assistive devices, which enables persons with disabilities to have devices they need to effectively do their jobs and to access places of business. For example: purchase and installation of specialized wheelchairs, cognitive aids, including computers and electronic assistive devices, voice recognition programs, and tools such as page turners. This category also supports the training of employees to use these devices.

The fourth category is accessible transportation, this category supports accessibility-related improvements to private transportation services. Eligible costs and projects could include costs of converting an existing vehicle to a wheelchair-accessible commercial shuttle or carshare service.

The fifth category is universal design capacity-building courses and workshops. The purpose is to develop the universal design knowledge and skills and capacity of the business community as well as those in professional services such as contractors, engineers, architects, project managers and planners. Agencies, including non-profit groups, may apply if they are offering universal design courses and workshops targeted to the business community.

Spreading the word to encourage businesses to apply is very important. Focus has been placed on reaching businesses through existing networks such as chambers of commerce, Accessibility Directorate, constituency offices, Restaurant Associations of Nova Scotia, Black Business Initiative, businesses navigators, and Municipal Affairs, to name a few.

Through the Business ACCESS-Ability Grant Program, the Nova Scotia Community College was able to offer the Rick Hansen Foundation's accessibility certification program. Participants learned about the impact of the social and physical environment on people with disabilities, the legislation, regulations and standards, universal design principles, how to do assessments and how to do community and support assessment finding with clients.

Nova Scotia now has 43 trained assessors with the skills to support business and access building and sites for accessibility,

COMMITTEE BUSINESS

The committee agreed not to meet during House sessions for the duration of its mandate. The committee also agreed to accept the 2018 report of the Standing Committee on Community Services. The report was signed on behalf of the committee by the Chair and was tabled in the House of Assembly.

DOCUMENTATION

The committee requested and received the following documentation:

- Details of the applications being processed since the October announcement.
- A copy of the evaluation plan detailing the effectiveness of the program.

WITNESSES

Department of Community Services

Brandon Grant - Executive Director of Employment Supports and Income Assistance

Joy Knight - Director of Employment Supports and Income Assistance

MATTERS OF DISCUSSION

The Career Rising Program is one of the programs delivered by Employment Support Services (part of the Employment Support and Income Assistance division) to help young people build confidence and connections within community, gain work experience, find mentors, identify career goals, and plan for post-secondary education. It is also part of a collection of programming that is offered through the ESIA division.

The Career Rising Program supports high school students to gain work experience, to develop their career goals, and go on to post-secondary education. It is a partnership with the Nova Scotia Co-operative Council and includes a variety of different component pieces to the program, including a two-week skills development camp in which young people get exposure to the agricultural sector and receive training relevant to a successful placement.

Following that, young people get their first job in many cases, and a paid work experience with a local farmer or business within the agricultural sector. There is also ongoing workforce and career development supports post the work experience. A new feature of the program includes a post-secondary grant of \$1,200 per year for those participants that complete the program as well as a contribution of \$500 from the Community Credit Union of Cumberland Colchester.

The bulk of youth in the program is the ESIA clients between the ages of 15 – 19 and are in high school. The program is also offered to youth in care, as well as Child, Youth and Family Supports-funded youth outreach.

The program initially was offered in the Kentville, Bridgewater, Truro, and North Sydney areas: however, it is expanding to include New Glasgow, Amherst, Cumberland County, Glace Bay, and Sydney. The department is offering a weekend leadership retreat for returning participants and looking at expanding the view of the program to other sectors, as well. The program started with the agricultural sector but they are looking for partnerships to expand the amount of businesses.

Other programs and services offered by the department to help support clients and youth towards labour market and independence include the Youth Development Initiative, which support community organizations or provides wage subsidies to help young people get their first job or to build employability skills, the Immigrant Youth Career Exploration program and a new program called Inspiring Success, which is government departments hiring ESIA dependents, as well as ESIA post-secondary students across the province.

The department has also expanded their post-secondary education programming to develop a new stream called Educate to Work for Dependents program, which support ESIA dependents to go to community college and provide them with financial supports. They also have the new EDGE program (offered in Kentville and Halifax), which focuses on 19–26 year-olds who are on ESIA. The department also supports the Work Activity Centres and other post-secondary programs. The Career Seek program provides financial support for clients to go to university.

COMMITTEE BUSINESS

DOCUMENTATION

The committee requested and received the following documentation:

- The number of eligible dependent youths within the program areas (Kentville, Bridgewater, Truro and North Sydney).

- A demographic breakdown of the individuals who have completed the program.

WITNESSES

Department of Community Services

Tracey Taweel - Deputy Minister

Vanessa Chouinard - Executive Director of Policy and Innovation

Department of Service Nova Scotia and Internal Services

Maria Lasheras - Chief Information Access and Privacy Officer

MATTERS OF DISCUSSION

The role of Service Nova Scotia and Internal Services is to provide leadership and a strategy for government. They had developed a corporate privacy policy which includes related processes and tools and provides operational support to government departments and some agencies. A couple of departments, including the Department of Community Services, determined that due to the extensive amount of personal information and the nature of their mandate, they would keep the operational privacy in-house.

The Department of Service Nova Scotia and Internal Services provide corporate awareness training through the development of tools that the departments adopt and deploy to their staff. They also offer monitoring and reporting supports.

In establishing their privacy program, it was determined there were essentially four pillars that will support privacy overall - governance and accountability, in privacy it is critical that roles and responsibilities are clearly articulated; program controls and processes, the privacy policy that came into effect in May 2018 identified what tools to use, what processes need to happen in the context of protecting privacy; collaboration, it is critical because the outcomes and the outputs are always at their best when there is collaboration and working together among all the departments; monitoring and oversight, to monitor what is happening, to measure and to report to ensure continuous improvement in practices.

The Department of Community Services does have its own dedicated privacy resource - the manager of Information Services and Privacy, who works closely with the Department of Service Nova Scotia and Internal Services to ensure that Community Services is in compliance with all relevant pieces of privacy legislation, policy and guidelines.

The managers role also includes overseeing all records management, the FOIPOP process and providing expert access and privacy advice. They help to investigate and respond to privacy breaches and any privacy complaints, oversees the privacy impact assessment process including the identification of any potential privacy risks that may be relevant to a new program design or services and ensures that any appropriate mitigations to offset those risks are implemented.

The manager develops and delivers training to Community Services staff province-wide and works with the Office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner to resolve and respond to privacy complaints which may be referred to their office.

In terms of the specific work, the DCS and Information Access and Privacy share experiences that are critical for common success. They collaborate and share knowledge learned from each other, share resources and, wherever possible, try to eliminate redundancy where possible.

It is important to note that third-party service providers that work with Community Services do not fall under the FOIPOP Act. They fall under federal privacy legislation, which is the Personal Information Protection and Electronic Documents Act. The department does, however, include privacy and confidentiality provisions in all contracts and agreements with service providers to ensure they are aware of expectations around the treatment of personal information being shared. This would include a privacy breach reporting provision and a guide for how they should respond to and report any privacy breach should one occur.

The department also limits the collection, use, and disclosure of personal information to only what is necessary to provide the service or support that a client requires. This is supported by the completion of the privacy impact assessment, as well as privacy awareness training and other privacy-related work at all levels of the department.

It also works to ensure that clients know and understand what information is collected, how it is going to be used, and who it will be shared with. This is supported by the use of consent forms, staff training, and communication with clients about programs and practices.

The department limits access to personal information to only those employees who need to know the information to carry out their duties, and also use security roles in technology solutions to make sure that access is limited only to those who require that access.

They ensure that reasonable security arrangements are in place to prevent privacy breaches. This includes, but certainly is not limited to personal information being securely stored in offices.

Processes are in place to monitor user accounts in their case management system to ensure staff who leave the department no longer have access to files. There is a reporting mechanism in place to detect dormant accounts, which can track and eliminate access, as well as confidentiality agreements in place with any contractors or consultants.

The department ensures that staff are well trained in the privacy protection protocol. Staff are required to complete mandatory access and privacy awareness training. The department is able to track who has completed that training in the corporate learning management system and will be working to ensure that they have complete compliance with that mandatory training.

With regard to the privacy breach, the majority of breaches that the DCS would see are caused by human error, meaning that breaches are not intentional or malicious in nature. Some examples would be emails being sent to wrong recipients or letters being placed in an incorrect envelope being sent out to an incorrect client. Since 2014, there have been 122 reported breaches in the department. In all 122 cases, 99 per cent of the information was recovered.

The number of reported breaches shows a growing level of awareness with staff and the growing level of awareness in the environment within which the department is operating.

COMMITTEE BUSINESS

Correspondence

The committee discussed the response from the Department of Community Services from the May 7, 2019, meeting regarding the Career Rising program. The committee felt that the answer to one of their questions of a demographic breakdown of the individuals who completed the program was not fully given and asked the clerk to write back to the department to ask for further breakdown on the demographic information with respect to race, ethnicity, gender and disability.

DOCUMENTATION

Tabled Documentation

Letter from former Deputy Minister of Internal Services, Jeff Conrad to Catherine Tully, Information & Privacy Commissioner for Nova Scotia regarding actions taken and progress made on recommendations in the Investigation Report - OIPC/Investigation Report #18-00140

Correspondence from Catherine Tully in response to the departments progress implementing recommendations from Investigation Report IR19-01.

Tabled by Maria Lasheras, Chief Information, Access & Privacy
Officer
Department of Service Nova Scotia and Internal Services

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A – CORRESPONDENCE

The following is a list of correspondence received by the Standing Committee on Community Services:

January 15, 2019

The committee received and agreed to accept the following correspondence:

Response from Minister Regan regarding the motion from the June 5, 2018, meeting of the standing committee asking the Department of Community Services to meet with the Benefits Reform Action Group (BRAG)

Correspondence from BRAG informing the committee of the results of that potential meeting.

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June 20, 2019

The committee discussed the response from the Department of Community Services from the May 7, 2019, meeting regarding the Career Rising program. The committee felt that the answer to one of their questions of a demographic breakdown of the individuals who completed the program was not fully given and asked the clerk to write back to the department to ask for further breakdown on the demographic information with respect to race, ethnicity, gender and disability.

APPENDIX B – DOCUMENTATION

The following is a list of the documentation requested and received by the Standing Committee on Community Services:

February 5, 2019

The committee requested the following documentation:

- Details of the applications being processed since the October announcement.
- A copy of the evaluation plan detailing the effectiveness of the program.

May 7, 2019

The committee requested and received the following documentation:

- The number of eligible dependent youths within the program areas (Kentville, Bridgewater, Truro and North Sydney).
- A demographic breakdown of the individuals' who have completed the program.

June 20, 2019

The following documentation was tabled with the committee:

Letter from former Deputy Minister of Internal Services, Jeff Conrad to Catherine Tully, Information & Privacy Commissioner for Nova Scotia regarding actions taken and progress made on recommendations in the Investigation Report - OIPC/Investigation Report #18-00140

Correspondence from Catherine Tully in response to the departments progress implementing recommendations from Investigation Report IR19-01.

Tabled by Maria Lasheras, Chief Information, Access & Privacy Officer
Department of Service Nova Scotia and Internal Services

APPENDIX C - MOTIONS

January 15, 2019

A motion was put forth and agreement was made for the following topics of discussion:

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- Poverty Reduction Grants
- Career Rising Program

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“Protection of confidential information”

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(Rollie Thompson is the suggested witness, but the NDP caucus agreed to have Leonard Doiron of Department of Community Services attend, as well)

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**Legislative Committees Office
PO Box 2630, Station "M"
Halifax, Nova Scotia
B3J 3P7**

Telephone: (902) 424-4432 or Toll Free 1-888-388-6489

Fax : (902) 424-0513

E-Mail : legcomm@gov.ns.ca

Website:

http://nslegislature.ca/index.php/committees/standing_committees/community_services