



Standing Committee on Community Services

ANNUAL REPORT

2024

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Halifax

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Honourable Danielle Barkhouse
Speaker
House of Assembly
Province House Halifax,
Nova Scotia

Dear Ms. 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 September 2023 to August 2024 of the Sixty-Fourth General Assembly.

Respectfully submitted,

Melissa Sheehy-Richard, MLA, Hants West
Chair
Standing Committee on Community Services

Halifax, Nova Scotia
2024

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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-fourth General Assembly. **Pursuant to Rule 60(2)(e) of the *Province of Nova Scotia Rules and Forms of Procedure of the House of Assembly*:**

(e) The Community Services Committee was established to consider matters related to community services, culture, heritage, human rights, municipal affairs, recreation, and sports.

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:

Melissa Sheehy-Richard, MLA, Chair
Hants West

Carman Kerr, MLA
Annapolis

John White, MLA, Vice Chair
Gloucester-Bay-Dominion

Derek Mombourquette, MLA
Sydney-Membertou

Danielle Barkhouse, MLA
Chester-St. Margarets

Susan Leblanc, MLA
Dartmouth North

Tom Taggart, MLA
Colchester North

Suzy Hansen, MLA
Halifax Needham

Larry Harrison, MLA
Colchester-Musquodoboit Valley

MEMBERSHIP CHANGES

Carman Kerr, MLA, Annapolis, replaced Hon. Ben Jessome, MLA, Hammonds Plains-Lucasville, Hon. Derek Mombourquette, MLA, Sydney-Membertou, replaced Lorelei Nicoll, MLA, Cole-Harbour Dartmouth,

Susan Leblanc, MLA, Dartmouth North, replaced Kendra Coombes, MLA, Cape Breton Centre-Whitney Pier, May 2024.

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 committee members, 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

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 Standing Committee on Community Services reports 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.

The 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

The Legislative Library compiles all research for the Community Services Committee 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.

PUBLIC HEARINGS

Agenda Setting

September 5, 2023

COMMITTEE BUSINESS

Correspondence

- The Department of Health and Wellness responded to a request for information at the May 23rd meeting. There was no discussion.

Agenda-Setting

- That the first PC caucus topic be “Supports for Community Centres, Infrastructures, and Facilities.” The witnesses would be representatives from the Department of Communities, Culture, Tourism, and Heritage: Deputy Minister Justin Huston, Associate Deputy Minister Melissa MacKinnon, and Executive Director Bill Greenlaw, and representatives from the Community Facilities Improvement Program and Community Generator Program.
 - Moved by Danielle Barkhouse, MLA
 - Motion carried
- That the second PC caucus topic be “Update on the Economic and Cultural Impact of Hosting the North American Indigenous Games, 2023.” The witnesses would be representatives from the North American Indigenous Games Host Society: CEO Brendon Smithson, Chair Fiona Kirkpatrick Parsons, and President Tex Marshall.
 - Moved by Danielle Barkhouse, MLA
 - Motion carried
- That the third PC caucus topic be “Investment in the Nova Scotia Film Industry and its Impact on Communities.” The witnesses would be Executive Director Christopher Shore from Communities, Culture, Tourism & Heritage and Executive Director Laura MacKenzie from Screen Nova Scotia.
 - Moved by Danielle Barkhouse, MLA
 - Motion carried
- That the first Liberal caucus topic be “Review of Income Assistance and the Impacts of Inflation.” The witnesses would be the Deputy Minister for the Department of Community Services, Executive Director of Feed Nova Scotia Nick Jennery, and Policy Analyst for Feed Nova Scotia Asif Khan.
 - Carried amendment by MLA Nolan Young to change the topic’s name to “Support for Low-Income Nova Scotians and the Impacts of Inflation.”
 - Moved by Lorelei Nicoll, MLA
 - Motion carried
- That the second Liberal caucus topic be “Addressing the Homelessness Crisis.” The witnesses would be the Deputy Minister for the Department of Community Services,

the Chair of Shelter Nova Scotia, and the Executive Director for the Affordable Housing Association of Nova Scotia.

- Carried amendment by MLA Nolan Young to include the Senior Director of Housing from the Department of Municipal Affairs and Housing, the Executive Director for the Nova Scotia Provincial Housing Agency, and representatives from the Department of Seniors and Long-Term Care.
 - Moved by Lorelei Nicoll, MLA
 - Motion carried
- That the NDP caucus topic be “The Provincial Emergency Response System.” The witnesses would be the Executive Director of the Emergency Management Office, representatives from the RCMP, representatives from the Nova Scotia Federation of Municipalities, and representatives from the Fire Service Association of Nova Scotia.
 - Moved by Suzy Hansen, MLA
 - Motion carried

DOCUMENTATION

No documents/information was requested.

TRANSCRIPT

https://nslegislature.ca/sites/default/files/pdfs/committees/cs/cs_20220906.pdf

The Impact of Energy Poverty Amidst a Cost-of-Living Crisis

October 3, 2023

WITNESSES

Affordable Energy Coalition

- Brian Gifford, Chair

Department of Community Services

- Joy Knight, Executive Director, Employment Supports and Income Assistance

Ecology Action Centre

- Chris Benjamin, Senior Energy Coordinator

EfficiencyOne

- Stephen MacDonald, President and CEO

Nova Scotia Power

- Judith Ferguson, Executive Vice President of Regulatory, Legal, and Government Relations
- Lia MacDonald, Vice President, Customer Experience and Innovation
- Chris Lanteigne, Director of Customer Care

Town of Bridgewater

- David Mitchell, Mayor

COMMITTEE BUSINESS

Discussion

- Jamie O'Neill is no longer the chair of Shelter Nova Scotia, Lynn Hartwell currently holds that role. There was no discussion.

Motions

- The second PC caucus topic needed to be restated for the record. That the second PC caucus topic be "Update on the Economic and Cultural Impact of Hosting the North American Indigenous Games, 2023." The witnesses would be representatives from the North American Indigenous Games Host Society: CEO Brendon Smithson, Chair Fiona Fitzpatrick, and President Tex Marshall.
 - o Moved by Tom Taggart, MLA
 - o Motion carried
- That the Committee approve the Annual Report.
 - o Moved by Tom Taggart, MLA
 - o Motion carried

DOCUMENTATION

The following information was requested from the Department of Community Services:

- MLA Kendra Coombes asked about and referred to the Employment Services and Income Assistance Policy 8.2.2(c) grants that had been issued this year, last year, and historically.
- MLA Lorelei Nicoll asked for the thresholds for the two types of poverty (poverty and deep poverty) used in conjunction with the Market Basket Measure.
- MLA Suzy Hansen asked for data collection statistics, and the Department offered to provide information pertaining to funding on a per-person basis – the number count and department-approved funding.

The following information was requested and received from EfficiencyOne:

- MLA Suzy Hansen asked about the energy use by the average homeowner in the province.

TRANSCRIPT

https://nslegislature.ca/sites/default/files/pdfs/committees/cs/cs_20221004.pdf

**Update on the Economic and Cultural Impacts of Hosting the
North American Indigenous Games, 2023**

December 5, 2023

WITNESSES

North American Indigenous Games Host Society

- Brendon Smithson, CEO
- Fiona Kirkpatrick Parsons, Chair and Federal Representative

COMMITTEE BUSINESS

Correspondence

- For the topic, Supports for Low-Income Nova Scotians and the Impact of Inflation, Mr. Asif Khan was identified as a witness. However, Asif Khan is no longer employed by Feed Nova Scotia. They have suggested that Ms. Mueni Mutinda appears in his place. There was no discussion.

DOCUMENTATION

There were no requests for information.

TRANSCRIPT

https://nslegislature.ca/sites/default/files/pdfs/committees/cs/cs_20221206.pdf

WITNESSES

Department of Community Services

- Tracey Taweel, Deputy Minister
- Joy Knight, Executive Director, Employment Support and Income Assistance

Feed Nova Scotia

- Nick Jennery, Executive Director

DOCUMENTATION

The following information was requested and received from the Department of Community Services:

- MLA Carman Kerr asked for statistics about food insecurity among the senior and student populations in the province.

TRANSCRIPT

https://nslegislature.ca/sites/default/files/pdfs/committees/cs/cs_20230110.pdf

WITNESSES

Department of Communities, Cultures, Tourism and Heritage

- Justin Huston, Deputy Minister
- Bill Greenlaw, Executive Director, Communities, Sport and Recreation

COMMITTEE BUSINESS

Discussion

- Deputy Minister Melissa MacKinnon responded to a request for information regarding statistics on food insecurity among seniors and students. There was no discussion.
- The meeting set for March 5th was canceled due to the return of the Legislative Sitting starting on February 27th. The topic and witnesses have been rescheduled for April 2nd. There was no discussion.

DOCUMENTATION

The following information was requested and received from the Department of Communities, Cultures, Tourism and Heritage:

- MLA Lisa Lachance asked for the following: the decrease in the number of department-funded projects, the impact of the Nourishing Communities Food Coupon Program on Nova Scotians and Nova Scotian households, and how many grants support the 2SLGBTQIA+ community within the last year.
- Multiple members asked for the link to the Department's new grant finder website once it has gone live.

TRANSCRIPT

https://nslegislature.ca/sites/default/files/pdfs/committees/cs/cs_20230207.pdf

Provincial Emergency Response System

May 7, 2024

WITNESSES

Department of Municipal Affairs and Housing

- Paul Mason, Executive Director, Emergency Management Office

Fire Services Association of Nova Scotia

- Rod Nielsen, Past President
- Terry Canning, 1st Vice President
- Wade Jennings, Former Vice President

Royal Canadian Mounted Police

- Staff Sergeant Robert Frizzell, Non-Commissioned Officer I/C of CROPS Support
- Glen Byrne, I/C of Operational Support and Communication Centre

COMMITTEE BUSINESS

Correspondence

- Deputy Minister Justin Huston has responded to three requests for information regarding the decrease in the total number of funded projects, the impact of the Nourishing Communities Food Coupon Program, and the number of grants dedicated to supporting 2SLGBTQIA+ community, made at the February 6th Community Services meeting.
- The Nova Scotia Federation of Municipalities' absence from today's meeting.

Motions

- That the Committee write a letter to the national Minister regarding the Alert Ready review.
 - Moved by MLA Carman Kerr
 - Motion approved
- That the Committee write a letter to the Minister of the EMO to ask if the report on the NS Guard consultations will be public.
 - Moved by MLA Ben Jessome
 - Motion deferred

DOCUMENTATION

The following information was requested and received from Paul Mason, Executive Director, Emergency Management Office, and Staff Sergeant Robert Frizzell, Non-Commissioned Officer

I/C of CROPS Support:

- MLA Camran Kerr asked for a breakdown of the consultations for the new division within the Emergency Management Office (Nova Scotia Guard).
- MLA Ben Jessome requested that a conversation be had with those capable of providing further information on the decision made regarding the Upper Tantallon wildfires and the process as a whole.

TRANSCRIPT

https://nslegislature.ca/sites/default/files/pdfs/committees/cs/cs_20230523.pdf

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A – MOTIONS

The following motions were made by the Standing Committee on Community Services throughout 2023-2024:

September 5th, 2023

Agenda-Setting

- That the first PC caucus topic be “Supports for Community Centres, Infrastructures, and Facilities.” The witnesses would be representatives from the Department of Communities, Culture, Tourism, and Heritage: Deputy Minister Justin Huston, Associate Deputy Minister Melissa MacKinnon, and Executive Director Bill Greenlaw, and representatives from the Community Facilities Improvement Program and Community Generator Program.
 - Moved by Danielle Barkhouse, MLA
 - Motion carried
- That the second PC caucus topic be “Update on the Economic and Cultural Impact of Hosting the North American Indigenous Games, 2023.” The witnesses would be representatives from the North American Indigenous Games Host Society: CEO Brendon Smithson, Chair Fiona Kirkpatrick Parsons, and President Tex Marshall.
 - Moved by Danielle Barkhouse, MLA
 - Motion carried
- That the third PC caucus topic be “Investment in the Nova Scotia Film Industry and its Impact on Communities.” The witnesses would be Executive Director Christopher Shore from Communities, Culture, Tourism & Heritage and Executive Director Laura MacKenzie from Screen Nova Scotia.
 - Moved by Danielle Barkhouse, MLA
 - Motion carried
- That the first Liberal caucus topic be “Review of Income Assistance and the Impacts of Inflation.” The witnesses would be the Deputy Minister for the Department of Community Services, Executive Director of Feed Nova Scotia Nick Jennery, and Policy Analyst for Feed Nova Scotia Asif Khan.
 - Carried amendment by MLA Nolan Young to change the topic’s name to “Support for Low-Income Nova Scotians and the Impacts of Inflation.”
 - Moved by Lorelei Nicoll, MLA
 - Motion carried
- That the second Liberal caucus topic be “Addressing the Homelessness Crisis.” The witnesses would be the Deputy Minister for the Department of Community Services, the Chair of Shelter Nova Scotia, and the Executive Director for the Affordable Housing

Association of Nova Scotia.

- Carried amendment by MLA Nolan Young to include the Senior Director of Housing from the Department of Municipal Affairs and Housing, the Executive Director for the Nova Scotia Provincial Housing Agency, and representatives from the Department of Seniors and Long-Term Care.
 - Moved by Lorelei Nicoll, MLA
 - Motion carried
- That the NDP caucus topic be “The Provincial Emergency Response System.” The witnesses would be the Executive Director of the Emergency Management Office, representatives from the RCMP, representatives from the Nova Scotia Federation of Municipalities, and representatives from the Fire Service Association of Nova Scotia.
 - Moved by Suzy Hansen, MLA
 - Motion carried

October 3rd, 2023

- The second PC caucus topic needed to be restated for the record. That the second PC caucus topic be “Update on the Economic and Cultural Impact of Hosting the North American Indigenous Games, 2023.” The witnesses would be representatives from the North American Indigenous Games Host Society: CEO Brendon Smithson, Chair Fiona Fitzpatrick, and President Tex Marshall.
 - Moved by Tom Taggart, MLA
 - Motion carried
- That the Committee approve the Annual Report.
 - Moved by Tom Taggart, MLA
 - Motion carried

May 7th, 2024

- That the Committee write a letter to the national Minister regarding the Alert Ready review.
 - Moved by MLA Carman Kerr
 - Motion approved
- That the Committee write a letter to the Minister of the EMO to ask if the report on the NS Guard consultations will be public.
 - Moved by MLA Ben Jessome
 - Motion deferred

APPENDIX B – DOCUMENTATION

The following is a list of documents and information requested and received by the Standing Committee on Community Services throughout 2022-2023:

October 3rd, 2023

The following information was requested from the Department of Community Services:

- MLA Kendra Coombes asked about and referred to the Employment Services and Income Assistance Policy 8.2.2(c) grants that had been issued this year, last year, and historically.
- MLA Lorelei Nicoll asked for the thresholds for the two types of poverty (poverty and deep poverty) used in conjunction with the Market Basket Measure.
- MLA Suzy Hansen asked for data collection statistics, and the Department offered to provide information pertaining to funding on a per-person basis – the number count and department-approved funding.

The following information was requested and received from EfficiencyOne:

- MLA Suzy Hansen asked about the energy use by the average homeowner in the province.

January 11th, 2024

The following information was requested and received from the Department of Community Services:

- MLA Carman Kerr asked for statistics about food insecurity among the senior and student populations in the province.

February 6th, 2024

The following information was requested and received from the Department of Communities, Cultures, Tourism and Heritage:

- MLA Lisa Lachance asked for the following: the decrease in the number of department-funded projects, the impact of the Nourishing Communities Food Coupon Program on Nova Scotians and Nova Scotian households, and how many grants support the 2SLGBTQIA+ community within the last year.
- Multiple members asked that the link to the Department's new grant finder website once it has gone live.

May 7th, 2024

The following information was requested and received from Paul Mason, Executive Director, Emergency Management Office, and Staff Sergeant Robert Frizzell, Non-Commissioned Officer I/C of CROPS Support:

- MLA Camran Kerr asked for a breakdown of the consultations for the new division within the Emergency Management Office (Nova Scotia Guard).
- MLA Ben Jessome requested that a conversation be had with those capable of providing further information on the decision made regarding the Upper Tantallon wildfires and the process as a whole.

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